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Jäckle, Sebastian

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Ministerial turnover in the German Bundesländer (1991-2010)

Sebastian Jäckle, University of Freiburg

Abstract: This article seeks to explain the determinants of ministerial turnover within the sixteen German Länder governments during the period from 1991 to 2010. For capturing the complete picture of turnover from an individual minister's perspective two different dependent variables are tested: first the duration a minister is able to remain in cabinet regardless how many different ministerial positions she has been holding during her time in government and second the duration of a minister in a specific ministry. The applied survival analysis techniques show that aggregate factors describing the political landscape, like the type of government or the ideological distance between coalition members, influence the hazard for turnover alongside with some biographic characteristics of the minister like her regional rootedness, while others such as sex, or holding a PhD do not show any effects.

Keywords: German Bundesländer – ministers – turnover – survival analysis – Cox-model

Determinanten der Amtsdauer von deutschen Landesministern zwischen 1991 und 2010

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel untersucht wie lange Länderminister in Deutschland im Kabinett vertreten sind, bzw. wie lange sie einem spezifischen Ressort vorstehen und insbesondere welche Faktoren diese Dauer erklären können. Dabei stehen der individuelle Minister und dessen Verweildauer im Kabinett, bzw. Ministerium im Fokus der Analyse. Die durchgeführte statistische Survival-Analyse gründet auf einem neu erstellten Datensatz, der sämtliche Kabinette der 16 Bundesländer zwischen 1991 und 2010 enthält. Es zeigt sich, dass sowohl Aggregatfaktoren, die die politisch-institutionelle Arena charakterisieren, wie z.B. die Art der Regierung(skoalition), oder die ideologische Distanz zwischen Koalitionsparteien die Wahrscheinlichkeit für einen Wechsel des Ministers erhöhen. Daneben spielen aber auch einige den Minister selbst beschreibende biographische Faktoren eine Rolle. Regional in dem betreffenden Bundesland verwurzelt zu sein erhöht beispielsweise die Dauer im Amt. Andere individuelle Charakteristika wie das Geschlecht oder das Führen eines Dokortitels hingegen zeigen keinerlei Einfluss.

Schlüsselwörter: deutsche Bundesländer – Ministerwechsel – Survival-Analyse – Cox-Modell

1. The question of ministerial tenure: differences to earlier studies

In the last few years we have observed two remarkable trends in the comparative research on governmental elites and their careers which will also guide this article. The first was a shift away from a purely institutional focus, bringing the individual and its biographic characteristics back into the analysis. Nevertheless these kinds of data, for example presented in biographic encyclopedias (Baer 1971; Gösmann 2008; Kempf and Merz 2008), are in most cases only analysed in a qualitative and descriptive manner impeding the systematic testing of determinants of cabinet duration. The second trend concerns the level of analysis. While a number of studies exist that look at ministerial tenure on the national level (Berlinski et al. 2007; Dowding and Dumont 2009; Fischer and Kaiser 2011),¹ the subnational level has been given much less attention. Existing studies nevertheless show that shifting the focus from the national to subnational levels should not only be regarded as a means to increase the number of cases and thus to find more robust results when it comes to the general patterns of ministerial turnover, but also that analyses of political elites on the subnational level are an important building block for the understanding of more complex multilevel career patterns (Rodriguez-Teruel 2011; Stolz 2003).²

In contrast to the much further developed literature on government survival (Jäckle 2009, 2011; King et al. 1990; Saalfeld 2008), this study focuses exclusively on the fate of individual ministers in the German Länder. The research question therefore is:

How long is a minister able to remain in cabinet and which factors determine his or her cabinet duration?

The rationale underlying this question is that in general, there is probably a multitude of factors at work when a minister's time in government comes to an end. I assume many of these factors to be contingent on the minister him- or herself as well as on the political sphere in which he or she operates. This view stands at least partly in contrast to present studies which maintain a strong focus on the prime minister's capacities to hire and fire.³ Yet, with their record of coalition governments the prime minister's autonomy for cabinet reshuffles or demotions is much weaker in the German

¹ A more recent development is the increase in studies on governmental elites in non-Western countries (e.g. Nikolenyi and Fettelschoss 2009; Stefan 2009).

² More recently, there is work going on within the research network on the selection and deselection of political elites (SEDEPE) which focuses exclusively on the subnational level (e.g. a conference on subnational political elites that took place in Montreal in October 2012. See www.sedepe.net).

³ For reasons of simplicity the *Ministerpräsidenten* of the 13 territorial Länder as well as the governing mayors (*Regierende Bürgermeister*) in Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg are called prime ministers for the remainder of the paper.

Länder than it is, for example, in Great Britain or Australia – two countries often discussed in ministerial turnover literature (Berlinski et al. 2010; Weller 1999; Woodhouse 1993). Thus, the context of coalition governments is one of the aspects that must be taken into account when analysing ministerial turnover in the German Länder, while at the same time the principal agent relationship between the prime minister and his or her ministers that is decisive for Westminster systems plays a smaller role in our context.⁴

This study also adds to the existing literature on political elites in Germany. Apart from more sociological works following the seminal book by Dietrich Herzog (1975) who gave questionnaires to a more or less representative sample of top-politicians concerning their paths to power (Gruber 2008), the majority of studies on selection and deselection processes for German political elites has focused predominantly on parliamentarians (Best et al. 2011; Patzelt 1997) and federal ministers (Ali 2003; Fischer and Kaiser 2009a; Fischer et al. 2006) or career patterns connecting both (Fischer and Kaiser 2009b, 2010).⁵ Yet the subnational level is often only analysed as a recruiting pool for a position on the federal level (Fischer and Kaiser 2011). One exception is a book by Lars Vogel (2009) describing the recruitment of federal as well as Länder ministers. Contrary to the more comprehensive literature on selection mechanisms, a systematic analysis of ministerial turnover and thus duration in power has nevertheless until now been missing for the German Bundesländer.

For explaining this duration and the determinants of ministerial turnover within the governments of the sixteen German Länder data on all ministers were recorded for the period 1990-2010. The statistical analysis in this article is based on this newly compiled dataset, including both political and institutional variables on the government and parliament level (e.g. type of government or policy-distance between parties) as well as biographic and socio-demographic characteristics of the individual ministers (e.g. gender, age, education, experience in earlier cabinets). For the analysis I do not only borrow from existing works on ministerial careers on the national and (the few available ones) on the subnational level but also from the already quite extensive body of more institutionally focused government survival literature (Jäckle 2011; Laver 2003; Warwick 1994). This tradition is not only relevant because of its contextual proximity to ministerial turnover – when a government fails, this is very often also the end of a minister's career in cabinet, but also because the event

⁴ This individual-minister-oriented perspective separates this analysis from other works that approach ministerial turnover from the perspective of the prime minister and ask under which conditions and for what reasons he or she reshuffles the cabinet, demotes or promotes ministers and induces individual ministers resignations (Dewan and Dowding 2005; Indridason and Kam 2008).

⁵ Works on party careers form another perspective for research on political elites.

history methods developed in the course of this research can be applied fruitfully to the analysis in this paper. Following the seminal works of Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008; 2004) who found that individual durability can in general not be equated with stability on the government level, this paper tests whether the factors explaining the durability of governments in general – especially aggregate factors of the political arena – are also applicable to individual ministers' careers and whether they determine a minister's duration in cabinet more or less than biographic characteristics of the respective minister. For the statistical analysis I resort to a *Cox* proportional hazard model which has already proven its suitability in government durability research (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004; Box-Steffensmeier and Sokhey 2009; Cox 1972).

In the following section I explain the case selection and give a short overview of the data, especially with regard to the different types of terminal events. The third section presents the hypotheses about ministerial turnover and their operationalizations before section four introduces briefly the applied event history methodology. Section five discusses the results of the statistical analysis before the final section six gives a résumé.

2. Cabinet duration data for the German Länder: Definitions and first descriptive results

For any statistical analysis it is crucial to define the cases. Particularly in event history analysis, this definition is not completely self-evident. There is always the question which events have to be considered as being terminal for a subject's event history. According to my research question a case is defined as a person who has been part of a cabinet without interruption, regardless how many different portfolios he or she has been holding during his or her time in government.⁶ Thus neither elections nor reshuffles automatically serve as terminal events,⁷ only when a minister entirely leaves the cabinet (for any reason), the ministerial spell ends. When the same person re-enters the cabinet after a period of time during which he or she was not part of the government this is treated as a new case with its event history starting to count again from zero. For every case the starting and ending

⁶ Only full ministers are counted, state secretaries without a vote in the cabinet are not included in the analysis.

⁷ This research focus is different from existing studies like for example a study by Indridason and Kam on the prime ministers ability to cope with ministerial drift. In that work all reshuffles – transfers (a minister moving from one portfolio to another), redefinitions of a minister's portfolio, promotions of new cabinet members as well as demotions – are defining elements for their cases (Indridason and Kam 2008, pp. 639-640). In contrast our study focuses on ministers completely leaving the cabinet. Transfers as well as redefinitions will only be included as independent variables in terms of the number of changes minister had to face during their time in office.

points of the spell are recorded, as well as biographic information on the minister and data about the political-institutional setting of the government(s) the minister has served in.⁸

The dataset covers all German Länder ministers that left the cabinet between 01.01.1991 and 31.12.2010.⁹ Applying the aforementioned definition for terminal events, 768 cases of ministers' duration in cabinet can be identified. Table 1 provides an overview of the types of terminal events and their frequencies within the dataset – prime ministers are included in the table. The categories for the classification of the terminal events are used in a mutually exclusive manner, although in the reality of research it is often not possible to determine the real, single cause of a ministerial turnover (Fischer et al. 2006, p. 712). In contrast, we often face an accumulation of different reasons resulting in the end of a ministerial spell (Dowding and Kang 1998). This phenomenon is well-established in the analysis of government terminations, and addresses the complex issue of precisely naming the type of terminal event (Budge and Keman 1990, p. 179; Jäckle 2011). The categorization is thus based on the most relevant type of termination, knowing that this decision is subjective and far from being without ambiguity. Nevertheless the categorization of events that have to be censored in the survival analysis can be done without significant error. Bearing this problem in mind, some preliminary descriptive conclusions can be drawn from the table. For these, I will use the data including prime ministers.

Apart from the rough classification into collective, voluntary and forced exits¹⁰ table 1 gives the exact number of cases that terminated due to a specific category of terminal events. Approximately one fifth of all ministers had to leave the cabinet because their party was voted out of government, but we see a large variation here: While the CSU has been governing in Bavaria for the whole observation period (from 2008 on together with the FDP) there have been major electoral turnovers for example in Saxony-Anhalt where nearly all types of party cabinet compositions could be observed during the last 20 years (CDU/FDP, SPD/Green, SPD, CDU/SPD). While only one minister died during her time in cabinet, 27 had to leave government because of health reasons. Particularly in Berlin, Brandenburg and Lower Saxony ministers often left the cabinet for taking another political position whereas we find the most ministers changing into private business in

⁸ The focus on the individual ministers also speaks against a definition often used for reshuffles which counts only simultaneous changes of two or more ministers as a reshuffle (Budge 1985). In the present analysis all ministers leaving the cabinet are counted, regardless of whether they have left alone or at the same time together with colleagues.

⁹ The dataset as well as the stata-do files are available at the author's website: www.sebastianjaeckle.de.

¹⁰ I have to thank Klaus Stolz and Jörn Fischer for drawing my attention to that simple but helpful typology.

Berlin, Baden-Württemberg and Schleswig-Holstein.¹¹ We only find very few instances that a party breaks a governing coalition due to policy differences and entirely leaves the cabinet. One of these instances was in Berlin, when as a result of a SPD-initiated vacation of seized buildings, all three Green ministers resigned from their positions in the SPD/Green government shortly before the first joint elections for the Berlin chamber of deputies in December 1990. Moreover, Berlin witnessed one of the two cases where a vote of no confidence launched against a prime minister resulted in a ministerial turnover (the other was Heide Simonis in Schleswig-Holstein). In 2001, four ministers together with the governing mayor Eberhard Diepgen subjected their fate to a vote of no confidence and as a consequence left the government when the majority of the parliamentarians no longer supported Diepgen.

¹¹ Examples are Thilo Sarrazin, who left the ministry of finance in Berlin for becoming a member of the executive board of the *Deutsche Bundesbank* and Burkhard Dreher, who left the ministry of economy in Brandenburg for becoming a CEO at the VEW, then a large utility company.

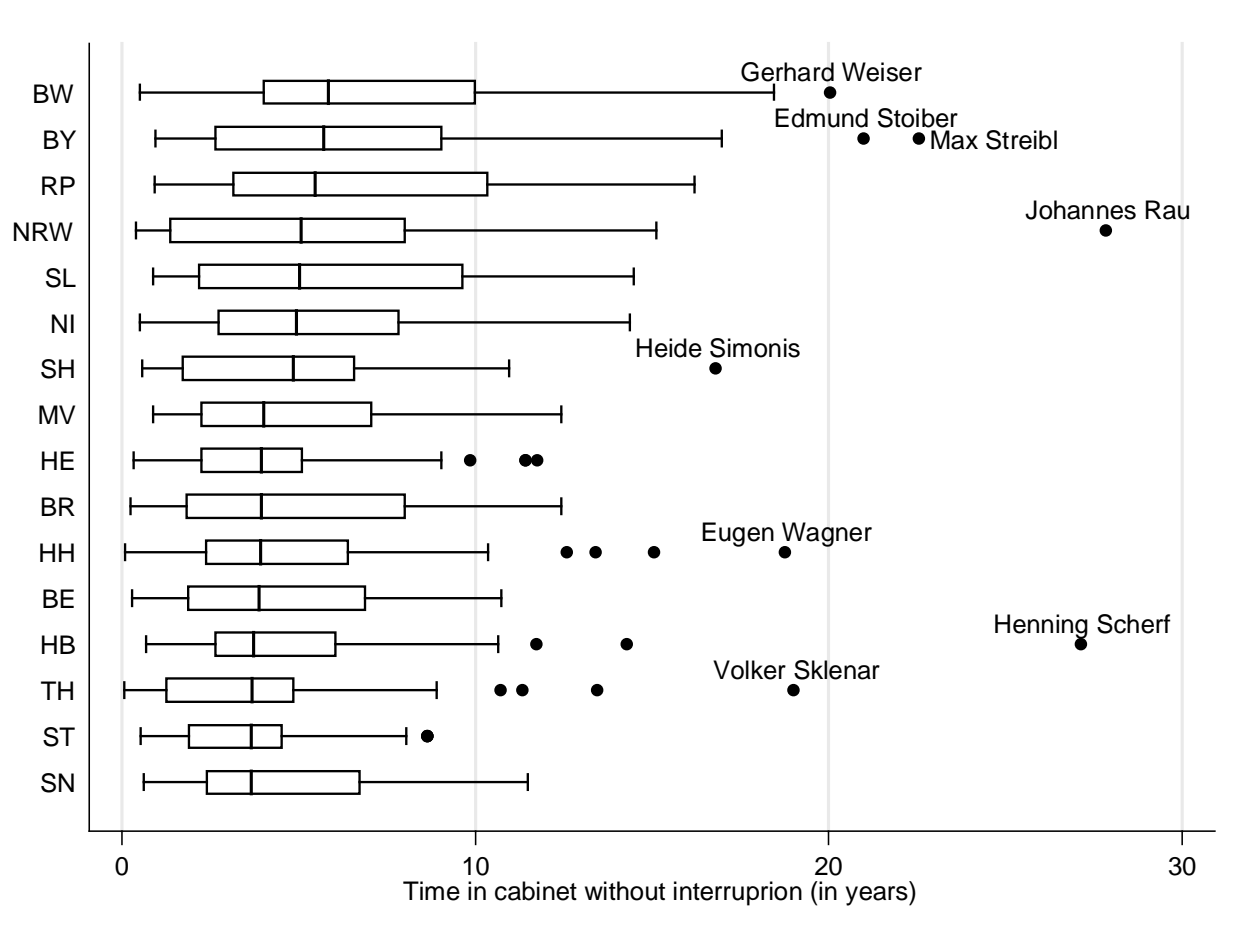
Table 1: Types and frequencies of terminal events for cabinet duration by Bundesland without (and with) prime ministers included

		BE	BR	BW	BY	HB	HE	HH	MV	NI	NRW	RP	SH	SL	SN	ST	TH	Sum
collective exit	voting out of government (at elections)*	3 (4)	6 (6)	4 (4)	- (-)	6 (6)	18 (20)	18 (20)	9 (10)	22 (24)	21 (23)	9 (10)	2 (2)	7 (8)	2 (2)	20 (22)	8 (8)	155 (169)
	problems within the governing coalition (whole party leaving the government)	3 (3)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (1)	- (-)	3 (3)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	4 (4)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	10 (11)
	lost vote of no confidence against prime minister	4 (5)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (1)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)
voluntary exit	ill health / age*	- (-)	2 (2)	2 (2)	1 (1)	2 (3)	1 (1)	- (-)	4 (4)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	1 (1)	- (-)	2 (2)	1 (1)	28 (29)
	change to other political/state position (e.g. federal government, other state government, central bank)	7 (7)	8 (9)	4 (5)	1 (1)	3 (3)	4 (4)	3 (3)	2 (2)	5 (7)	5 (6)	4 (5)	3 (3)	4 (5)	5 (5)	3 (3)	5 (5)	66 (73)
	change into private business/deliberately exiting politics	8 (8)	2 (2)	7 (7)	4 (4)	4 (5)	4 (5)	4 (5)	- (-)	1 (1)	2 (3)	2 (2)	8 (8)	- (-)	- (-)	1 (1)	3 (3)	50 (54)
forced exit	problems within the own party	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (2)	5 (6)	1 (1)	- (-)	1 (1)	5 (5)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	4 (4)	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	- (1)	23 (26)
	scandal	3 (3)	7 (7)	4 (5)	6 (7)	3 (3)	6 (6)	8 (8)	2 (2)	2 (3)	5 (5)	1 (1)	1 (2)	1 (1)	5 (6)	6 (8)	4 (4)	64 (71)
	partial ministerial reshuffle after elections	8 (8)	1 (1)	7 (7)	- (1)	8 (8)	1 (1)	9 (9)	5 (5)	- (-)	5 (5)	2 (2)	3 (3)	7 (7)	2 (2)	2 (2)	3 (4)	(63) 65
unclassified	other terminal event (politically induced)	9 (9)	8 (8)	4 (4)	9 (9)	4 (4)	8 (8)	5 (6)	3 (3)	8 (8)	2 (2)	3 (3)	6 (6)	4 (4)	18 (19)	6 (6)	12 (13)	109 (112)
	death*	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	1 (1)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	1 (1)
	still in office at 31.01.2011*	8 (9)	8 (9)	11 (12)	11 (12)	6 (7)	10 (11)	5 (6)	8 (9)	8 (9)	11 (12)	7 (8)	7 (8)	8 (9)	9 (10)	9 (10)	9 (10)	135 (151)
	<i>election, but no change in portfolio</i>	<i>12 (15)</i>	<i>23 (27)</i>	<i>50 (57)</i>	<i>37 (41)</i>	<i>6 (12)</i>	<i>15 (18)</i>	<i>44 (48)</i>	<i>25 (26)</i>	<i>51 (57)</i>	<i>25 (30)</i>	<i>33 (36)</i>	<i>16 (20)</i>	<i>16 (20)</i>	<i>25 (29)</i>	<i>16 (18)</i>	<i>18 (21)</i>	412 (475)
sum		54 (57)	43 (45)	44 (48)	37 (41)	38 (42)	52 (56)	56 (61)	38 (40)	49 (55)	54(59)	31 (34)	41 (44)	34 (37)	42 (45)	50 (55)	45 (49)	708 (768)

BE: Berlin; BR: Brandenburg; BW: Baden-Württemberg; BY: Bavaria; HB: Bremen; HE: Hesse; HH: Hamburg; MV: Mecklenburg-West Pomerania; NI: Lower Saxony; NRW: North Rhine-Westphalia; RP: Rhineland-Palatinate; SH: Schleswig-Holstein; SL: Saarland; SN: Saxony; ST: Saxony-Anhalt; TH: Thuringia. The grey row contains ministers that continued to stay in the cabinet despite elections, changes in the party composition of the government or the change of the prime minister. These cases which are typically regarded as terminal events in government survival literature are **not** counted as terminal events in this analysis. The asterisk indicates terminal events which are right-censored in the Cox-model.

A lack of support from one's own party can only be made responsible for the turnover in a small number of cases whereas scandals account for more than ten per cent of all terminations of ministerial spells.¹² For 112 terminations I was – at least with the informational basis available (*Munzinger Archiv*) – only able to assert that they were politically induced, but no particular terminal event could be singled out.

Graph 1: Durations of ministers in cabinet (prime ministers included)



The boxplot in graph 1 gives a first impression of the durations in cabinet (again prime ministers are included). We see that there is a serious variation within and in between the 16 Länder. The median duration for cabinet duration varies between about 3.5 and 6.5 years in Saxony and Baden-Württemberg respectively. A couple of ministers clearly stand out when it comes to cabinet duration. Two groups can be identified among them: first, ministers who stayed all the time in cabinet within the same portfolio (Eugen Wagner was minister of construction; Gerhard Weiser and Volker Sklenar

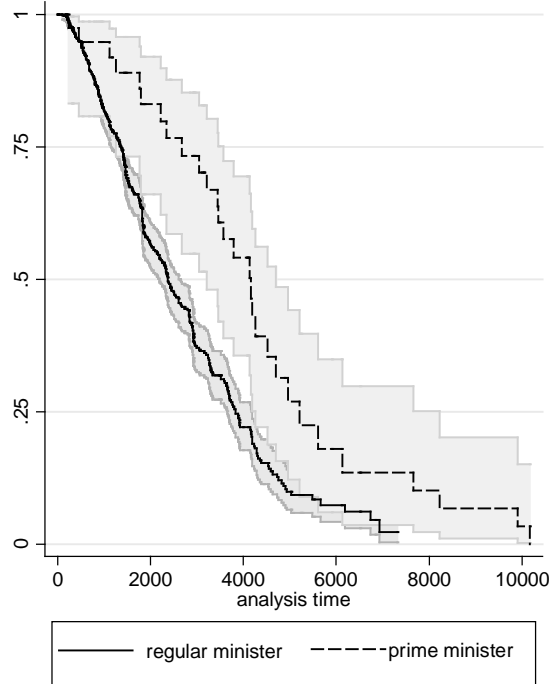
¹² This category subsumes all types of scandals. The large majority are nevertheless either of financial or political nature. Sex scandals which – according to Dowding and Kang (1998, pp.419-425) – make up a considerable portion of British ministerial resignations particularly for conservative politicians, are apparently not a big issue in the German Länder, as Jörn Fischer and his colleagues have also shown for the federal level (Fischer et al. 2006).

were both ministers of agriculture) and second, politicians who once in their career made it to the office of the prime minister (Johannes Rau, Max Streibl, Edmund Stoiber, Henning Scherf or Heide Simonis). When it comes to ministerial turnover prime ministers are thus obviously more than just a *primus inter pares* within government. For them the principal-agent-logic is in spite of all coalition effects still relevant. On the one hand, being the principal, they at least have the constitutional power to dismiss their agents, the ministers, if there are conflicts between them, and on the other hand they cannot be dismissed so easily. The only possibility for a (forced) turnover of a prime minister (apart from voluntary resignations) is to lose a vote of no confidence or a motion of confidence.¹³ In addition, the change of a prime minister is always more severe than the turnover of any other minister as it is synonymous to a government termination. The following Kaplan-Meier curves in graph 2a (Kaplan and Meier 1958) show the survival rates of prime ministers compared to regular ministers. Although not controlling for further variables, the results are very clear cut: Persons who were prime minister during their time in government survive significantly longer in cabinet than regular ministers do. Taking theoretical arguments together with this empirical finding, prime ministers should better be treated in a separate research. Thus the following analysis focuses only on regular ministerial spells. Graph 2b also shows that there are no party differences, therefore party membership will not be tested in the regression models.¹⁴

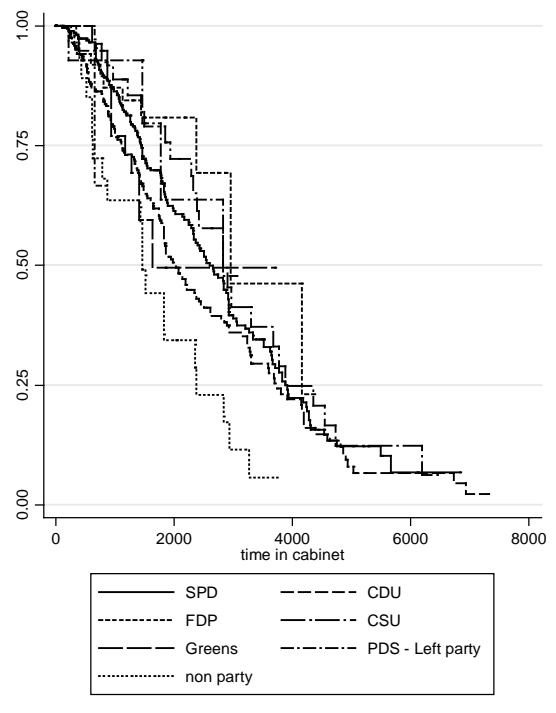
¹³ According to the constitutions of the Länder, a vote of no confidence is possible in all of them except Bavaria, where the prime minister has to step back if the political conditions preclude a trustful collaboration with the parliament. Motions of confidence are only anchored in the constitutions of Brandenburg, Hesse, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Saarland, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia.

¹⁴ The confidence intervals that, for the sake of clarity, were not presented in graph 2b would overlap widely.

Graph 2a: Kaplan-Meier estimates for prime and regular ministers + 95% confidence intervals



Graph 2b: Kaplan-Meier estimates by the minister's party



3. Hypotheses and operationalization

Following theoretical and empirical works on ministers' lifetimes and government survival, two main blocs of factors can be identified as potentially relevant. First, attributes of the institutional and political setting (aggregate level) determine the arena in which the ministers act and second, biographic information about respective ministers could influence a minister's duration in cabinet from the individual level (see table 2).

Table 2: Independent variables for the statistical analysis

aggregate level	individual level
H1: type of government (SPG, coalition government with the minister being from the same party as the PM)	H5: age (time-varying)
H2: majority (percentage of parliamentary seats of the government party/parties)	H6: gender
H3: ideological policy distance between the coalition partners	H7: tertiary education, doctorate – PhD; Habilitation
H4: important ministry	H8: regional rootedness (birthplace in the same Bundesland as the ministerial job)
controls: minority cabinets; length of constitutional interelection period (CIEP); possibility to launch a vote of no confidence against individual ministers	H9: expert ministers & non party affiliation
	H10: number of spells the minister has served before the actual spell
	H11: number of different cabinet positions (portfolios) during the ministerial spell
	H12: length of party membership (time-varying)
	only tested for East German sub-sample
	H1-east: member of one of the bloc-parties in the former GDR
	H2-east: <i>import</i> from West-Germany as <i>reconstruction helper</i>

3.1 Aggregate level factors

Studies of government survival have shown that single party majority governments (SPG) and minimal winning coalitions (MWC) are the most durable types of cabinets (Dodd 1974; Warwick 1994), even though they reveal significant differences in their kinds of terminations: while SPG more frequently exercise the option of dissolution of parliament followed by early elections, MWC show a higher risk for replacements (Jäckle 2011, p. 111; Kayser 2005, p. 17). The underlying principal agent logic of this phenomenon can also be applied to the question of ministerial turnover. In SPG prime ministers possesses much greater autonomy in reshuffling their cabinet. Moving ministers from one portfolio to another can help to reduce agency loss (Indridason and Kam 2008), but in some instances there is likely no other option than to completely remove a minister from the cabinet who is either mired in scandal or pursuing policies too removed from the prime minister's own policy position. In these cases it should be easier for prime ministers in SPG to replace the problematic ministers or induce their resignation¹⁵ than for a prime minister who is bound by coalition politics (Budge 1985). For coalition governments a distinction must be made: if ministers are members of the same party as the prime minister, their turnover can most likely be pushed through as easily as in a

¹⁵ Jörn Fischer and his colleagues have shown that, at least for German federal ministers, the role of the Federal Chancellor is often decisive for the minister's fate when the opposition or the media confront cabinet ministers with demands for resignation (Fischer et al. 2006, p. 730).

SPG or even easier, as the coalition partner should normally have no reason to adhere to a politician from another political party. In contrast, the coalition partner will generally try to keep its own minister in power. We can therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: *In SPG and for those ministers in coalition governments that belong to the prime minister's party, the risk for ministers to leave their ministry as well as to leave the whole cabinet should be higher than for ministers in coalition governments who belong to the small coalition partner(s).*

In their study on ministerial tenure in Great Britain, Berlinski and Dowding showed that majority size does not influence ministerial turnover (Berlinski et al. 2007, pp. 256-257). This non-effect is plausible for Westminster systems, where mostly SPG rule, but in coalition governments like they are the norm in the German Länder we could expect to find some effects of the majority size. The direction of influence is nevertheless not that clear: a large majority size could on the one hand stabilize governments for example when it comes to votes of no confidence and thereby also lead to long cabinet durations of the ministers, but on the other hand parties within coalitions that rely on large majorities could see themselves not as dependent on their respective coalition partners which would undermine cabinet duration. We expect this second effect to be stronger:

H2: *Ministers working in governments that rely on a large majority should have shorter durations in cabinet than their colleagues in governments with less parliamentary support.*

As for government survival (Warwick 1994, 2006), ideological partisan differences may play a role in ministerial turnover. For testing this assumption data on the political positioning of the parties on the two dimensions *economy* and *society* as well as data on the salience of these two dimensions for the respective parties were used.¹⁶ The salience-weighted Euclidean distance of the coalition parties on these two dimensions serves as a proxy for intra-coalitional policy differences.¹⁷ The assumption is that the higher the policy differences in coalition governments, the more often these differences will impact the personal level, leading to personal changes within the cabinet.

H3: *The higher the salience-weighted Euclidean distance between the coalition parties, the higher the hazard for ministerial turnover should be.*

¹⁶ The data are from Marc Debus (2008). To gain salience-values and policy positions Debus applied the wordscore-technique on electoral programs. His period of investigation covers 1994 to 2006. As a consequence it was only possible to determine the policy distance for about half of the cases in this study.

¹⁷ The empirical values of the ideological distances range from ca. 900 to 3400. To account for ideological differences of factions within single party governments the ideological distance value was set for all SPG to 300.

Clearly there are differences between ministries according to their importance. Although this importance is also a function of the parties' ideology (Greens will most likely assign more weight to the ministry of environment, whereas Social Democrats might deem the ministries of labour and social welfare more important), we can, with respect to the specific Länder competencies, nevertheless identify a certain core of ministries which are of specific significance for all governments. These are the ministries of finance, education and cultural affairs, economic affairs and of the interior.¹⁸ Especially in these important ministries personal continuity is essential and parties can be expected to appoint their best personnel to these positions. Both factors support the view that these ministers should have longer durations in these specific ministries and as a consequence in cabinet.

H4: *Ministers holding an important cabinet position should have a lower hazard for turnover.*

Minority governments are unusual in the German Länder. Examples are the so called *Magdeburg model*, a SPD led government tolerated by the PDS in Saxony Anhalt between 1994 and 2002 or the SPD-Greens coalition in North Rhine-Westphalia under Hannelore Kraft (2010 - 2012) which did not have a majority of its own, counting on changing support from either Die Linke or FDP. Other minority governments were mostly caretakers. The statistical analysis controls for minority governments. Furthermore the analysis controls for the length of the constitutional interelection period (CIEP) which varies between 4 and 5 years, and the possibility to launch a vote of no confidence against individual ministers (possible in BE, BW, HB, RP and SL).

3.2. Individual factors

Biographic information constitutes the second set of factors which potentially determine a minister's duration in cabinet. The age of the minister must be controlled for, because older ministers may have reached retirement age or may feel – especially when confronted with political pressure – that they 'have reached the highest rung on the ladder and so [are] more willing to leave office to take a look at those outside options' (Berlinski et al. 2007, p. 258). Age is included as a time-varying covariate in the Cox-model and we can hypothesize:

H5: *The older a minister is, the higher her risk for leaving the cabinet should be.*

¹⁸ The classification of ministries follows Pappi et al. (2008).

Women are still underrepresented in political positions. However, the percentage of female ministers is significantly higher than the percentage of female prime ministers, showing that the realization of equal opportunities is a stepwise process starting at lower political levels. While research has shown that gender is a relevant factor for the selection of ministers, no gender-effect has been found on the duration in office once a woman has made it to the cabinet.

H6: *We expect to find no differences between the hazard rates of women and men.*

Education is another personal attribute that could influence the turnover rate. Berlinski and Dowding have shown that there seems to be a difference between cabinet members with public and those with a private school education in Britain. Especially ministers that have studied in Oxford or Cambridge reveal a lower turnover hazard than those not having an ‘Oxbridge background’. According to that research, the type of school attended by a minister serves as a proxy for ‘characteristics of the minister such as acquired skills, latent ability or access to social networks’ (Berlinski et al. 2007, pp. 254-256). While in theory these characteristics can be seen as relevant for job performance as a minister as well as at a possible job later in the private business – and hence could work in both directions – empirical evidence indicates that an elitist education decreases the minister’s hazard for turnover. In Germany nevertheless there is no such strict distinction between elite universities such as Cambridge or Oxford and average ones. Therefore in this study we only distinguish between ministers with or without tertiary education, those holding a Dr/PhD and those having received a *Habilitation*.¹⁹ The argument thus must be slightly adapted: a university degree and especially a PhD shows, apart from the higher level of education, a certain dedication the minister has put into her career, sometimes even during times when she was already politically active. Therefore having completed a university education or even a PhD can in addition to being a proxy for higher education also be seen to some extent as a proxy for drive and assertiveness which can enhance the chances of staying in power when problems arise. We formulate the following hypothesis:

H7a: *Ministers having completed tertiary education and especially those holding a PhD should have lower hazard rates.*

For ministers having received a *Habilitation* the education argument turns around. The time that has to be invested in the academia for obtaining this postdoctoral degree can in the end be missing for a

¹⁹ Distinguishing between ministers without tertiary education and those holding a university degree does not produce meaningful variance. Only three ministers in the whole sample did not attend university.

thorough party and political career and also a return into academics could often be an option for such ministers.

H7b: *Ministers holding a Habilitation should have higher hazard rates.*

Being regionally rooted in the *Bundesland* where the minister holds office could have a positive impact on portfolio duration. I use the place of birth as a proxy for regional rootedness.

H8: *Ministers serving in the same Bundesland, where they were born should have a lower hazard for leaving the cabinet than those lacking these regional roots.*

Career changers coming from private business, bureaucracy or academia who are appointed as expert-ministers are controlled for as well. Prime ministers sometimes use this option to gain expertise for their cabinets. Especially in the East German Bundesländer this phenomenon could be observed quite often. Additionally, these expert-ministers frequently do not hold a party membership which should result in more fragile backing in times of conflict.

H9: *Ministers that were appointed as expert-ministers, coming from private business, bureaucracy or academia should have a higher hazard. The same should be true for non-party ministers.*

The last biographic factor to be controlled for is the amount of expertise a minister has accumulated during her political career. Three operationalizations will be tested: first, the number of ministerial spells a minister has served before the observed spell, second, the number of different portfolios the minister held during his or her time in cabinet, and third, the time a minister has been member of his or her party.

A return into cabinet after some time during which the minister was not part of the government could be interpreted as an indication of his or her power within the governing party or special qualities. Both should lead to a lower hazard for turnover:²⁰

H10: *The larger the number of spells a politician has served as minister before the observed spell, the lower his or her hazard for leaving the cabinet should be.*

²⁰ This argument resonates with a study which claims that the talent pool of potential ministers is not infinite (see Dewan and Myatt 2010). Therefore, from the perspective of a prime minister who wishes to work with the most talented personnel, recourse to ministers that have already proven their qualities in earlier governments is often logically sound.

The consequences of a high number of cabinet positions held during the ministerial spell are less clear. Shuffling from one portfolio to another can have different reasons: Either the minister does not satisfy the expectations of the prime minister and hence must change office. This would be an indication of a lack of support that could ultimately result in a short duration in power. Or someone who is an exceptional crisis manager and generalist could also be employed each time the government faces political trouble. Such a minister would most likely have a lower risk for leaving the cabinet as he or she is one of the pillars of the government and central to its performance. It is therefore difficult to make a clear prediction about the direction of influence for the number of cabinet positions a minister held during her spell. Both directions of influence are theoretically possible. Yet there is additionally a more basic dependence of survival time at work: a minister who has already served in a number of different portfolios almost certainly also has served a certain length of time.²¹ Taken this *time argument* together with the *higher experience argument* we can hypothesize:

H11: *The more portfolios ministers hold during their time in cabinet, the lower their hazards for turnover should be.*

Finally, having a strong backing within the own party should also help. I use the time a minister is a member of his or her party as a proxy for this party-backing, therefore:

H12: *The longer a minister has been a member of his or her party, the lower the hazard for leaving the government should be.*²²

3.3. East-German specifics

There are strong theoretical arguments for analyzing the East German Länder separately: a comparable socio-economic surrounding, a specific political culture, the common heritage of ‘bloc-parties’, a large influence of the PDS – the former Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) – and the import of West German politicians as so called *reconstruction helpers*. When the GDR ceased to

²¹ It is likely that for this reason the proportionality assumption is not justified for this variable and therefore must certainly be tested.

²² Party membership, included into the Cox-model as a time-varying covariate is measured in days but standardized on years for better interpretable coefficients.

exist, the bloc parties merged into their western counterparts.²³ These bloc parties that have been centralized in the National Front have been entirely politically dependent on the SED. In the wake of the political events in 1989/90, members of the bloc parties who had previously worked together with the political leadership of the GDR turned coats and became ‘flawless democrats’. A significant portion of the new political establishment in East Germany has thus already been connected to the old system. Ministers with such a bloc party background should therefore be more often confronted with rumours about collaboration with the *Stasi* or mired in other political scandals concerning their history within the GDR.

H1-east: *We assume for the East German subsample that ministers who have been members of a bloc party should have a higher hazard for turnover.*

Another specific of the East German political landscape after the reunification was the systematic ‘import’ of politicians from the western part of Germany. Those so called *reconstruction helpers* (*Aufbauhelfer*) were nevertheless only needed for the first years when there was a lack of sufficiently qualified and politically untainted personnel.

H2-east: *Reconstruction helpers should have higher hazards for exiting the cabinet.*

4. Method

The study applies event history analysis (EHA). This method is appropriate as we are not only interested in the question *if* a certain minister leaves the cabinet (this kind of question could also be answered using a logit model), but also *when* this event takes place. Therefore we model the *hazard rate* λ – a combination of the survival and the probability density functions. The hazard rate represents the instantaneous risk that an event will occur, in this article that a minister will leave the cabinet, during the extremely short interval Δt , under the condition that he or she has not left until time t . We estimate a semi-parametric Cox-model (Cox 1975). This model enables researchers to estimate the influence of attributes on the hazard rate without knowing the functional form of the baseline hazard and thus without the danger of introducing error into the model through a

²³ CDU-East and the Democratic Farmers party of Germany (DBD) became part of the West CDU, while the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (LDPD) and the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD) merged into the FDP. There was no SPD bloc-party, because the social democrats had in 1950 been forced to merge with the communist party (KPD) into the ruling SED. The lack of an organizational structure to build on as provided by the bloc parties for CDU and FDP was one of the most serious difficulties the Social Democrats had to face after 1990 in the new Länder.

misspecification of this underlying hazard (Yamaguchi 1991, p. 101). It is therefore the best choice for the estimation of ministerial turnover hazards.²⁴ A study on government terminations by Damgaard who distinguishes between *technical and discretionary terminations* serves as a blueprint for the censoring regime. While technical terminations “are beyond the control of the players”, discretionary terminations “are deliberately brought about by the actors involved, even if these actors may feel that they have no other options” (Damgaard 2008, p. 303). Thus, the following analysis treats ministerial spells ending due to death, ill health and old age, voting out of government and the end of the observation period as technical terminations and censors them (see table 1).

5. Statistical Analysis

This section presents the results for the Cox-models in form of hazard ratios. These antilogs of the partial likelihood coefficients are easier to interpret than the raw coefficients. A ratio of 1 indicates no influence of the independent variable on the hazard. Values greater than one show an increase in hazard, those lower than one indicate a decrease. For example, a hazard ratio of 1.5 means that an increase of the independent variable of one point raises the hazard for turnover under *ceteris paribus* conditions by 50 percent.²⁵

Table 3 presents five models for cabinet duration. Models 1-3 are estimated for all 16 Länder, models 4 and 5 only for the East-German subsample. In the first model all variables are included simultaneously. In models 2 and 3 a stepwise backward selection reduces the explaining covariates to only those showing at least by trend some effects. The difference between these two models is that model 2 includes the variable “ideological distance” which is not available for the whole sample period, while model 3 entirely omits this covariate, thereby increasing the N available for the Cox model significantly. The following interpretation is based on the final models 2 and 3.

For the aggregate variables two hypotheses can be confirmed: In SPG as well as in coalition governments – if the minister is from the same party as the prime minister – ministers have a higher hazard to leave the cabinet (**H1**). The positive effect of the parliamentary strength of the governing parties was also expected (**H2**). Taking a closer look at this effect, it can partly also be attributed to grand coalitions where the parties are on average shorter in power, and with them their ministers. The ideological distance between the government parties (**H3**), as well as the importance of a

²⁴ For further information about this class of event history models and specific problems such as the proportionality assumption, tied events and the partial likelihood estimation procedure see (Blossfeld et al. 2007; Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004; Jäckle 2011, pp. 75-91; Therneau and Grambsch 2000).

²⁵ For an overview of how to interpret the partial likelihood coefficients of a Cox-model see Box-Steffensmeier and Jones (1997, p. 1450).

ministry (**H4**) on the other hand do not impact on the hazard for ministerial turnover at all. The three control variables (minority cabinets; CIEP; individual vote of no confidence against regular ministers) do not show big influences, only the CIEP has a reducing effect on the hazard for turnover.

For the individual characteristics we find only few significant effects: Neither age (**H5**) nor gender (**H6**) is of any relevance. While this was expected for the latter, no effect for age is surprising. Education apparently also does not influence the hazard for ministerial turnover in a major way (**H7**), and if it has any effects, these are not the ones expected: Holding a PhD reduces ministerial duration while a habilitation at least by trend prolongs a minister's duration in cabinet. Nevertheless these are not very strong effects and they are only significant in model 3 – the one without ideological distance included. This is also true for regional rootedness (**H8**). Model 3 shows that ministers who were born in the Bundesland where they are part of the cabinet have a smaller hazard for leaving the government. Being an expert minister, coming from the academia, bureaucracy or private business does not alter the hazards for turnover (**H9**). The last three individual characteristics tested were the amount of expertise a minister brings into the cabinet. Only one of the operationalizations shows an effect: a high number of portfolios a minister has held during his or her time in cabinet reduces the hazard significantly (**H11**). The significant interaction term (portfolios x survival time) that had to be included because of non-proportionality of the portfolio variable²⁶ means that this effect is stronger for ministers who accumulated more portfolio experience during their early years in cabinet. The experience in terms of cabinet spells a minister has served before the current spell (**H10**) and the years a minister has been member of his or her party (**H12**) do not help.

The separate analysis for the East German subsample (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia) confirms our assumptions at least partially. Model 4 includes all variables simultaneously (except for ideological distance which would reduce the number of cases too much) and model 5 applies the same stepwise backward selection procedure known from the earlier models. We do find some differences to the overall models: First, parliamentary strength has a

²⁶ Since log-log-plots as well as the Grambsch-Therneau-test indicate non-proportional hazards for the variable *portfolios within spell* (Grambsch and Therneau 1994; Therneau and Grambsch 2000, p. 127), an interaction with survival time was included in the model to explicitly account for this fact (see Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004, p. 136). The estimation of stratified models which some textbooks present as a possibility to cope with non-proportional hazards has a number of drawbacks (see Therneau and Grambsch 2000, p. 145) and is therefore not applied in this analysis. For finding the appropriate form of the time dependence plots of scaled Schoenfeld residuals against different functional forms of time (identity, log(t), t²) were inspected (see Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004, pp. 120-121). Since the identity plots showed the best results and also make the most sense from a conceptual point of view by making the interactions more easily interpretable, the identity interactions were used in the models. Other variables show no signs of non-proportionality.

negative effect on the hazards for ministerial turnover. This result is in line with the negative effect of minority governments which can largely be attributed to the so called Magdeburg model.²⁷ Second, we find a significant and strong effect of expert ministers who exhibit a much higher hazard rate than their non-expert, mostly party affiliated, colleagues. The significant interaction effect that was included because of non-proportionality shows that the effect of experts is not constant through time, but it decreases. This means that the longer an expert minister manages to stay in cabinet, the more his instantaneous probability to terminate (his or her hazard rate) decreases. The two variables *bloc party* (**H1-east**) and *reconstruction helper* (**H2-east**), tested because of the special political circumstances that, at least at the beginning of the observation period, characterized the East German political landscape do not show significant effects. Nevertheless the signs at least show into the right direction and the bloc party effect is only by a very small margin not significant. Therefore we can say that having a bloc party past at least by trend increases the hazard for ministerial turnover.

²⁷ The Magdeburg model was a minority government comprised of SPD and Greens in 1994 which was tolerated by the PDS. Prime minister Reinhard Höppner continued in 1998 with a SPD single-party minority government supported by the PDS when the Greens did not manage to re-enter the parliament. With these tolerating policies the Magdeburg model cabinets come close to standard majority coalition governments and it is therefore not that surprising to find ministers in them to have longer durations than in other East German governments.

Table 3: Cox-models – dependent variable: duration in cabinet

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	all 16 German Länder			5 East-German Länder only	
<i>Aggregate variables</i>					
H1: SPG (1/0)	1.619 (0.531)	1.807*** (0.346)	1.782*** (0.292)	1.762* (0.582)	1.910** (0.602)
H1: Coalition & same party as pm (1/0)	1.439* (0.282)	1.419* (0.268)	1.700*** (0.255)	2.159*** (0.629)	2.264*** (0.638)
H2: Parl. strength of governing parties (in %)	1.020*** (0.00735)	1.020*** (0.00704)	1.009 (0.00605)	0.957*** (0.0162)	0.956*** (0.0160)
H3: Ideol. distance between coalition parties (emp. values 9-34; SPG set to 3)	0.994 (0.0161)				
H4: Important ministry (1/0)	1.068 (0.137)			1.124 (0.231)	
Minority cabinet (1/0)	1.086 (0.372)			0.213*** (0.101)	0.234*** (0.108)
CIEP (in years)	0.734* (0.120)	0.719** (0.114)	0.832 (0.104)	0.665 (0.177)	0.649* (0.164)
Individual vote of no confidence (1/0)	1.201 (0.168)	1.202 (0.165)			
<i>Individual characteristics</i>					
H5: Age (in years, time varying)	1.015 (0.0104)	1.014 (0.00905)		1.001 (0.0163)	
H6: Gender (0 = female; 1 = male)	1.053 (0.152)			1.000 (0.264)	
H7a: Tertiary education (1/0)	1.014 (0.219)			0.834 (0.402)	
H7a: PhD (1/0)	1.118 (0.154)		1.220* (0.138)	1.023 (0.231)	
H7b: Habilitation (1/0)	0.776 (0.204)		0.726 (0.156)	0.787 (0.296)	
H8: Regional rootedness (1/0)	0.912 (0.117)		0.768** (0.0817)	0.828 (0.188)	
H9: Expert minister (from academia, bureaucracy and private business)	0.846 (0.177)			3.608** (1.905)	3.655** (1.859)
Expert minister x time				0.999*** (0.000242)	0.999*** (0.000236)
H10: Number of cabinet spells before	0.881 (0.312)			0.476 (0.294)	
H11: Number of portfolios during spell	0.0910*** (0.0218)	0.0914*** (0.0216)	0.113*** (0.0214)	0.179*** (0.0347)	0.176*** (0.0335)
Number of portfolios x time	1.001*** (7.58e-05)	1.001*** (7.47e-05)	1.001*** (6.17e-05)		
H12: Party membership (in years, time varying)	0.999 (0.00598)			1.001 (0.0107)	
<i>East-German specifics</i>					
H1-east: Bloc party (1/0)				1.678 (0.534)	1.582 (0.455)
H2-east: Reconstruction helper (1/0)				1.182 (0.336)	
Number of subjects	515	515	723	220	220
Number of terminal events	291	291	385	119	119
loglikelihood	-1287	-1289	-1839	-430.5	-432.8
chi2	362.7	359.6	438.0	138.9	134.2

Cox proportional hazard model with censoring (termination because of death, ill health & old age, elections and end of observation period). Hazard ratios with standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Models 2, 3 and 5: stepwise backward selection removing p >= 0.20. Prime ministers excluded. Interactions with survival time included when the Grambsch-Therneau test showed significant non-proportionality.

6. Conclusion

This analysis, using a newly compiled dataset, shed some light onto the patterns of ministerial turnover within the German Bundesländer. First, we found a significant variance within, but also in between the 16 Länder. Focusing on only those ministers with the longest durations in cabinet we were able to identify two specific groups that apparently have good chances to survive for a long time in government: ministers who stayed all their time in cabinet within the same portfolio and prime ministers. Based on the latter result we excluded prime ministers from the following survival analysis.²⁸

One of the main results of the Cox-models is that aggregate parameters describing the political and institutional landscape do play a bigger role than individual biographic factors, except for the prime minister status. We find ministers serving in coalition governments to have higher hazards for turnover if they are from the same party as the prime minister and the same is true for ministers in single party governments. Here the vetoplayer theory, understood in a broad sense, can serve as an explanation. The more other parties are able to block the prime minister in his or her ability to hire and fire and move ministers to other portfolios, the longer ministers can stay in power. The positive effect of parliamentary strength on the hazard for turnover deserves a more thorough inspection. It can probably be traced back primarily to grand coalitions in which parties in general tend to leave government faster than in single party or minimal winning cabinets. We find no effects for ideological distance – this could nevertheless also be an artefact of the operationalization which reduced the number of cases available for the Cox-model in a significant manner. Therefore a more thorough analysis, using alternative ways of measuring ideological characteristics of party governments seems to be necessary for testing whether parties and their positions do matter with respect to cabinet duration.

For the individual factors we found surprisingly no effects for age and gender and only small effects for educational background that furthermore did not match the hypotheses. Political and institutional experience is another factor at least partially determining the probability for turnover. Those ministers that had been members of the government in an earlier spell and are therefore well versed in the *ministerial business* tend to have lower hazards. This first experience effect is nevertheless not

²⁸ We showed that prime ministers exhibit significantly longer durations in cabinet. Because of these huge empirical differences and a number of theoretical arguments (e.g. constitutional requirements and the principal agent perspective) we decided not to include prime ministers in the actual statistical analysis. We believe that it is a fruitful research agenda in its own right and should therefore not be mixed up with the question of turnover of regular ministers.

statistically significant. On the contrary we find a significant negative effect on the hazard for the second experience variable – the number of portfolios held during the respective tenure.

The specific East German political landscape is reflected in the results of a separate model for these five Länder. Here, ministers serving in minority governments have significantly longer durations in power while expert ministers who do not show differences in the hazards of the complete sample, are much more likely to leave the cabinet in East Germany. The two variables only relevant within the context of the Eastern German Länder, “membership in a bloc party” and “reconstruction helper” show effects that while not completely significant at least lead into the hypothesized direction:²⁹ Ministers that had been members of one of the bloc parties before reunification exhibit somewhat higher hazards for turnover.

Especially the result that the political and institutional surrounding matters more for the ministerial stretch than biographic characteristics do, is of relevance for future studies. Furthermore this analysis has shown that the simple principle agent logic that describes Westminster systems quite well has definitely to be amended for coalition governments like they are the rule in the German Länder. To get a more complete picture of executive elites, it is nevertheless necessary to analyse political career paths from a cross-Länder as well as from a multi-level perspective incorporating also parliamentary and party experiences. This would definitely enhance our understanding of the complex career patterns often exhibited by politicians today. A good example is one of the ministers also included in the analysed dataset: Thomas De Maizière started his political career in 1990 as a secretary of state in the ministry of cultural affairs in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, moved on through ministerial positions in Saxony to the federal level where he was first chief of the German chancellery and later minister of the interior before being appointed minister of defence in 2011. This article can be seen as one building block in constructing a more thorough model for understanding the dynamics underlying such careers by focusing on the subnational level which has been largely neglected in earlier studies. Certainly further bricks also employing more qualitative research perspectives are necessary in order to strengthen this model, but with this analysis a start has been made.

²⁹ The much smaller number of cases available for the East German subsample must also be taken into account when interpreting the lower levels of significance that we observe here.

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