

Cabinet Reshuffles in the French Fifth Republic

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Abstract

France's semi-presidential form of government provides an interesting case for testing theories of cabinet reshuffles. It is not the semi-presidential form of government as such that makes France an interesting case but the sharp contrast between periods of cohabitation and unified government in terms of who leads the government. Thus, different actors are in a position to initiate cabinet reshuffles at different points in time. We argue that cabinet reshuffles are strategic devices that the presidents (under unified government) and prime ministers (under cohabitation) use to fend off challenges to their leadership. We find that cohabitation and the presidential and prime ministerial approval rates influence the stability of government. Moreover, the effect of the approval rates are influenced by cohabitation.

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1 Cabinet Reshuffles in the French 5th Republic

Add this quote from Elgie “When things go well, the President often receives the credit. When things go badly, the Prime Minister usually takes the blame. If things go very badly and the Presidents starts to be criticised, then the Prime Minister is replaced. If things go very well and the Prime Minister starts to be praised then the Prime Minister is also replaced. Presidents can neither tolerate Prime Ministers who are failures nor Prime Minister who are a success. Both are a threat to the President’s own authority and both have to be dismissed.” p.1 The role of PM

The allocation of cabinet portfolios is an important topic in the literature on coalition government. For Laver and Shepsle (1994, 1996), among others (e.g., Giannetti & Laver 2005), the allocation of portfolios among coalition partners affects the government’s policy direction as well as its stability. A hallmark of this literature is its focus on the initial allocation of cabinet portfolios; relatively little attention is paid to the re-allocation of portfolios during the parliamentary term, that is, to cabinet reshuffles. In theory, however, reshuffles should have as great an impact on the course of the government as the initial allocation of cabinet portfolios. Why, then, are cabinets reshuffled? Two broad sets of answers to this question can be advanced. One perspective casts reshuffles as strategic devices that prime ministers (PMs) use to protect their positions from a variety of political threats. Thus, PMs use reshuffles to reverse their government’s political unpopularity, keep internal party rivals off balance, or to impound public opinion shocks that threaten delicate coalition bargains (Kam & Indridason 2005, Dewan & Dowding 2005, Laver & Shepsle 1998). In a second perspective the link between the PM’s self-interest and reshuffles is less direct if it exists at all. On this view reshuffles are, variously, responses to exogenous shocks (such as the death of a minister), part of a parliamentary tradition of regularly re-allocating ministers among portfolios, or technocratic devices used to solve an adverse selection problem, to wit, the selection of competent ministers (Huber & Martinez-Gallardo 2004). These views are not entirely independent – Dewan & Dowding (2005), for example, argue that PMs respond to scandals with reshuffles because the public equates a reshuffled cabinet with an improved (i.e., more competent or honest) cabinet and rewards government with higher approval ratings. That said, we wish to draw a distinction between reshuffles as overtly political strategies, and reshuffles used in a non-strategic or technocratic fashion.

In this paper, we use the pattern and timing of French cabinet reshuffles to help us distinguish between these perspectives. In France, the presence of a dual executive, whose powers vary between periods of cohabitation and unified government, allows us to distinguish between political and non-political sources of cabinet reshuffles. There is no reason to believe that presence of non-political sources of reshuffles, e.g., scandals or the competence or honesty of the ministers, depends on whether the government is unified or divided. The frequency of reshuffles under periods of cohabitation and unified government should

therefore be similar if the second perspective discussed above is correct. If, on the other, chief executives use cabinet reshuffles to guard their positions, we might expect the pattern of French cabinet reshuffles to change depending on whether the the government is unified (and the President effectively in charge of the cabinet), or whether the government is divided (with the Prime Minister exerting far greater control of the cabinet). In particular, under periods of unified governments, cabinet reshuffles should be sensitive to the president's approval rating whereas under cohabitation they should respond more clearly prime minister's public approval.

We begin by briefly reviewing our theoretical argument about cabinet reshuffles as a mechanism to combat moral hazard and our previous findings on the subject. In the following section we then discuss the relevant aspects of French politics and derive several hypotheses about the occurrence of cabinet reshuffles within the French constitutional framework. The remainder of the paper is then devoted to testing the hypotheses using data on cabinet reshuffles in France between 1962 and the present date.

1.1 Perspectives on Cabinet Reshuffles

Cabinet reshuffles have received rather limited attention in the literature but, as indicated above, several different explanations of why cabinet reshuffles occur have already been offered. Huber & Martinez-Gallardo (2004, 2003*b*) have focused on the role of experience and ministerial capability. In their view the frequency of cabinet reshuffles stem in large part from the external conditions that guide the appointment of ministers. Where political and party institutions permit, or demand, a more thorough screening of candidates, candidates of a higher caliber are selected into the cabinet, thus reducing the need for reshuffling once a cabinet has been formed. A related idea focuses on matching between ministers and portfolios rather than capability. Each scenario is characterized by some measure of uncertainty or imperfect information and cabinet reshuffles are seen as responses to new information about the ministers capabilities or their match to a certain portfolio. One implication of this view is that the likelihood of a reshuffle with each subsequent reshuffle as a reshuffle will only be beneficial if the expected capability of the new cabinet exceeds the current cabinet's capability.

Dewan & Dowding (2003), on the other hand, see cabinet reshuffles (or ministerial resignations) as a strategic response to scandals. They find that ministerial resignations in the wake of a scandal increase the popularity of the British government. This positive effect on the government's popularity provides the incentive to force the resignation of minister, which often is accompanied by a reshuffle of the cabinet. Thus, Dewan & Dowding (2003) explicitly connect cabinet reshuffles with popular opinion – albeit via the presence of an exogenous factor.¹ While their argument is certainly plausible it does leave some questions

¹Dewan & Myatt (2005) suggest that scandals are, at least in part, a function of the minister's policy activity and that the minister's level of activity will depend on the prime minister's willingness ask for

regarding cabinet reshuffles unanswered.² Not all reshuffles involve scandals. Neither do they all involve the resignation or dismissal of a minister. Although explanations that rely on exogenous factors to trigger reshuffles have an intuitive appeal, they risk overlooking the political context in which they take place. One implication of the exogenous shock perspective is that the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle should be independent of the tenure of the government or the number of previous reshuffles. In the French context it might also be taken to imply that the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle should not depend on whether the government is unified or divided, which we consider in greater detail below.

While it is fairly obvious how cabinet reshuffles may be helpful in addressing the problem of adverse selection, i.e., by throwing out inept ministers, it is less clear why cabinet reshuffles would be helpful in dealing with situations in which the preferences of the principal (president or prime minister) differ from the ministers' preferences. In Indridason & Kam (2004) we present a two period model in which the prime minister and his ministers have similar ideas about what constitutes a 'good' policy. The preferences of the ministers diverge, however, from the prime minister when it comes to determining policy in their portfolio. Ambitious ministers are assumed to prefer higher levels of spending in their portfolio. Under these assumptions it can be shown that cabinet reshuffles can be used to induce cabinet ministers to constrain their spending. Casting reshuffles as tools that principals use to control their ministers provides an explanation for some of the stylized facts of cabinet reshuffles that the explanations rooted in either the exogenous factors or the adverse selection perspective cannot account for. For example, our moral hazard perspective provides a rationale for why cabinet reshuffles occur with some regularity (which is inconsistent with the exogenous shock perspective) and why cabinet reshuffles often do not involve the sacking or resignation of ministers (which is inconsistent with the capabilities/adverse selection argument).

2 Patterns of Politics in France

The constitution of the 5th French Republic provides for a system of a dual executive composed of a president, popularly elected since 1962, and a prime minister who has the confidence of the majority of the legislature. Formally, the president appoints the prime minister and, on the advice of the prime minister, the other cabinet ministers. The president terminates the prime minister's appointment after his government resigns.³ Similarly, the president terminates the appointments of other cabinet ministers on the prime minister's advice.

resignation.

²It should be noted that Dewan & Dowding's (2003) article focuses on ministerial resignation rather than cabinet reshuffles. The two topics are, however, related and their insights contribute to the study of cabinet reshuffles.

³Although de Gaulle initially sided with this strict interpretation he nevertheless dismissed prime minister Pompidou after he had won a landslide victory in the legislative election of 1962 (Wright 1989). Pompidou had hinted at the possibility of succeeding de Gaulle as president, which de Gaulle is said to have disapproved.

A strict reading of the constitutional provisions regarding the appointment of the cabinet suggests that the prime minister holds the reins when it comes to reshuffling the cabinet. French prime ministers are empowered to a) propose to the President the names of prospective ministers (Article 8); b) decide and direct the course of the Government (Articles 20 and 21); and c) to “determine the boundaries of departmental competencies” (Elgie 1993, p. 10). That is, the president cannot appoint or remove ministers without the prime minister’s initiative and, moreover, the president is required to do so upon the recommendation of the prime minister. It appears, however, that things work a little differently in practice. As often has been observed, the president effectively leads the government during periods of unified government and the ability of the prime minister to make himself felt rests in large degree on his ability on maintaining a good relationship with the president. There are number of examples in which the president has sidestepped the prime minister or backed ministers against the prime minister when disputes have occurred within the cabinet. On the other hand, during periods of cohabitation the president has appeared to stand back and let the prime minister steer the ship.

2.1 Reshuffles under Unified Government

In line with the perception that the president rules during periods of unified government, the president has a large say in what the cabinet looks like. The president can shape the cabinet to a considerable degree by creating/modifying portfolios. Giscard d’Estaing, e.g., created a post for a junior minister of industrial affairs in 1976 without as much as informing the prime minister. The president also has considerable influence over cabinet appointments, able to push some choice on the prime ministers and veto others. For example, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber was appointed minister in 1974 against the wishes of prime minister Chirac, while in 1981, president Mitterand insisted on the exclusion of the leader of the Communist party from the cabinet. Of course, the membership of the cabinet is typically the result of consultation between the president and prime minister (Wright 1989, p. 86). However, these examples suggest that during periods of unified government it is the president who has the upper hand in these negotiations. In addition, the willingness of cabinet ministers to seek the backing of the president in their disputes with the prime minister further suggests that the prime minister’s power of appointment is limited when France is operating under a unified government.

As we are concerned with cabinet reshuffles, the fact that the president appoints (and dismisses) the prime minister provides a slight complication. Thus, to the extent that the president can be considered the head of government during periods of unified government, a change in the identity of the prime minister (and his cabinet) resembles more closely a cabinet reshuffle than a change in government as long as the party composition of coalition does not change. Although changes in the identity of the prime minister is officially counted as a new government we count such changes as cabinet reshuffles *unless* they follow a

presidential election in which a new president is elected or they follow a legislative elections that calls for a change in the composition of the governing coalition.

We recognize that departing from the conventional classification of governments and cabinet reshuffles is not uncontroversial but we believe it is warranted here. Our theoretical expectations is that there is a relationship between the popularity of the relevant actors and the likelihood of a reshuffle. In our previous work on parliamentary government the relevant actors were the prime minister and his cabinet ministers where the prime minister faces a choice whether or not to reshuffle his cabinet. In that context the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle was found to depend more strongly on the prime minister's popularity than her party's popularity. In the present context one can argue that the incentive to reshuffle is more likely to manifest itself in the relationship between the president and the prime ministers rather than within the cabinet.

There are several reasons for why this ought to be the case. First, as we have hinted at above, under unified government it is the president that holds the reins and has the power to orchestrate cabinet reshuffles. While we are not aware of any systematic studies of the relative influence of the prime minister and the president on ministerial appointments, the anecdotal evidence suggests that this interpretation is not far off. In addition the prime minister owes his position to the president, which further increases the president's leverage.

Second, intra-party politics in France are different in important respect from the countries we initially studied.⁴ The French political parties have generally been institutionally weak and many of them are best classified as "caucus" parties (Stevens 1992). The parties tend to be parliamentary (as opposed to popular) creations that may be created anew (e.g., Giscard's RI) or divided to further a notable's electoral career. Thus, the idea of challengers using party rules to unseat an incumbent leader is generally out of the question. Of the governing parties, only the Socialist Party (PS) has tried to move away from informal and personalistic practices to establish a formal method of leadership succession: In February 1995 a ballot of the PS rank-and-file endorsed Jospin over Emmanuelli as the party's presidential candidate. This was the first time the PS employed this mechanism though the rules for doing so had existed since 1978 (Knapp 2004, p. 170). In the main, however, party rules, largely because they are non-existent, easily avoided, or manipulated, are irrelevant to the political game in France.

Finally, French prime ministers often aspire to become a president.⁵ The relationship between president and prime minister has sometimes been noted for being influenced by the shadow of an upcoming presidential election (see, e.g., Willerton & Carrier 2005). It is, however, likely that the tension the greatest heights during periods of cohabitation when the electoral contest may pit the sitting president against the prime minister. Yet, as we discuss in greater detail below, electoral considerations also figure into the strategic calculations of

⁴The countries were Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the UK.

⁵Pompidou and Chirac were both prime ministers before becoming presidents. Balladur, Barre, Chaban-Delmas, and Jospin all ran (unsuccessfully) for the office of the president.

the president under unified government. Thus, if we are interested in competing ambitions as an explanatory factor, it certainly makes sense to count changes in the prime ministership as cabinet reshuffles.

2.2 Reshuffles under Cohabitation

The situation is far less ambiguous during periods of cohabitation. French prime ministers have stood firm on the constitutional rights of their office of the prime minister. Presidents have in turn not contested those rights, and have largely confined their interference with the policy making process to the means that the constitution affords them. In terms of domestic policy the ability of the president to interfere is largely limited to tactics that delay the process, e.g., by preventing the use of legislation by governmental decrees. In the areas of foreign policy and defence the president has somewhat greater influence (Elgie 2001, p. 119-120).

That the locus of the political leadership shifts from the president to the prime minister as the electoral forces move the regime from unified government to cohabitation is not disputed in the literature. The explanations of why the shift occurs are, however, not very satisfying. Historical factors, i.e., de Gaulle's decisive leadership in the first years of the Fifth Republic, are regularly cited. While de Gaulle's heritage is a plausible explanation of why the Fifth Republic set off on the observed path it does not explain why it has stayed on the path. Others have argued that electoral considerations lead presidents to accept their relatively passive role – by staying on the sidelines they are in the privileged position of not having to accept responsibility for unpopular policies (Elgie 2001). The problem with this explanation is that it does not explain why presidents choose to get their hands dirty during periods of unified government.

A more plausible explanation would posit that presidents simply do not have the institutional means to influence policy during cohabitation. After all, a legislative majority is required to enact legislation. Cohabitation is, by definition, characterized by the president's opposition parties controlling the majority of the seats in the legislature. The important difference between cohabitation and unified government lies in the president's ability to dismiss the prime minister and install a new one. Under cohabitation the president has little choice but to install another prime minister from the opposition – the threat to dismiss the prime minister is thus an empty one. When the government is unified the ability to dismiss the prime minister has considerably more bite and the threat to replace the prime minister is credible. It is thus somewhat ironic that de Gaulle, who had envisioned a strong presidential office as a part of the institutional framework of the fifth republic, initially argued that the president could only relieve the prime minister of his duties after his government had resigned. Of course, de Gaulle appears to have changed his mind sometime before 1968 when Pompidou got the sack.

Whatever the causes of the varying importance of the two offices, politicians and voters alike appear to have accepted the varying institutional roles. For example, the literature on economic voting (e.g., Lewis-Beck 1997, Lefay 1991) in France has fairly well established that in periods of unified government voters hold the President responsible for economic conditions whereas in periods of cohabitation they shift responsibility onto the prime minister.

Despite the sharp contrast between the role of the prime minister in the policy making process under cohabitation and unified government it is not clear whether the prime minister has full control of the makeup of his cabinet. The difficulty here is that prime ministers do not have untrammelled power to appoint, dismiss, or reshuffle ministers during cohabitation, i.e., formally the prime minister only proposes changes in the cabinet to the president. Elgie (1993, p. 50) notes, for example, that Mitterrand vetoed Chirac's appointment of Léotard as Minister of Defence in March 1986. Léotard, however, did get a seat in the cabinet as a Minister of Culture and Communications. This example indicates that even during cohabitation the prime minister's ability to appoint and dismiss ministers was constrained by the president. It is, however, not clear from this example whether the president's ability to intervene is restricted to those policy areas that are considered within his domain, i.e., foreign policy and defence, or whether the president has an effective veto over the prime minister's nominations.

Stevens (1992, p. 103) suggests that during cohabitation, reshuffles will take the form of a bargain between the two executives, the prime minister getting his way on some appointments but only after allowing the president a say on others. If that is the case, then the role of the president when it comes to cabinet reshuffles is much like that of a government coalition partner – unless the president attempts to hold the government hostage by preventing reorganization of the cabinet. In either case, cohabitation ought to decrease the frequency of cabinet reshuffles as the agreement of more actors is required (Tsebelis 2002). Furthermore, such agreement may be more difficult to achieve the more ideologically distant the actors are.

2.3 Cabinet Reshuffles & Agency Loss

Above we have focused on the ability of the president and the prime minister to reshuffle their cabinets. However, the ability to reshuffle does not imply a need to reshuffle. It seems evident that certain events call for a change in the membership of the cabinet. A scandal, for example, may require the resignation or dismissal of a minister. Huber & Martinez-Gallardo (2004) argue that cabinet reshuffles have the role of replacing incapable ministers with (hopefully) more capable ministers.

Our interest is in cabinet reshuffles as a mechanism for reducing potential for agency loss that is inherent in the process of delegation from the leader of the political regime

(president or prime minister – depending on whether the government is divided or unified) to the ministers (prime minister or cabinet ministers). While it is fairly obvious how cabinet reshuffles may be help address the problem of adverse selection, i.e., by throwing out inept ministers, it less clear why cabinet reshuffles would be helpful in dealing with ministers who have their own political agenda. In Indridason & Kam (2004) we present a two period model in which the prime minister and his ministers have similar ideas about what constitutes a ‘good’ policy. The preferences of the ministers diverge from the prime minister, however, when it comes to determining policy in their own portfolio. Ambitious ministers are assumed to prefer higher levels of spending in their portfolio as means of furthering their political career.

We show that cabinet reshuffles reduce policy drift due to the ministers’ incentive to overspend in our model. There are two (potential) reasons why cabinet reshuffles may minimize the disutility of excessive spending to the prime minister. First, in anticipation of being reshuffled the minister’s incentive to overspend is reduced because he will only receive part of the benefit stemming from spending in his current portfolio – and what may be worse, his successor may be the one receiving the credit. Second, the prime minister, and the cabinet as a whole, may benefit from reshuffles because a large deviation from government policy in one portfolio may be more damaging than smaller deviations spread over more portfolios.⁶

Our results indicate that as long as the costs of cabinet reshuffles are not excessive – note that the cost may actually be negative as when scandals occur – the prime minister will adopt the strategy of reshuffling his cabinet with some regularity. Intuitively, it is the threat, or expectation, of a cabinet reshuffle that keeps the ministers on their toes.

An important part of our argument is that cabinet reshuffles are not a policy neutral mechanism (as in the ministerial capability perspective) but that they have policy consequences, which generally favor the prime minister at the expense of the individual minister.⁷ If the performance of a minister in a given portfolio has any influence on his prospects of rising up in the ranks of his party it suggests that cabinet reshuffles are not only the PM’s tool for attaining a preferable policy outcome but that cabinet reshuffles may also prove useful to the PM when it comes to intra-party politics and potential challenges to his leadership. One implication of this is that cabinet reshuffles will be influenced by intra-party politics. First, cabinet reshuffles should therefore be influenced by the institutions governing leadership selection that the parties have chosen for themselves. Cabinet reshuffles should be more frequent when the prime minister comes from a party where it is relatively easy to

⁶This is a frequent assumption in formal models of politics. Quadratic preference, i.e., $u_i(x) = -x^2$ imply that a policy drift of $\frac{x}{2}$ in two portfolios is preferred to a policy drift of x in one portfolio. Thus, when ministers differ in their ambitiousness reshuffling can contain policy drift in any one portfolio.

⁷This is not to say that at the end of the day the minister may prefer a reshuffle regime to a non-reshuffle regime. Indeed, if cabinet reshuffles do constrain the ministers’ actions in the manner we argue it may in effect provide a solution to the collective action problem that the cabinet as a whole faces, i.e., each ministers would like to depart from the cabinet’s optimal policy (e.g. the policy maximizing the likelihood of reelection) in her portfolio while other minister stick slavishly to the cabinet’s policy.

mount a challenge to the leadership of her party. Second, the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle should depend on the popularity of the prime minister and her party in a particular way. While cabinet reshuffles become more likely as the popularity of the government decreases their likelihood also depends on the difference between prime minister and party popularity. That is, as the gap widens and the position of the prime minister becomes weaker vis-à-vis the party, cabinet reshuffles become increasingly more likely. We find evidence for these hypotheses in an examination of five Westminster parliamentary systems (Kam & Indridason 2005).

We expect the occurrence of cabinet reshuffles to follow similar dynamics to the five parliamentary systems we have considered before. The French political institutions differ somewhat sharply from the Westminster systems that we have previously considered and it is therefore necessary to consider in some detail how the French institutions the nature of the agency problem. As our discussion above indicates, the dual executive has important implications for how the agency problem manifests itself but so do various other aspects of the French political system such as the organization of the French political parties.

The presence of a dual executive and the possibility of divided government leads to our first hypothesis in a fairly straightforward fashion. The prime minister's ability to reshuffle the cabinet under cohabitation is limited as the power to appoint ministers formally rests with the president. If reshuffles do indeed need the assent of both president and prime minister, the divergent preferences of the actors may limit the scope for possible changes to the cabinet and render cabinet reshuffles less frequent.

Hypothesis 1 *Periods of cohabitation reduce the likelihood of cabinet reshuffles.*

The French parties are institutionally weak and challenges to the leadership are not likely emanate from within the parties. The natural (often intra-party) tensions between ministers and prime ministers are therefore not channelled through internal party mechanisms although intra-party politics still affect French cabinets. French political parties are highly personalistic, and the ever-present factions (*courrants*) within them are commonly organized around various notables, many of whom are ministers. In the PS, for example, Chevenement, Rocard, Mitterand, Strauss-Kahn, Jospin, Fabius, Hollande, and Dray were all ministers and factional chieftains (Knapp 2004, p. 167) – and, indeed, were ministers because they were factional chieftains. Much like British prime ministers, then, French prime ministers tend to confront in their cabinets a set of intra-party rivals.

The absence of well institutionalized parties implies that the tensions between minister and prime minister are managed, firstly, by a convention of ministerial autonomy that is very foreign to the British notion of cabinet government, and secondly, by recourse to the electoral arena. French ministers have cabinets of advisors loyal to them personally, head highly centralized departments, and are not subject to much parliamentary scrutiny. Convention and mutual self-interest, moreover, induce ministers to keep to their own port-

folios (a tradition, labelled, *cloisonnement* or “compartmentalization”) and permit them to openly dissent from government policy (Stevens 1992, p. 104; Elgie 1993, p. 30-31). Finally, ministers may take advantage of the dual executive system to make end runs around the prime minister (Elgie 1993, p. 32-33). The result, in theory, should be a high degree of ministerial drift and a strong incentive for prime ministers to reshuffle to reduce that drift (as in Indridason & Kam (2004)).

If *cloisonnement* is the chief means of suppressing intra-government tension, then electoral politics is the chief outlet for that same tension. Challenges by ministers to the prime minister, or commonly by the prime minister (and other ministers) to the president, does not take an intra-party form in France, but rather an electoral form. That is, ministers (especially those heading factions (*courrants*) or coalition parties) and prime ministers will try to develop a profile that allows them to enter and do well in the race for the presidency. It is for this reason that presidents will choose to dismiss PMs who are either too unpopular or too popular. As Elgie (1993, p. 1) notes:

When things go well, the President often receives the credit. When things go badly, the Prime Minister usually takes the blame. If things go very badly, and the President starts to be criticized, then the Prime Minister is replaced. If things go very well and the Prime Minister starts to be praised, then the Prime Minister is also replaced. Presidents can neither tolerate Prime Ministers who are failures nor Prime Ministers who are a success. Both are a threat to the President’s own authority and both have to be dismissed.

Electoral prospects can thus be expected to be one of the key elements in triggering cabinet reshuffles – and perhaps more so than in many of the parliamentary systems because the effects of popularity are not mediated by party institutions.

The popularity of the president and the prime minister should affect the timing of cabinet reshuffles in a fairly straightforward fashion although it is necessary to distinguish between periods of unified and divided government. During unified government we have argued that the president acts as the head of government. If the president uses cabinet reshuffles as a tool to strengthen his position he is expected to reshuffle the cabinet when he appears vulnerable vis-à-vis the prime minister. Thus, other things equal, the president should become increasingly likely to reshuffle the cabinet when his popularity declines. The likelihood of a reshuffle should depend not only on the president’s popularity but on the PM’s popularity as well – if the president’s popularity falls relative to the PM’s popularity the likelihood should increase, i.e., both actors popularity may rise but if the PM’s popularity rises at a faster rate a reshuffle may become more likely. Furthermore, as Elgie (1993) and others have argued, the president is also held responsible for lackluster performance by the prime minister. Hence, if the popularity gap between the prime minister and president becomes too wide the likelihood increases.

Hypothesis 2 *During periods of unified government an increase in the popularity of the president, other thing equal, leads to a decline in the probability of reshuffle.*

Hypothesis 3 *During periods of unified government an increase in the popularity gap between the president and the prime ministers widens, whether to the advantage of the president or not, increases the likelihood of the cabinet being reshuffled.*

Our data doesn't permit us to consider periods of cohabitation in any detail but, for sake of completeness, we nevertheless offer some hypotheses concerning the determinants of cabinet reshuffles under cohabitation. The dynamics of cabinet reshuffles follow a similar logic during periods of cohabitation – only now the focus shifts from the president to the prime minister. There is, however, one important difference – the prime minister cannot dismiss the president. The prime minister's inability to sack the president also implies that he cannot be held responsible for the president's actions.⁸ The clear demarcation of accountability is further evidenced by the rather limited contact between prime minister and president. The popularity of the president therefore figures little into the prime minister's decision to reshuffle the cabinet or not. The prime minister may care a great deal about the popularity of the president relative to her own but reshuffling the cabinet can, at best, only help indirectly by bringing her cabinet ministers into line. Thus, the prime minister's concerns are primarily directed at her cabinet and the coalition that he or she heads.

As the prime minister would like to deter challenges to her leadership the likelihood of reshuffle should increase as the popularity of the prime minister declines. Much like the president, the prime minister also has to take into account the popularity of other actors – in this case, the popularity of the political parties in her coalition and her main competitors for the leadership. And as with the president, as the relative popularity of the prime minister increases the less likely a cabinet reshuffle becomes.

Hypothesis 4 *During periods of cohabitation an increase in the popularity of the prime minister, other thing equal, leads to a decline in the probability of reshuffle.*

Hypothesis 5 *During periods of cohabitation an increase in the popularity gap between the prime minister and her main competitors leads to an increase in the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle.*

The kind of government headed by the prime minister may also have implications for the timing of cabinet reshuffles. French governments can be classified along three dimensions (Elgie 2001). First, whether they are single-party or coalition governments. Second, if a coalition, whether the coalition is balanced or not – that is, whether the main parties in

⁸This can be considered the complement of the finding in the literature on the economic voting (e.g., Lewis-Beck 1997) that presidents are not held accountable for economic performance during periods of cohabitation.

the coalition control a similar number of legislative seats. Finally, the extent to which the government parties are factionalized. Each dimension offers a fairly clear cut prediction about the effect on the likelihood of a reshuffle.

Coalition governments are likely to be more difficult for the prime minister to reshuffle for two reasons. First, each coalition party may be able to exercise a veto over any change in the cabinet. Second, to maintain the coalition, the prime minister may have to pay special attention to party balance within the coalition, which in turn may reduce the scope for reshuffles if some of the parties have limited number of candidates fit for a cabinet position (Laver & Shepsle 2000).

If the parties compromising a coalition are equal in strength cabinet reshuffles ought to become less frequent because the prime minister is less likely to be able to exercise discretion when it comes to cabinet reshuffles if her party does not dominate the coalition. One might, however, also argue that the prime minister's incentive to reshuffle the cabinet is greater when confronted with a rival from a party similar in size to her – though it seems plausible that larger parties should be able to put up greater resistance.

Finally, factionalized parties represent greater intra-party competition, which we have argued primarily takes an electoral form. That is cabinet reshuffles become an important tool in fending off rivals within the party or coalition, which may be especially important where party discipline is weak. It is therefore to be expected that factionalization leads to a greater frequency of cabinet reshuffles.

Hypothesis 6 *Coalition governments lead to a decrease in the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle.*

Hypothesis 7 *Balanced coalitions lead to a decrease in the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle.*

Hypothesis 8 *The presence of factionalized parties in government leads to an increase in the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle.*

Finally, the French electoral calendar is complex and includes not only presidential and legislative elections but also European elections as well as regional, cantonal, and municipal elections. Presidential and legislative elections have an obvious influence on the formation of governments and cabinet reshuffles but the 'lower level' elections may also have an impact. While polls carry limited weight and may be easy to shrug off, a loss in one of the 'lower level' elections may be more difficult to swallow. In addition, these elections have sometimes been portrayed as referendum on the performance of the incumbent national government. Chirac's cabinet reshuffle in the aftermath of the UMP's dismal performance in the regional election of 2004 is a good example of a 'lower level' election having repercussions at the national level. That is, a reshuffle is being used to respond to political unpopularity much in the vein of our argument about presidential popularity above. Cresson's reshuffle in

March 1992 was in the aftermath of the regional council elections (Keesing's, March 1992). The cabinet was again reshuffled in October 1992 after Senate elections (Keesing's, October 1992). In the latter case there was a different reason for the reshuffle. The reshuffle had less to do with the political impact of the election results than to the elections siphoning off talent from the cabinet. In France, members of the cabinet are not allowed to hold a legislative mandate (Const. Art. 23) although they may hold a limited number of other elected offices – a practice known as *cumul des mandats*. In short, the electoral expression of intra-party and coalition politics combines with the practice of *cumul des mandats* to make the timing of French reshuffles sensitive to the timing of presidential, legislative, regional, municipal, and perhaps even European elections.

Hypothesis 9 *Elections (legislative, regional, municipal, cantonal, and European) increase the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle.*

Some legislative elections do, of course, call for the installment of new government. This is not a problem in our empirical testing as changes in government as a result of a lost majority in legislative elections are not coded as reshuffles.

3 Empirical Test

3.1 Data & Methods

We test the above hypotheses on data on the timing of cabinet reshuffles in the Fifth French Republic beginning in 1965. The first few years of the Fifth Republic are excluded for two reasons. First, popular polls on attitudes towards the president were first conducted in the last month of 1961 and initially the polls didn't consistently ask about attitudes toward the prime minister. Our analysis includes all cabinet reshuffles from January 1966 onward. Second, it was in October 1962 that the French voters accepted in a referendum that the president of France should be elected by a direct vote rather than an electoral college of 80,000 "grand electors". As much of our theory relies on electoral motives it would, even if the popularity data had been available, be reasonable to exclude the first four years of De Gaulle's presidency.

Majority of the data on changes in the French cabinet comes from Keesing's Record of World Events and the European Journal of Political Research (via John Huber and Cecilia Martinez-Gallardo). Their dataset was supplemented with data from Keesing's and further information from the website of the French legislative assembly (www.assemblee-nationale.fr). The data on presidential and prime ministerial popularity was obtained from IFOP (via Eric Bélanger). The data for the last few months was taken from IFOP's website at <http://www.ifop.com>.

There are numerous changes (150+) to the French cabinet in the forty year period that

we examine, but not all of the changes can reasonably be called cabinet reshuffles. First, we distinguish cabinet reshuffles from a change in government, that is, a change in the legislative majority or the election of a new president typically call for the formation of a new cabinet. Second, there are many minor changes to the cabinet, i.e., as when Christian Sautter replaced Dominique Strauss-Kahn after his resignation as a result of being under investigation on corruption charges, that should not be counted as reshuffles as they do not count as a reorganization of the cabinet in any meaningful sense. Our rule of thumb is that a cabinet reshuffle must involve at least two minister and two portfolios. Finally, there may be a temporal element to changes in the cabinet. Two ‘reshuffles’ within a short span of time should not be counted as separate reshuffles. Similarly, a series of small changes that don’t satisfy our second criteria should be counted as a reshuffle if they take place within a short period time and *collectively* satisfy the second criteria. The choice of how long the ‘short span of time’ should be is somewhat arbitrary. We use a thirty day window as our criteria although it is likely that most reshuffles are concluded in shorter time. Changes in the cabinet that are further apart than thirty days appear unlikely to have the same cause.⁹

Our data contains a total of 36 cabinets of which 25 ended in a reshuffle. The average cabinet lasted 13.5 months. The lifespan of the cabinets ranges from 1 to 33 months. A simple comparison of the duration of cabinets under divided and unified government suggests that hypothesis 1 is correct. The average cabinet lasts 22 months under cohabitation but only 12 months under unified government. These numbers are only suggestive of the difference between unified and divided government because it does not take into account that some of the observations are censored, i.e., those cabinets are terminated for other reasons, e.g., a government termination caused by a presidential or a legislative election. In this case the censoring appears to mask the difference – if we restrict our attention to only those cabinets that end in a cabinet reshuffle, cohabitation cabinets last nearly twice as long as cabinets under unified government.

The duration of cabinets terminated by a reshuffle and the duration of other cabinets may also be of interest. Reshuffled cabinets lasted on average 12.8 months while cabinets terminated for other reasons lasted 15.4 months. Of the total of 473 months included in our dataset, 361 were spent under unified government and 112 under cohabitation.

The methodological tool of choice for the analysis of data where the quantity of interest is the probability of a certain event occurring at a given point in time are survival (or duration) models. Commonly survival models allow the estimation of the effects of the covariates of interest (e.g., presidential popularity) on the likelihood of an event (cabinet reshuffle) occurring at time t . In the analysis below we employ the Cox proportional hazard model, which is based on the hazard function:

$$\gamma(t|x) = \gamma_0(t) \exp\{\beta^T x\} \tag{1}$$

⁹Alt (1975) also takes time into account in defining cabinet reshuffles but suggests a 60 window.

where t denotes the time passed from the beginning of the cabinet, x the values of the covariates and β^T the coefficients to be estimated. The primary benefit of the Cox proportional hazard model is that no prior assumptions need to be made about the baseline hazard function ($\gamma_0(t)$), which cancels out when the likelihood function is derived because covariates are simply assumed to have proportional effect on the likelihood of a reshuffle. In other words, it is not necessary to specify whether the likelihood of a reshuffle increases or decreases as time passes. Since our data consists of repeated events, i.e., a single government can experience multiple reshuffle, we allow the baseline hazard function to vary between the time that the government is at risk of the first reshuffle and subsequent reshuffles. For hypothesis testing we calculate robust standard errors that are clustered on the identity of the government.

It should be noted that our approach places certain constraints on the hazard ratio. By assuming that each reshuffle marks the beginning of a new cabinet (rather than the continuation of a government) we require that the likelihood of a reshuffle t periods after a reshuffle occurs are the same (up to differences in the covariates) regardless of whether the period in question occurs early or late in the life of the *government*. This is a substantive rather than technical assumption and the one we believe is most consistent with our theoretical argument about the impact of cabinet reshuffles on ministerial drift. In a ‘perfect’ world (i.e., where there are no shocks to popularity or other covariates) the optimal strategy to contain drift is to reshuffle the cabinet at regular intervals. The world is certainly not perfect in this manner so it is worthwhile entertaining other possibilities but that will, for now, remain on agenda of interesting things to explore.

Our primary explanatory variables concern measures of the actors’ popularity, and types of government. Our data set contains measures of the popularity of the president and the prime minister. From these data we have generated several measures that we use in our analysis. First, we consider simply the PRESIDENT’S POPULARITY. Second, the difference between the president’s and prime minister’s popularity, POPULARITY GAP, is measured as the absolute value of the difference between the actors’ popularity ratings: POPULARITY GAP=ABS[PRES. POPULARITY - PM POPULARITY]. Third, the PRESIDENT’S INITIAL POPULARITY is the president’s popularity rating in the first month after he takes office. The PRESIDENT’S INITIAL POPULARITY may influence how the president perceives his standing – after all, his initial popularity may be an indication of the level of popularity sufficient to win elections and stay in office. Finally, CHANGE IN PRESIDENT’S POPULARITY is the change in the president’s popularity from the previous month.

Governments, we argued above, can be characterized along three dimensions, i.e., whether they are single-party, factionalized, and/or balanced. The coding of these variables is taken from Elgie (2001, p. x) who bases his classification on the data in Thiebault (2001). The variable SINGLE PARTY GOVT. takes the value one when the cabinet is formed by a single party and zero otherwise. The variable FACTIONS equals one when the the government party or parties are factionalized and zero else. The variable BALANCED COALITION takes the

value one when the main coalition parties are evenly balanced and zero if not (or if there is a single party government).

Finally, legislative and ‘lower level’ elections may influence the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle. The variable ALL ELECTIONS takes the value one if a an election was held but is zero otherwise. The elections we used in the coding of the variable are legislative, regional, municipal, cantonal, and European election.

3.2 Results

Only a single reshuffled occurred during the periods of cohabitation. While this fact fits very well with hypothesis 1, it has the unfortunate consequence that it becomes infeasible to empirically examine our hypotheses concerning the effects of cohabitation using the survival model discussed above. Table 1 provides some simple comparisons between periods of cohabitation and unified government. Below we then use survival analysis to examine our other hypotheses. We exclude all observations during cohabitation in the survival analysis because our theory indicates that the dynamics of cabinet reshuffles should be quite different under cohabitation and, unless we can control for these factors, it would bias our results.

TABLE 1: THE LIKELIHOOD OF A CABINET RESHUFFLE
COMPARISON BETWEEN PERIODS OF COHABITATION & UNIFIED GOVERNMENT

	COHABITATION	UNIFIED GOVERNMENT
NO. OF RESHUFFLES	1	24
NO. OF CABINETS	5	30
MONTHS	112	361
% GOVERNMENTS RESHUFFLED	20%	80%
PROBABILITY OF A RESHUFFLE (MONTH)	0.9%	6.7%
AVE. DURATION OF UNRESHUFFLED CABINETS	12.5	19.7

Table 1 reveals a stark contrast between periods of cohabitation and unified government. Cabinets under unified government are four times as likely to be reshuffled than cabinets under cohabitation¹⁰ and the probability of a reshuffle occurring increases sevenfold as we move from divided to unified government. A part of the observed difference lies in the fact that periods of cohabitation last shorter than periods of unified government. If we define the beginning of each government as a change of president or the switch between cohabitation and unified government, the average duration of a unified government is 51 months while under cohabitation the average equals 37 months. The shorter duration under cohabitation may mean that there is less chance of observing a cabinet reshuffle, i.e., there may be less need to reshuffle after a new government forms. This can, however, only be a partial explanation as the average time until a cabinet reshuffle is only 12.8 months (with

¹⁰Our definition of cabinet here takes account of reshuffles, i.e., a new cabinet can be result of the installment of a new government or simply a reshuffle.

standard deviation of 9.2). The number of observations naturally limits our ability to draw strong conclusions somewhat but the pattern is nevertheless surprisingly clear.

We now turn to the analysis of cabinet reshuffles under unified government. Table 2 displays the estimation results of the duration model. The table displays the estimated coefficients.¹¹ A coefficient with a positive sign indicates that the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle increases as the variable takes a higher value.

TABLE 2: THE LIKELIHOOD OF A CABINET RESHUFFLE
COX PROPORTIONAL HAZARD MODEL

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PRESIDENT'S POP.	-.039** (.016)	-.045*** (.017)	-.049*** (.018)	-.030* (.018)	-.043** (.017)	-.048*** (.018)
POPULARITY GAP	.054 (.0440)	.074* (.044)	.062 (.043)	.050 (.051)	.076 (.049)	.060 (.053)
PRESIDENT'S INIT. POP.			-.044*** (.014)	-.048** (.024)		-.052*** (.017)
CHANGE IN PRES. POP					-.091* (.053)	-.101* (.055)
ALL ELECTIONS	1.586*** (.510)	1.683*** (.460)	1.634*** (.418)	1.466*** (.513)	1.905*** (.587)	1.877*** (.531)
FACTIONS		.590 (.433)	.770 (.498)		.446 (.459)	.651 (.543)
SINGLE PARTY GOV'T.				.725* (.405)		
OBSERVATIONS	361	361	361	361	361	361
LOG LIKELIHOOD RATIO	-41.126	-40.535	-40.126	-40.250	-39.511	-38.966
χ^2 STATISTIC	41.337	470.200	211.106	41.871	85.795	242.822

Levels of significance: *** - 99%, ** - 95% * - 90%

The results in the table tend to support our hypotheses. However, some of the variables we discussed above do not appear in the table as they did not have a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of a reshuffle.¹² As the PRESIDENT'S POPULARITY increases the likelihood of observing a cabinet reshuffle decreases. The effect is significant at the 95% confidence level except when an indicator for SINGLE PARTY GOVERNMENT is included in the model. Similarly, the PRESIDENT'S INITIAL POPULARITY has a significant effect on the likelihood of reshuffle. President's that are more popular at the beginning of their term are less likely to reshuffle the cabinet. President's also appear to respond to changes in their popularity in the short run. A president is less likely to reshuffle if his popularity is on an

¹¹The results of duration models are often displayed as hazard ratios to ease interpretation. However, when the estimated models contain interaction, as some of the do here, the estimated coefficients actually allow for an easier interpretation of the direction of the estimated effects.

¹²These variables include the indicators for balanced coalition (and a measure of the share of seats held by the PM's party) and single party government (with one exception). While the coefficients of the variables were not significant they consistently had the hypothesized sign.

upswing - or alternatively, a bad poll result may trigger a reshuffle. The effect of changes in popularity in the short run is only significant at the 90% confidence level.

There are some indications that the POPULARITY GAP between the president and prime minister influences the likelihood of a reshuffle. The sign of coefficient for POPULARITY GAP is consistently as hypothesized but fails to reach significance in all but one of the models where it is significant at the 90% level. The prime minister's popularity (not reported here) also failed to have a significant effect. These results, i.e., that the president's popularity has a clear impact on the likelihood of reshuffles while the effects of the prime minister's popularity are largely absent, are nevertheless somewhat instructive. First, they suggest that our interpretation of the powers of the French president under unified government, i.e., that the president determines the shape of the cabinet, is correct. Second, the results suggest that the president is primarily concerned with his own popularity when it comes to deciding whether to reshuffle the cabinet. It should be noted, however, that the correlation between the president's popularity and the prime minister's popularity is fairly high (.77), which makes it difficult to disentangle the effects of the popularity ratings for the two executives.

As hypothesized, factionalization has a positive effect on the likelihood of a reshuffle but fails to reach standard significance levels. In substantive terms the effect is fairly large (hazard ratio of 1.91, i.e., it nearly doubles the probability of observing a cabinet reshuffle). Similarly, the effects of the variables BALANCED GOVERNMENT and SINGLE PARTY GOVERNMENT (not reported) were as hypothesized but failed to reach significance in our model specifications.

Finally, the sign of the coefficient of the variable ALL ELECTIONS is in line with expectations and is highly significant. The likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle increases substantially in the period immediately following an election.

The shape of the baseline hazard function is of some interest. At the outset we discussed the different perspectives on cabinet reshuffles. Accounts that emphasize the role of exogenous shocks, e.g., scandals, imply that the baseline hazard rate should be flat – at least as long as the arrival rate of the exogenous shocks is uncorrelated with the length of the government's tenure.¹³ Accounts emphasizing the role of capability and the role of cabinet reshuffles in the selection of capable ministers should imply a downwards shift in the baseline hazard function with each consecutive reshuffle as a reshuffle should reduce the number of incompetent ministers in the cabinet and therefore reduce the need for reshuffles. Our argument, on the other hand, implies a non-decreasing baseline hazard rate that doesn't shift markedly up or down with each reshuffle for two reasons. First, the incentive to reshuffle in Indridason & Kam (2004) stems from inducing the agents to implement policies that are closer to the principal's liking. Insofar as the leader of the coalition cares about policy, this incentive should remain constant throughout the government's term. Second,

¹³ A two strike rule, as discussed by Dewan & Myatt (2005), where ministers hit by their first scandal get a warning but aren't sacked, would imply an initially increasing baseline hazard.

reshuffling cabinet also serves the goal of fending of intra-party rivals. The need to do so should generally be increasing as elections draw nearer and the question of who will lead the party through the next election looms larger.

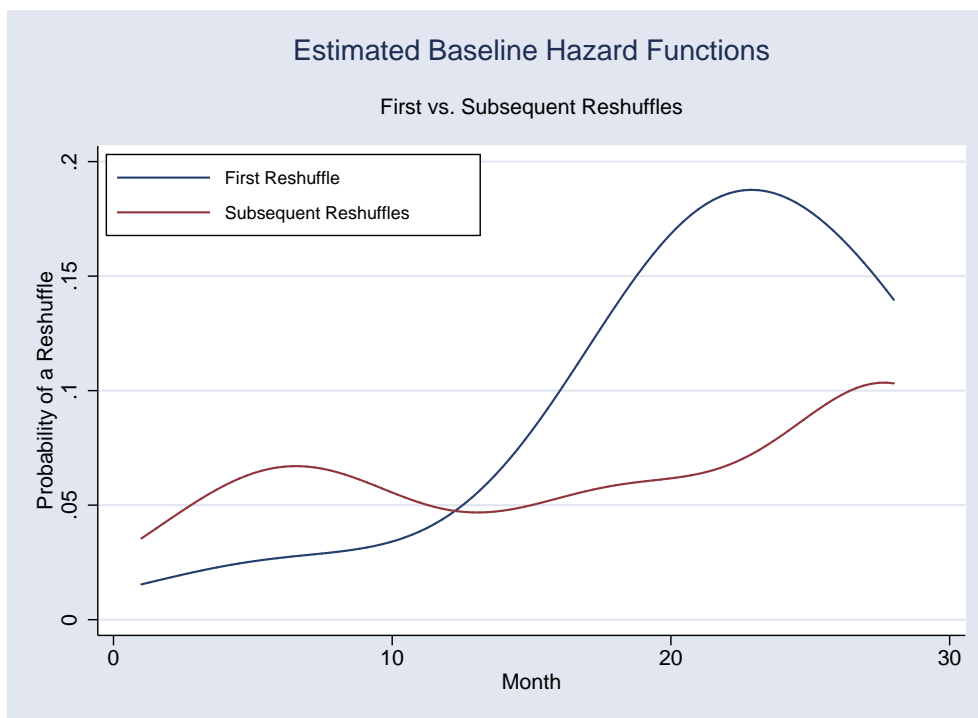


Figure 1: BASELINE HAZARD FUNCTION

Figure 1 displays the estimated baseline hazard function from model 6 for the two strata of reshuffles in our sample. The baseline hazard rate for a first reshuffle increases until around month 23 where it starts to decline – but recall that the maximum cabinet duration in the sample was 33 months so in effect the baseline hazard rate increases monotonically. The baseline hazard function for subsequent reshuffles is flatter but appears to increase slightly over time. Note also that the baseline hazard function doesn't shift clearly up or down between the two strata. The baseline hazard function thus do not allow us to clearly distinguish between the different perspective. As the perspectives on cabinet reshuffles that we have discussed aren't mutually exclusive this does not come as a surprise. We believe that each of the perspectives identifies factors that are relevant to the study of cabinet reshuffles and as such they combine in determining when cabinet reshuffles occur. By itself, each perspective would, however, have difficulties in accounting for the observed patterns.

4 Conclusion

In this paper we have examined the causes of cabinet reshuffles in the French Fifth Republic in the light of our theory about cabinet reshuffles and ministerial drift. In short, several of the factors our theory identifies as important appear to have an impact on the likelihood of observing a cabinet reshuffle. At the very least, the results are encouraging for further work in the area – both on the sources of cabinet reshuffles in France, which are especially interesting because of the possibility of divided government, and in a comparative perspective.

From a practical point of view, lack of data provides considerable obstacles in examining the applicability of our theory in sufficient detail. The lack of data makes evaluating differing causes of cabinet reshuffles between unified and divided government especially difficult – from the researcher’s point of view France needs more experience with cohabitation.

Apart from the lack of data (that can possibly be found) our study suffers from another limitation, which in the end may actually prove helpful. The prime minister’s power to determine departmental boundaries, maybe especially important in the French case and act as a substitute for cabinet reshuffles.¹⁴ Firstly, it is a power that French PMs have used fairly frequently (Stevens 1992, p. 107), and in Stevens’ view, one that prime ministers have used strategically to control ministers. Barre’s 1978 re-organization of the Finance Ministry is, for example, described as part of a divide-and-conquer strategy that Barre employed to limit the power of chief ministerial rivals (Stevens 1992, p. 107). This is a useful tactic in that it can be used by the prime minister to reign in ministers without giving the appearance of a) governmental instability, or b) actively attacking ministers. The latter quality is especially important in France because ministers are senior political figures in their own right and many would probably resign (injuring the government in the process) rather than accept overt subordination to the prime minister (Elgie 1993, p. 176). It is reasonable to expect, then, that French reshuffles will be characterized by changes in departmental boundaries as well as changes in ministerial personnel. Information on changing departmental boundaries may provide additional evidence to bear on our theory.

¹⁴In effect, reshuffling cabinets and changing departmental boundaries are essentially the same thing – or at least would serve the same purpose according to our theory.

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