Majoritarian Parties in Multi-Party Parliaments
Hilary Pearse

Westminster-derived parliamentary systems are typically associated with two party systems and single party majority government. However, party system fragmentation in several of these systems has compelled majoritarian political parties that are accustomed to single party majority government to adapt to prolonged periods of minority and/or coalition government. If we assume that parties are unitary rational actors operating within institutional constraints,[1] then we can predict that majoritarian parties will respond to environmental change by adapting their strategies so that they can still win office. In a newly fragmented party system, a majoritarian party will enter strategic executive or legislative coalitions in order to form a government. The party will make any tactical adjustments necessary to maintain a collaborative relationship with the minimum number of required support parties, while retaining a sufficiently distinct 'brand' to maximise its vote share. Because the party's organisational structure, selection of personnel and policy positions have all been adopted over time with the goal of single party majority government in mind and changing any of these elements is costly, in the absence of clear evidence that party-system fragmentation is a long-term phenomenon, party strategy will revert to the pursuit of single party government as soon as this appears to be a viable goal.

However, the unitary rational actor model faces several challenges during periods of environmental change. Environmental change can destabilise long-settled internal power relationships that have helped to create the appearance of a unitary actor during periods of environmental stability. Uncertainty about the future can deprive actors of the information they need to make expected utility calculations, resulting in competing preferences within the party and strategic miscalculations. Not only may these conditions undermine the capacity of the party to act rationally, but there may be more going on than simply strategic adaptation to changing conditions. When a party changes its strategic behaviour and maintains this new behaviour consistently over time, this strategic outlook becomes institutionalised within the party and can have a 'feedback effect' on the party's position within the party system.

This paper draws on a larger research project in which I study the adaptation of three majoritarian political parties to non-majority government in three Westminster-derived democracies: Fianna Fáil in Ireland, the New Zealand Labour Party and the Liberal Party of Canada (Pearse, forthcoming). Rather than attempting to present data from all three cases in the limited confines of a conference paper, I use Fianna Fáil as a case study to illustrate the argument that there is more going on in the adaptation process than a tactical adjustment to environmental change. Once opposed to coalition as a matter of core principle, Fianna Fáil has not governed alone since 1989. The party's very different strategic responses to similar election results in February 1982 and 2002 exemplify the puzzle presented by majoritarian parties that choose to enter coalition when single party government is a feasible option.

In the February 1982 Irish general election, Fianna Fáil (FF) won 81 of the 166 seats in the Dáil. Given the neutrality of the Ceann Comhairle (Speaker), 83 votes is the minimum

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[1] See, for example, Laver and Schofield, 1990; Strom, Budge and Laver, 1994; Laver and Shepsle, 1996; Muller and Strom, 1999. This work draws on earlier models of coalition formation that also assume that parties are unitary actors, including Downs, 1957; Riker, 1962; Axelrod, 1970; and De Swaan, 1973.

support needed to pass legislation in Dáil Éireann. Fine Gael won 63 seats, the Labour Party 15 seats, the Workers' Party three seats and three independent deputies were elected. Eventually, Charles Haughey formed a minority FF government with the support of the Workers' Party and independent TD Tony Gregory, coalition government being anathema to the one party in the Republic that prided itself on its capacity to govern alone. Twenty years later, in the 2002 election, Fianna Fáil again won 81 of the 166 seats in the Dáil. Following this election, support for other parties in the Dáil was far more fragmented: Fine Gael won just 31 seats, Labour 20, the Progressive Democrats (PD) eight, the Green Party six, Sinn Fein five, and 14 independent deputies were elected. Fianna Fáil had "a wider range of governing options than ever before" (Mitchell, 2003: 220). Yet, despite the plethora of independent TDs available to support a minority FF government, Bertie Ahern formed a coalition government with the PDs which, in office concessions alone, cost Fianna Fáil two of the 15 Cabinet seats[2], two of 17 junior ministries and four of the 11 members of the Seanad that are appointed by the Taoiseach. Winning 81 seats in both elections and with minority government a viable option each time, why did Fianna Fáil choose coalition government in 2002?

Bertie Ahern's own answer to this question, that coalition with the PDs was a more stable option than minority government and that he enjoyed a "political partnership and good personal relationship" with PD leader Mary Harney (quoted in Mitchell, 2003: 215), reveals the extent to which Fianna Fáil's perspective on coalition government had changed in the twenty intervening years. Unthinkable pre-1989, and then the highly controversial last resort of two successive Fianna Fáil leaders desperate to retain their position as Taoiseach, the party's early experiments with coalition government in 1989 and 1992 had been tumultuous. The party's failure to share power effectively had led to the early termination of both coalitions and it took three long years in opposition and then the successful completion of a full 5 year term of government in coalition with the PDs between 1997 and 2002, for the party to accept that coalition was a fact of government in the early 21st century. Even if fortuitous election results, such as those in 2002, facilitated minority government, the expectation that such results were now the exception rather than the rule necessitated keeping potential coalition partners on board with an eye to the future. This is not just evidence of 'simple learning', where the party's identity and interests remain the same while "the acquisition of new information about the environment enables actors to realize their interests more effectively" but of 'complex learning' where the learning process itself alters the identity and interests of the party (Wendt, 1999: 327). This paper identifies the conditions that make this sort of feedback effect more likely, including the time horizons of the actors, and the response of both voters and other parties within the party system to the party's behaviour.

Parties as unitary actors

Given the multiple actors within parties, including members, activists, officials, elected representatives and party leaders, each with potentially different interests, and the public conflict that occurs between intra-party factions, few scholars would argue that political parties are actually unitary actors. The debate within the literature is instead between scholars

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[2] The Irish Constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, has restricted the size of Cabinet to a maximum of 15 members since its enactment in 1937.

who argue that the "analytical simplicity" gained by treating parties as unitary actors enables "analysis that is more parsimonious and more compatible with existing rational choice explanations of party behaviour" (Muller and Strom 1999: 282) and scholars that argue that this produces in theory with little relevance to political practice (Pridham, 1986). Most scholars agree that the unitary actor assumption is more relevant at some points in the political cycle than others, such as during election campaigns, when the party has an electoral incentive to suppress internal divisions, and coalition formation, when decision making is formally delegated to a negotiation team.

Analysing political parties as unitary actors effectively assumes that the party leader *is* the party. Laver and Schofield argue that, in the context of government formation, the assumption that party leaders control strategy and make major decisions for the party is a reasonable one (1990). Laver and Hunt's survey of political experts also supports the unitary actor assumption. Experts in nearly all the advanced industrialized democracies reported that party leaders, rather than legislators or activists, made strategic decisions about the formation of party policy and participation in government (Laver and Hunt, 1992: 85-86). The leader may take the preferences of others within the party into account when making decisions, but Laver and Hunt conclude that "while a party does not have a single set of preferences, it may often function as a unitary actor in terms of its dealings with the outside world" (1992: 84).

It is not unreasonable, therefore, to extend the unitary actor assumption to parties' strategic decisions about inter-party alliances when these relationships are stable and follow familiar patterns. While elections may produce legislatures with a multitude of arithmetically possible governments, the number of politically feasible potential governments is considerably smaller, precisely because patterns of competition and alliance remain relatively enduring (Franklin and Mackie, 1983; Pridham, 1986: 15-16). Reviewing coalition formation in Western Europe more than 15 years after the publication of his seminal text on coalition government, Keman concludes that "[e]lectoral change, the emergence of new parties and new directions within party systems during the 1990s has not translated into drastically different patterns of government formation and composition" (Keman, 2007). Much of the time, inter-party relationships are stable and intra-party division is not public, so it makes sense to use the analytical shorthand of the unitary actor model. Sometimes, however, inter-party relationships depart from established patterns, producing visible intra-party divisions in reaction to change.

Majoritarian parties

By definition, majoritarian parties have a clearly defined oppositional relationship with all other parties in the party system. Their capacity to govern alone means they do not need to cultivate inter-party electoral relationships. In the classic Westminster two-party system, two majoritarian parties compete against each other to form single party majority governments. Duverger calls them "parties with a majority bent", defined as "those which command an absolute majority in parliament or are likely to command one at some date in the normal play of institutions" (1954: 283). A 'party with a majority bent', renamed a 'majoritarian party' in this paper for the sake of brevity, is to be distinguished from a 'major party' that, while large, does not expect to govern alone. "Major parties have no hope of ever obtaining an absolute majority save in exceptional circumstances which do not correspond to the

nature of the system; if they are alone in office they can only exercise power with the agreement and support of other parties" (Duverger, 1954: 286).

Between 1948 and 1989, Irish party competition echoed the classic two-party system, only with a single majoritarian party, Fianna Fáil, competing against a number of smaller parties that could only form government in coalition. Peter Mair summarized this pattern in 1979 as 'Fianna Fáil versus the rest.' In Ireland's Single Transferable Vote electoral system, multiple candidates from the same party compete in multi-member districts and a preferential ballot gives voters the opportunity to rank their preferred candidates across all the parties competing in that constituency. All candidates who receive the required quota of votes in each district are elected, a process which usually requires the transfer of surplus votes from winning candidates as well as the transfer of the votes of the least popular candidates. Between 1948 and 1989, vote transfers reflected the division between Fianna Fáil and 'the rest', with the second and third largest parties in the system, Fine Gael and Labour, periodically agreeing to exchange lower preferences, while voters for these parties traditionally refused to give their lower preferences to Fianna Fail candidates (Sinnott, 1995: 199-216). However, Mair and Weeks argue that the 'Fianna Fail versus the rest' pattern of party competition was destroyed by Fianna Fail's decision to form coalitions with the Progressive Democrats in 1989 and Labour in 1992. "Fianna Fáil's first coalition in 1989 had destroyed one pillar of the 'Fianna Fáil versus the rest' system, while this new coalition [with Labour in 1992] (Fianna Fáil joining with one of 'the rest') ended a second, thus signaling the death of the traditional party system" (Mair and Weeks, 2005: 150).

The experience of coalition government does not necessarily require adaptation from a majoritarian political party. If political parties view the environmental change which has caused party system fragmentation and necessitated non-majority government as temporary and/or within their power to remedy, they will treat the experience as a temporary aberration, a necessary evil to be endured until the party can win sufficient seats to govern alone. The party's perception of the time horizon of non-majority government is crucial. If the party expects the restoration of its majority in one or two parliamentary terms, then it has little incentive to adapt its behaviour toward other parties, beyond the minimum requirements for the passage of legislation. Despite collaborating with other parties within the legislature, it will seek to maintain its distinct public image by emphasizing its own achievements within the government, or claiming all government achievements as its own rather than acknowledging the contribution of support parties, and maintaining a competitive stance toward all other parties at the next election. In contrast, if the party does not expect to restore its majority, it will realize that its future participation in government will be dependent on the cooperation of other parties. After decades of adversarial behaviour, however, building collaborative relationships with other parties can be difficult and will often involve a process of trial and error, or 'experiential learning'.

Parties as rational actors

How compatible is a learning process of trial and error with models of rational decision making? The rationality assumption that lies at the heart of all rational choice theory has three components: "purposive action, consistent preferences, and utility maximization" (MacDonald, 2003: 552). In other words, actors make decisions with a goal in mind, they can rank their preferences from the options available to them and will behave in ways that they

subjectively estimate will deliver the greatest reward. In order to apply the rationality assumption to majoritarian parties making decisions about government formation when single party government is not a viable option, we must therefore be able to identify: the goal of the party, the options available to the party and the party's ranking of these options, and the party's choice of a course of action that it perceives will maximize rewards.

Regardless of whether a majoritarian party's motivation is purely perks and power oriented or more about the policy changes it can achieve in government, the goal of a majoritarian party is indubitably to win office. Majoritarian parties, which by their very nature must be catch-all parties in order to win a majority of seats in the legislature, do not face the same dilemmas as niche parties, which must make tough decisions about the trade-offs involved in maintaining ideological purity versus policy compromise to win more votes or form a coalition with a larger party. Purposive action is not the problematic element of the rationality assumption in this case.

However, the capacity of parties to rank their preferences and make utility maximization calculations can be compromised in periods of environmental change. The ambiguity inherent in a new setting may lead to conflict within the party not only over the ranking of preferences, but even over which options are available to the party to be ranked. The rationality assumption allows actors to be subjective in their ranking of options and their utility calculations, but it does require actors to be able to identify a set of consistent preferences that are ranked and transitive. For many within Fianna Fáil in 1989, the possibility of coalition government was not even considered. This created a situation where there was conflict within the party over the available options, let alone the ranking of these options. Once in coalition, lack of any previous experience of coalition management and the challenge of working with either new actors, in the case of Labour, or actors whose earlier departure from the party had been acrimonious, in the case of O'Malley and Ahern, made utility maximization calculations difficult. How useful then, is the unitary rational actor model for explaining FF decision-making during the party's early experiments with coalition government?

Fianna Fail as a unitary rational actor?

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Charles Haughey's decision to enter coalition with the Progressive Democrats in 1989 was made against the wishes of most of the FF cabinet, the parliamentary party and the party organization. When the FF frontbench met for the first time following the election "a clear majority, led by Reynolds, was strongly opposed to a coalition arrangement of any kind" (Collins, 2001: 197). The parliamentary party were opposed to the idea of entering coalition government, but were more concerned with avoiding another election in which FF appeared likely to lose more seats. The party had already lost 4 seats in the 1989 election and polling at the time suggested that FF would lose at least another two seats in the event of another election (Laver and Arkins, 1990: 202). Collins describes the reaction of the party organization as a whole to Haughey's decision as sheer disbelief, "there was total and utter astonishment that Haughey had given way to O'Malley of all people" (2001: 199).

Haughey's decision revealed both the extent to which the situation presented a "conflict of interest" between the party and its leader (Laver and Arkins, 1990: 205) and the capacity of the party leader to act unilaterally without the need for explicit consent from cabinet, the parliamentary party or the organization as a whole. In contrast to the Irish Labour party, the FF Córú agus Rialacha (Constitution and Rules) do not require the party leader to either seek a mandate for coalition formation from the party or to present a potential coalition agreement to the party for ratification (Fianna Fáil, 2006). Laver and Arkins argue that Haughey's primary goal was to avoid losing the leadership of the parliamentary party, which became more likely the longer it took to form a government. When members of the PD negotiation team questioned Haughey about his capacity to commit to coalition given the public opposition within his cabinet, particularly from Flynn and Reynolds, Haughey infamously replied, "It's all right. I just haven't told them yet" (Collins, 2005: 105). The concentration of power within the party leader enabled Haughey to commit to a coalition opposed by most within Fianna Fáil.

Internal divisions within FF were not resolved during the course of the coalition government. The Programme for Government signed by both parties contained a clause requiring renegotiation of the agreement in 1991. Tension within FF became acute at this time, not because of ideological difference between the two parties but because of a clear division "over what was best for the party at that time, in mid-term preparing for the next election" (Mansergh, 1997: 121). The parliamentary party's one check over the party leader is the capacity to vote the leader out and install a replacement. Albert Reynolds' successful ousting of Haughey as leader represented a victory for the anti-coalition faction within the party. Reynolds "made himself the standard-bearer of those in the party who believed that under another leader FF could still win an overall majority and govern alone" (Mansergh, 1997: 121). Girvin records the belief within the party at the time that a change of leadership "would provide the party with the momentum to achieve an overall majority" (1993: 5).

The perception within FF at the time was that Reynolds' goal was to incite the PDs to break up the coalition, thus providing a target for blame and a reason for the electorate to return FF to single party government (Girvin, 1993: 8-9). Having referred to the FF-PD coalition as a "temporary little arrangement" in late 1989 (Mansergh, 1997: 120), on taking over the leadership Reynolds made his lack of commitment to coalition government clear to the PDs. While Haughey and O'Malley had maintained open lines of communication speaking by telephone every two to three days, Reynolds and O'Malley barely communicated over the last months of the coalition (Personal interview, Dublin, 12 June 2006). One of Reynolds's closest advisors at the time suggests that Reynolds's initial anger over Haughey's decision to enter coalition may have been less about anti-coalition sentiment than about Haughey acting behind his back (Personal interview, Dublin, 22 June 2006), but his accession to the party leadership was at least partly due to the strength of opposition to coalition within the party. Introducing Reynolds at his first Ard Fheis (Annual Party Conference) as Taoiseach, Brian Cowen summed up the sentiment of this faction when he proclaimed about the PDs, "when in doubt, leave them out" (Farrell, 1993: 148).

Fianna Fáil's bid for single party government in the 1992 election failed. Party loyalty, defined by Sinnott as "the proportion of transferred votes that stays within the party when votes from one of the party's candidates have been transferred and at least one other candidate of the same party is available to receive transfers" (1995: 209), declined

dramatically. Fianna Fáil party loyalty fell to 69 per cent in 1992, from 77 per cent in 1989 (Sinnott, 1995: 210). Reynolds argued during the campaign that "coalition government was flawed government" although Brian Lenihan, who had been Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) in the coalition under Haughey publicly supported the possibility of a coalition with Labour (Girvin, 1993: 16-17). Reynolds' Press Secretary, Sean Duignan, described the campaign as one where FF TDs acted to ensure "personal survival" regardless of central party direction. "I was struck by signs of indiscipline and even insubordination in the organization at large" (quoted in Collins, 2001: 249). This was a dramatic departure from the norm for a party famed for its internal discipline, the almost military organization of its electoral campaigns and "the elevation of total obedience to the party leadership into a fundamental and inviolable principle of party membership" (Dunphy, 1997: 9).

If any party were to be capable of maintaining the illusion of operating as a unitary actor during a period of environmental change, it should have been Fianna Fáil. As recently as 1986, Prager had noted the hierarchical authority structure of the party and the acquiescence of rank and file FF members to the decisions of the party leadership (216-7). But the initial decision to enter coalition was vehemently contested within the party and resulted in the replacement of the party leader responsible and continuing public division within the party at the next election. Reynolds' eventual decision to form a coalition with Labour ironically mirrored Haughey's decision to preserve his role as Taioseach in the face of party opposition to coalition. Senior TDs such as Flynn, MacSharry and Brennan had spoken out against coalition during the 1992 campaign and had publicly expressed a preference for opposition rather than coalition with Labour on the night of the election (Collins, 2001: 250). Even after the formation of the party's second coalition there was still a significant faction within the parliamentary party that believed that time to re-group in Opposition would be sufficient to return FF to single party government after the next election.

Fianna Fáil as a rational actor?

Fianna Fáil's first two terms of coalition government were not only characterized by considerable public disunity but by significant tactical miscalculation. This was due partly to lack of experience of coalition management but also to strained personal relationships between coalition partners. Reynolds in particular underestimated the importance of cooperation with both the Progressive Democrats and Labour. Reynolds had hoped that pushing the Progressive Democrats to the point where they voted no confidence in the government and precipitated the 1992 election would result in voters viewing the PDs as irresponsible and recognizing the need for single party FF government. Instead, the first opinion poll of the election campaign saw Reynolds' satisfaction rating as Taoiseach plummet 20 points. "The voters clearly blamed Reynolds rather than O'Malley for the break-up of the government" (Collins, 2001: 248). Reynolds made an effort to learn from his mistakes and treat Labour with more respect in coalition, agreeing to refer to the coalition as a "partnership" and accepting all of Labour leader Dick Spring's proposed coalition management processes, including making Spring Tánaiste and creating an Office of the Tánaiste that effectively operated as a policy coordination mechanism for the coalition and ensured that Spring was informed of developments in all policy areas at the same time as Reynolds.

Nevertheless, the relationship between Reynolds and Spring disintegrated over the next two years. One of the Labour ministers in the Partnership government explained that the cabinet's capacity to respond to unanticipated events required "respect between leaders" and that the gradual erosion of trust between Reynolds and Spring prevented the two parties from resolving disputes (Interview, Dublin, 22 June 2006). Reynolds did not expect Spring to lead Labour out of the coalition in 1994 over the appointment of Harry Whelehan as President of the High Court. Ruari Quinn, Labour leader from 1997-2002, recalls the days following Whelehan's appointment (which had been opposed by Labour) as follows.

> Over the weekend, the parliamentary party met and gave Dick [Spring] its full support.
> Furthermore, we did not fear a general election. If Albert Reynolds had gambled on this
> factor, he had made a major mistake.
> Now Fianna Fáil panicked, realizing that Albert had to undo the damage of his extraordinary
> stubbornness …
> The Labour ministers hurriedly convened and agreed with Dick that we could no longer
> support Reynolds as Taoiseach. As he rose to go down the corridor to the Taioseach's office,
> I asked Dick if he wanted company. He said yes, so Brendan, Mervyn and I walked with
> him ….I intervened on Dick's behalf, saying very forcibly to the Taoiseach, 'It is very
> fucking simple: we either have your head or Harry Whelehan's' (2005, 315-6).

Both Haughey and Reynolds were making decisions about coalition formation, management and, in the case of Reynolds, termination on the basis of very limited information. In particular, Reynolds's mistreatment of coalition partners and miscalculation surrounding both coalition terminations display clear errors in judgment. Commentators within Fianna Fail and Labour attribute this in part to Reynolds's own stubborn and, at times, bullying political style. Martin Mansergh (1997), Fianna Fail Senator and advisor to Reynolds, Fergus Finlay (1998), political advisor to Labour leader Dick Spring, and Ruari Quinn (2005) all agree that the clash between the personalities of Spring and Quinn played an integral part in the collapse of the Partnership government.

Following Reynolds's resignation as party leader, the party again miscalculated Labour party strategy. Bertie Ahern was elected unanimously by the parliamentary party as their new leader in November 1994 and negotiated a new Programme for Government with Labour. Ahern had already selected the FF ministers in the new cabinet when Spring decided instead to form a Rainbow Coalition with Fine Gael and the Democratic Left. Less than 24 hours before he expected to become Taioseach, Ahern became Leader of the Opposition. "When Dick Spring called at 2 a.m. on Tuesday 6 December, I was left shaken" (quoted by Collins 2005, 300). FF did not anticipate Spring's decision, in part, because the formation of the Rainbow Coalition was the first time that a new government had been formed in Ireland without an intervening election. A senior Labour party advisor at the time also suggests that FF had not realized the significance of the two by-elections held following the 1992 election which provided a Fine Gael-Labour-Democratic Left coalition with the seats that it required to control a majority within the Dáil (Interview, Dublin, 29 June 2006). If this is true then it suggests that Reynolds's refusal to back down over Whelehan's appointment was not utility maximizing behaviour.

While the utility maximization component of the rationality assumption allows for subjective interpretation of expected utility, the value of the theory is undermined if 'subjective interpretation' is stretched so far to allow objectively incorrect calculations about the number

of seats held by all relevant parties in the Dáil and the possible formation of alternative coalitions. If Reynolds did not even consider the possibility of Labour forming an alternative coalition with Fine Gael and the Democratic Left then this casts doubt on the party's capacity to identify possible outcomes of major strategic decisions and rank their preferences. Clearly, Fianna Fail would have preferred to revoke Whelehan's nomination and stay in government than have Labour form an alternative government with Fine Gael and the Democratic Left. At the time of Whelehan's appointment, in the face of Labour party opposition, FF Ministers thought that they were risking an early election rather than the formation of the Rainbow Coalition. Collins recounts the following scene following Whelehan's appointment ceremony.

> After the short ceremony, [Fianna Fail Minister for Justice] Geoghegan-Quinn marched over to a still beaming Whelehan and hissed, "When I'm out in the snow on the election trail in Galway and people on the doorsteps ask me "What about Harry Whelehan?" I'm going to reply, "Fuck Harry Whelehan." It was a sentiment shared by some of the other Fianna Fail ministers but none of them had spoken up an hour earlier to try to deter Reynolds from his folly (Collins, 2001: 281).

Evidence of learning

The contrast between Fianna Fáil's public disunity and poor coalition management in its first two coalitions, both of which collapsed far short of the five year parliamentary term, and the success of the party's coalitions with the Progressive Democrats from 1997-2002 and 2002-2007 is testimony to lessons learned within the party. The selection of Bertie Ahern as party leader and the two and a half long years spent in Opposition were both crucial to the party's new commitment to making coalition government work. In the days before Ahern's selection as party leader, one of his strongest supporters within the parliamentary party, Brian Lenihan, issued a statement from his hospital bed praising Ahern's "negotiating and consensual skills that are so required for modern leadership in the national age" (quoted in Collins, 2001: 296). Collins describes Ahern's style as "uniquely personal" (2001: 297). His negotiation skills had been honed during his dealings with the trade unions, both as Opposition spokesperson for Labour in the 1980s and as Minister for Labour under Haughey. Collins recounts Haughey's government press secretary, PJ Mara, describing Ahern's strategy for resolving labour disputes as "Well, Bertie will go out and have a few pints with the lads tonight and see what can be done" (quoted in Collins 2001: 298). In contrast to the polarizing and volatile leadership style of Haughey or the blunt stubbornness of Reynolds, Ahern's leadership style is better suited to coalition management.

During Fianna Fáil's period in Opposition between November 1994 and May 1997, Ahern and Mary Harney, leader of the Progressive Democrats established a rapport. By the time of the 1997 election, FF and the PDs had made a transfer agreement Gallagher estimates that this agreement enabled FF to win as many as 7 extra seats in 1997 (1999: 129). This was the party's first transfer agreement since 1933. Ahern acknowledged his party's failure to make coalition work during the 1997 campaign and assured voters that he had learned from these mistakes. To prove this, he outlined his 'coalition philosophy' for voters. Larger parties should not impose their preferences on smaller parties "and must not take them for granted in a dismissive fashion … but nor is it conducive to stability for smaller parties or independents to make a habit of putting regular ultimatums to a larger party or to try to hold them to ransom" (quoted in Mitchell, 1999: 250). It is impossible to imagine any former

Fianna Fáil leader espousing their coalition philosophy during an election campaign. As Mitchell points out, 1997 was the first election in which FF "was not opposed to or at least equivocal about coalitions" (1999: 243).

Not only were both parties committed to entering a coalition government in 1997, they were determined that it would last the full five years. Following the vote for Taioseach in the Dáil, the cabinet travels to the Áras an Uachtaráin (Residence of the President) to be sworn into office and traditionally holds its first meeting at the Áras. It is an emotional moment for ministers, steeped in ceremony and pageantry. Ahern began the meeting in 1997 with the words "we will not be troubling the electorate for another five years. Everyone sitting around this table knows that the alternative is the wasteland of opposition, howling likes wolves baying the moon" (Personal interview, Dublin, 28 June 2006). Ahern was not the only Fianna Fáil TD to find opposition frustrating. Due to the party's dominance of Irish government, the experience of opposition seems to be particularly galling for many within Fianna Fail. The years between 1994 and 1997 convinced many former opponents of coalition that, if not actually desirable, in comparison to opposition coalition was the lesser of two evils (Personal interview, Dublin, 28 June 2006).

Under Ahern's leadership, the coalition did last the full five years and FF entered the election campaign in 2002 expressing a clear preference for continuing the coalition with the PDs, despite polling that suggested the party was capable of winning a majority of seats alone. Ahern publicly stated that he was in favour of continuing the coalition even if FF did win a majority of seats, an offer that was turned down by Harney who recognized the futility of being a coalition partner with no leverage (Collins, 2003: 27). By the 2007 election campaign, the prospect of coalition was not a contentious issue for FF, with the party publicly declaring its capacity to work with either the PDs or Labour, depending on the election results (*Irish Times*, 2007: 1). At the time that I was interviewing members of the Fianna Fail parliamentary party, the party's TDs described themselves as more or less evenly divided between those who would prefer coalition with Labour and those who would prefer coalition with the Progressive Democrats, for both policy and office related reasons. This was perceived as a strength rather than a weakness for future coalition building (Interviews with the author, Dublin, June 2006).[3]

Beyond the change of party leader and the experience of opposition what else contributed to the party's acceptance of coalition government? A change of heart about coalition government was not limited to the parliamentary party. By 2002, a majority of Fianna Fail voters preferred coalition government to single party government. A poll published during the 2002 election campaign demonstrated that a Fianna Fáil coalition with another party or with independent TDs was the preferred post-election option of 63 per cent of voters, including 52% of Fianna Fáil supporters (Mitchell, 2003: 216). In the first election campaign where a majority seemed possible for FF since 1977, single party government was the second choice of most Fianna Fáil voters. Mitchell cites journalist Sam Smyth's explanation of this phenomenon. "Like recidivists who don't trust themselves to confront another occasion of sin, Fianna Fáilers are afraid of the opportunities available to the party if it is in government alone" (quoted in Mitchell, 2003: 216).

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[3] As a consistently larger parliamentary party than the Progressive Democrats, Labour would be entitled to demand more cabinet seats and junior ministries.

Similarly, party strategists recognize that winning seats is increasingly dependent on preference transfers between parties rather than first preference votes. In the hey-day of the 'Fianna Fáil versus the rest' party system, the phenomenon of plumping (only ranking candidates from one party on the ballot paper rather than giving lower preferences to candidates from other parties) was far more prevalent among FF voters (Sinnott, 1995: 213). Plumping for all parties began to decline in the early 1980s, evidence of the onset of decline in party attachment prevalent across Europe at the time, and by the 1990s FF strategists had recognized the importance of lower preference transfers to compensate for the decline in the party's first preference vote (Personal interview, Dublin, 14 June 2006). Lower preference transfers were responsible for the party's increase in seats in 2002. "[E]ven though 2002 marked a small electoral gain for FF, it is still the third-lowest vote recorded by the party in 70 years. Indeed, the party has only been able to mask its overall electoral decline through its increasing ability to attract lower-preference transfers, itself a consequence of the opening up of the old 'Fianna Fail versus the rest' system – hence its 7 per cent bonus share of seats over votes in 2002"(Mair and Weeks, 2005: 152). The party did not have an explicit transfer agreement with the PDs in 2002 but TDs recognized the value of appealing for lower preferences from supporters of other parties in their constituencies.

Conclusion

How can we differentiate between genuine adaptation by a majoritarian party to non-majority government and a temporary tactical adjustment while the party bides its time until the status quo is restored? The Fianna Fáil case study highlights three important factors: the time horizon of key actors within the party, the nature of the relationship between the majoritarian party and potential coalition partners, and the preferences of party members and voters. In the 1989 and 1992 coalitions, both party leaders were clearly more motivated by the immediate desire to retain their position as Taoiseach than by the long term interests of the party. The majority of the parliamentary party opposed coalition and deposed Haughey in an attempt to instate a leader that could return Fianna Fail to single party government. The party perceived coalition government as a temporary aberration from the norm and, as a result, their time horizons extended only until the next election and the possibility of winning back a majority. In contrast, the coalitions formed in 2002 reflect the actions of a party leader thinking beyond the current parliamentary term and towards the future. Fianna Fail could have formed a minority government with the support of the same independent TDs that had supported the FF-PD coalition between 1997 and 2002. But Ahern not only perceived coalition as a more stable option, he recognized that PD support could be necessary for the formation of future governments.

The establishment of trust between a majoritarian party and their potential coalition partners also reflects adaptation. All parties involved in the coalitions of 1989 and 1992 identify the break-down of personal relationships as being a key factor in the early dissolution of the coalitions. Trust was difficult to establish because the parties had not worked together before, and because of the animosity between some members of the FF parliamentary party and the PDs. When a majoritarian party clearly demonstrates its intention to govern alone in future and shows little respect for its coalition partner, as was certainly the case when Reynolds took over the leadership of FF from Haughey, it is difficult to establish the good faith between parties necessary for coalition management. Instead, trust is built both through

experience of successful shared government and through the recognition of mutual interest. In the case of Fianna Fáil, early coalition termination was evidence of the absence of trust between coalition partners, while the capacity of both the 1997 and 2002 governments to complete the five year parliamentary term is testimony to the improved relationship between Fianna Fáil and the PDs.

Finally, when a majoritarian party perceives non-majority government as a temporary departure from the norm, we would expect to see the supporters of that party share the party's enthusiasm to return to single party government. That a slim majority of Fianna Fail voters now prefer coalition to single party government suggests that voters for the party have adapted to the new environment. Since the completion of successful full term of coalition government in 2002, divisions within the party over the wisdom of coalition government are no longer as deep or as public. Undoubtedly there are still some within the party who would prefer single party government, particularly among those ministerial hopefuls who see 'their' places in cabinet taken by the other party or backbenchers whose constituents are opposed to policy decisions driven by their coalition partner. But the capacity of Ahern as party leader to appease internal dissent and the party's seventeen years of coalition government mean that the party can once again be treated as a unitary rational actor. While the validity of the model was challenged by the public disunity, uncertainty and strategic miscalculation between 1989 and 1994, in periods of post-adaptation political stability the rational actor model remains a "useful fiction" (MacDonald, 2003) for the analysis of party strategy.

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