

Cabinet Reshuffles and Prime Ministerial Power

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VERY PRELIMINARY "IDEAS-PAPER"

Abstract

This paper contains some ideas about how to transform a paper we wrote together in Swedish for an anthology on Swedish governments 1917-2009. There, we point out that reshuffles are problematic when used as an indicator of prime-ministerial power/dominance over the cabinet. In the future, we wish to expand our critique. In this "ideas paper", however, we only briefly outline our critique. We will argue that there exist at least two problems inherent in using the frequency of reshuffles as an indicator of Prime-ministerial power over the cabinet. The first we call the "problem of proxying", which arises because scholars implicitly use the frequency of reshuffles as a proxy for the political experience of the ministers surrounding the PM. Specifically, the frequency of reshuffles is thought to be inversely related to the political experience of ministers. The second problem we call the "problem of selection bias", which arises because of the failure to properly specifying the possibility of a bi-directional causal relationship between prime-ministerial power and cabinet reshuffles. We will try to argue that these are serious problems for those who wish to use the frequency of cabinet reshuffles as a measure of prime ministerial using historical data and examples from the Swedish history with parliamentarism.

Introduction

While the formation and collapse of cabinet governments has been a mainstay of political science for more than 50 years, the recent decade has seen a growing pre-occupation with cabinet reshuffles. For some, the rotation of ministers in and out of cabinet, or between cabinet posts, is mainly an alternative to cabinet duration as a measure of government instability (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2004), the latter having been argued to be crucial for the government's ability to implement policy (Warwick 1994, Huber 1998). Others have interpreted cabinet reshuffles as a corrective act, taken by PM:s to satisfy public opinion in the face of scandals (Dewan and Dowding 2005). Most of the scholarly interest, however, is driven by an interest in prime ministerial power. This is evident in work that sees the reshuffling of ministers as a reactive or proactive measure taken by the PM to ensure that individual cabinet ministers implement his/her policy agenda (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008, Indridason and Kam 2008). In light of these ideas, it is not surprising that frequent cabinet reshuffles have been seen as an indicator of prime ministerial dominance over his or her fellow cabinet ministers, most notably in the literature on the alleged 'presidentialization' of parliamentary governments (REFERENCES TO OURSELVES AND OTHERS).

In this paper we will argue that the use of cabinet reshuffles as a measure of prime ministerial power is problematic. This critique rests on the view of parliamentary as a system of delegation, where the parliament delegates power to the PM who, in turn, delegates power to the individual cabinet ministers (Strøm, Müller and Bergman 2003). Our interest lies with the latter stage, that is, on the internal balance of power within the cabinet. Like many before us, we conceptualize the delegation game as one where the PM (the principal) has problems controlling the individual ministers (the agents) because the latter's goals may diverge from those of the former. Given this view, cabinet reshuffles have been seen as measure taken in order to prevent ministers from pursuing policy goals that are at odds with those of the PM, or to remove those that do so (see, e.g., Indridason and Kam 2008 MORE REFERENCES).

One mechanism suggested for linking cabinet reshuffles to the internal balance of power within the cabinet focuses on political experience. In short, it is argued that a PM will have a hard time dominating decision-making in a cabinet that is staffed with more experienced ministers. If a minister has experience with cabinet work, they also have more experience bargaining and compromising with both the parliament and the bureaucracy, and may therefore be more effective at pursuing their own policy agenda (which may be at odds with that of the PM). If they, on top of that, have held the same portfolio for a long time, they will have gained an unmatched expertise with that policy area, and perhaps even adopted some of the views held by entrenched bureaucrats in this policy domain (see, e.g., Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2004). Experience may thus be understood as ministerial experience with the portfolio they are currently holding or as having previous cabinet experience, even if it may be with another portfolio than the one currently held. In addition, other forms of political experience may also be crucial. Prominent examples of this are experience from serving in parliament, or in leading positions within a party (such as the executive board). Having experience from these

arenas will, in all likelihood, also increase ministers' expertise in substantive policy, as well as their ability to craft and pass policy. Experience from parliament and/or leading positions within parties may thus also enable ministers to pursue a policy agenda that is at odds with that most preferred by the PM (REFERENCES TO OUR OWN WORK).

In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that scholars have suggested ministerial reshuffling as a measure of prime ministerial power. It is not only a comparatively easy concept to operationalize and analyze quantitatively, on surface it appears to be related to the ministers' cabinet experience in a relatively straightforward fashion. When new ministers enter or leave the cabinet, or are reassigned to new portfolios, the level of cabinet and/or portfolio experience held collectively by the cabinet will typically be affected. If the PM constantly does this, we might well surmise that average ministerial experience of the cabinet falls. While we are broadly sympathetic to the view that politically experienced ministers will be harder to control and that they may serve as a counterweight to the PM, we argue that the link between reshuffles and the experience of cabinet ministers is not so straightforward. A reshuffle might, theoretically, lead the PM to be surrounded by more experienced ministers. And this is even more likely if one considers outside experience (e.g. from parliament and top party positions). If our objection is valid then cabinet reshuffles is simply a convenient, but bad, proxy for ministerial experience, and we would be better of measuring the latter directly.¹

A second mechanism underlying the putative link between prime ministerial power and cabinet reshuffles focuses directly on the existence of a divergence of interests between the prime minister and his/her ministers. Suppose, that reshuffles are frequently attempts by the PM to ensure that the cabinet will better implement his/her policy agenda (REFERENCES). A reshuffle might, for example, increase the match between his/her policy priorities and those of the cabinet. We do not dispute that PM:s might increase their power this way, in fact we find it plausible. Even so, this does not mean that we can interpret the observed difference in the frequency of reshuffles *across* time and cabinets as an indicator of prime ministerial power. The argument is simple: A weak prime ministers, according to this view, should be more likely to reshuffle, for instance to obtain a set of ministers with policy priorities that are more in line with his/her own. If our argument is valid, there will thus exist a selection bias inherent in the use cabinet reshuffles as a measure of prime ministerial power. Reshuffles do indeed strengthen the PM, but, for precisely this reason, we would expect initially weak PM:s to be more likely to engage in them.

We illustrate out two objections using detailed data on Swedish cabinet ministers from 1917-2010. Regarding the problem of bad proxying, we consider the relationship between cabinet reshuffles and the political experience of cabinet ministers. As it turns out the correlation is far from perfect. When there is a cabinet reshuffle, it is usually the cabinet ministers who have less political experience that leave the government. And the most reshuffled cabinets are not the least experienced (TRUE?). To illustrate the problem of selection bias, we focus on the case of PM:s that have inherited cabinet ministers from previous PM:s, and especially the case when the current PM was elevated to this position due to some more ore less "exogenous" event. Given the incoming PM:s

¹ For now, we sidestep the issue of whether it is reasonable to always assume that politically experienced ministers will always stand in the way of the PM:s policy goals.

power to hire, fire and reassign ministers, we would expect him or her to use this power fairly early in the term in order to obtain a closer match between his or her preferences and those of the ministers. If such PM:s reshuffle more ministers (especially inherited ministers) during their first term compared to their latter terms, this hardly suggests that they are becoming less powerful. Rather it suggests that there is something to the selection-bias story. Although we think that the issue of inherited ministers is the clearest way to illustrate of the problem of selection bias, our point is more general. In any situation where the PM finds herself surrounded by ministers whose policy objectives diverge from their own And this type of situation might not only come about because the previous PM recruited the ministers, it might also occur when PM:s have incomplete information, and therefore pick ministers that are bad from their vantage point.

Before we proceed, we wish to sound a note of caution on the reading of our paper. While we will argue that cabinet reshuffles are a problematic measure of prime ministerial power, this should not be interpreted as a call for the study of the phenomenon halt. On the contrary, we believe this to be a very fruitful area of research. Not the least, we endorse studies of to what extent, and how, reshuffles are used by PM:s to pursue their policy agenda. What we do argue, however, is that reshuffles is suboptimal when seen as a summary measure of prime ministerial power, and that measures focusing on ministerial experience capture the phenomenon of interest more directly. This implies that, in many empirical applications, and most notably in the study of the 'presidentialization' of parliamentary systems, the practice of measuring prime ministerial power using the frequency of reshuffles should be abandoned.

The Problem of Bad Proxying: Cabinet Reshuffles and the Political Experience of Ministers

Here I would like to see one of our analyses that show that politically experienced ministers are less likely to be reshuffled than others. Preferably the analysis should include both cabinet experience, parliamentary experience and party political experience (vi har delvis en sådan analys I vårt kapitel).

We should then follow this with bar charts showing for, each cabinet, that show cabinet reshuffles per portfolio year on the one hand, and the political experience of the same cabinets' ministers on the other (again, political experience can be measured in several ways, cabinet, party political and parliamentary). Such bar charts should, in time, be complemented with regression analysis showing that the link between reshuffles and ministerial experience is relatively weak (vi har ministeromsättning per portföljår I stapeldiagram I vårt kapitel, och I Thomas kapitel finns parlamentarisk förankring och partipolitisk förankring som bar charts, går det att få fram samma grej för regeringserfarenhet).

The Problem of Selection Bias: When Weak Prime Ministers Reshuffle Cabinets

What kind of data/analysis and argument I think we should have here:

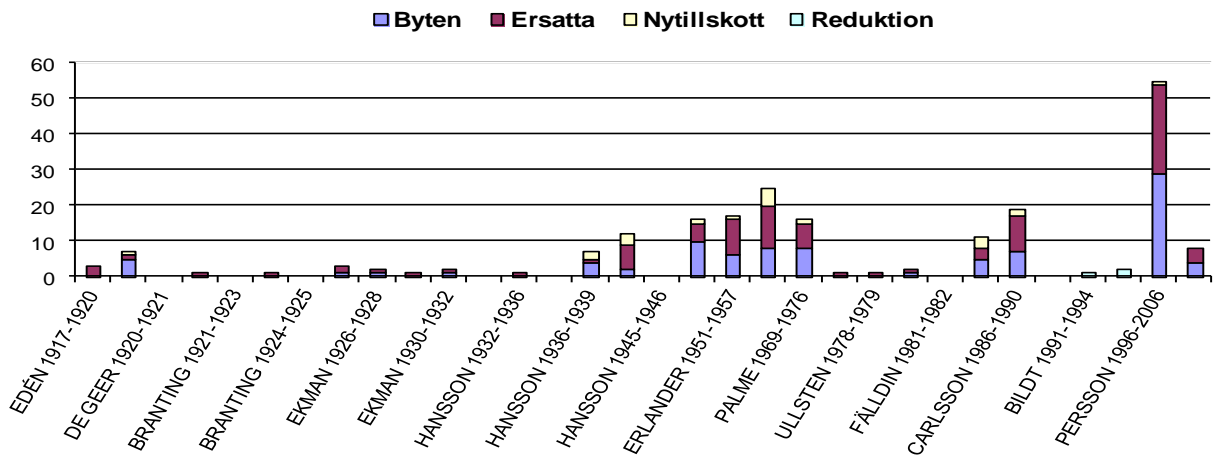
Insert analysis and data that shows that inherited ministers are replaced more than own picks (Vi hard et i vårt kapitel). Then show that when a new PM (from same party as previous, so that their recruitment pool is the same) takes over government (prominent examples Erlander 1946, Palme 1969, Carlsson 1985, Persson 1996) they usually reshuffle more in their first period in government than in latter periods and point out that this hardly shows that their power was decreasing with time, rather the opposite...

Give more detailed account of two specific cases. Hansson who upon his death was, somewhat surprisingly, replaced by the minister of education Tage Erlander. And Ingvar Carlsson who replace Palme when the latter was murdered. These were not obvious and particularly strong candidates for the PM-ship (at least not Erlander) so that they cannot have been said to be exceptionally strong initially, yet they reshuffled a lot of inherited ministers out as soon as the timing was appropriate. And the fact that they reshuffled more during their first period in office than in latter periods hardly tells us that they were stronger in the start. Rather, as they could make their own picks, they got more powerful. Thus, reshuffles made them more powerful, but they were initially not exceptionally powerful. There is an inverse relationship between power and reshuffling. Compare this to a minister who gets to pick his/her ministers from scratch. He/she might not have to reshuffle so much because he/she got it right from the start.

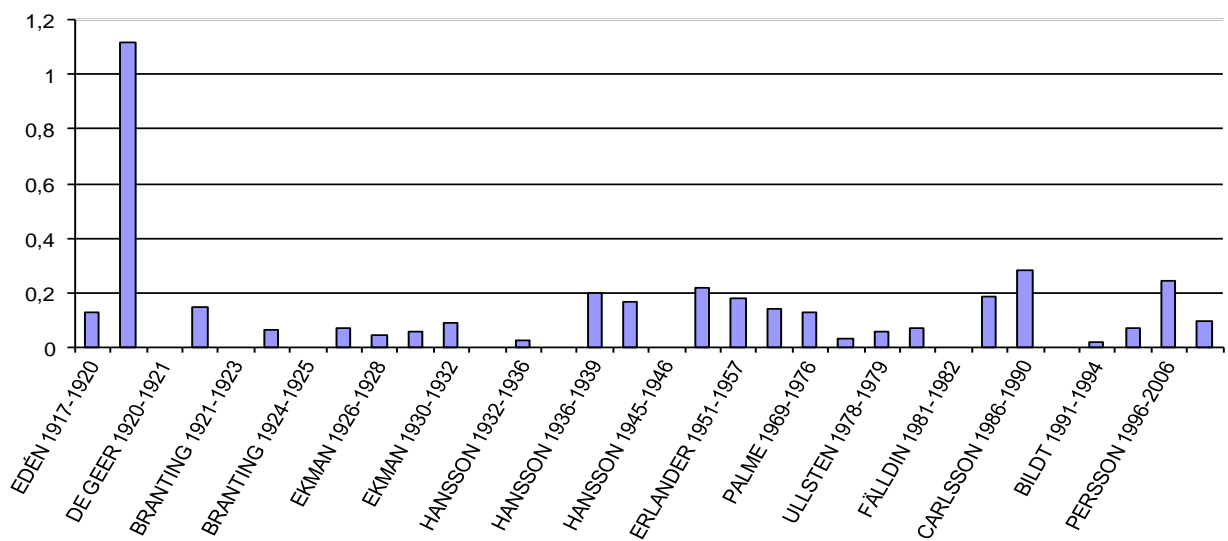
Relevant tables and figures:

Tabell 6.1. Swedish cabinet turnover during parliamentarism

Cabinet resigns because of...	Coalition		Total
	No	Yes	
... electoral outcome	9	3	12
... lack of parliamentary support	5	0	5
... inner crisis	1	4	5
... active cabinet reformation	1	2	3
... PM has to resign (scandal)	1	0	1
... PM dies or wants to quit	5	0	5
Total	22	9	31



Figur 6.1 Ministerial turnover (because of cabinet reformation) 1917–2009, uppdelat på ministärer.



Figur 6.2 Ministerial turnover per portfolio year (because of cabinet reformation) 1917–2009, uppdelat på ministärer.

Figure. Share of cabinet ministers with parliamentary background (Source: Persson)

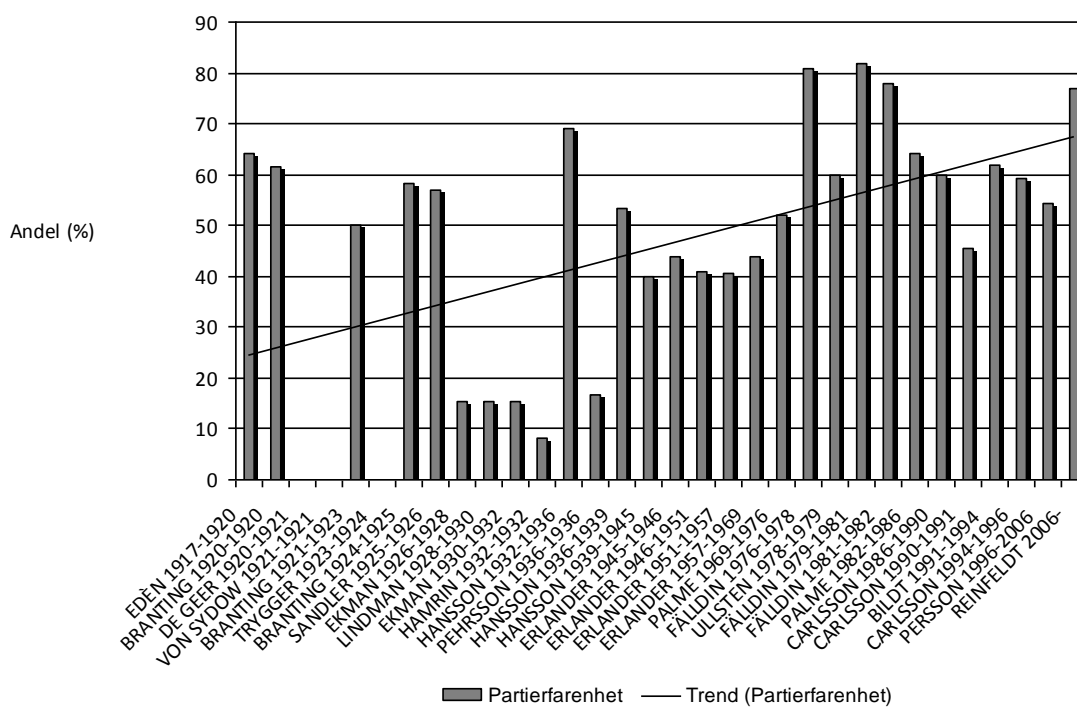


Figure. Share of cabinet ministers with party political background (Source: Persson)

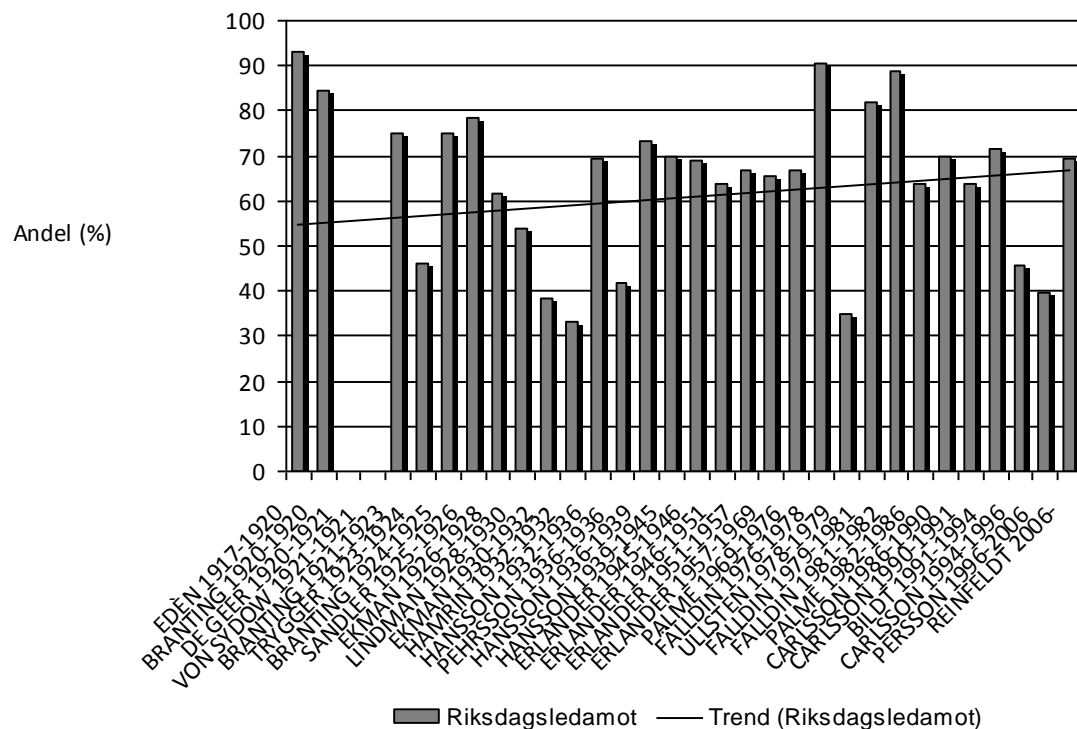


Table 6.3 The determinants of ministerial turnover (N=32)

	Separate tests		Group-wise tests	
	Effect (unstandardized b's)	Explanatory Power (Adj. R2)	Effect (unstandardized b's)	Explanatory Power (Adj. R2)
Background Factors				
Cabinet Duration (years)	3,151***	0,702	3,151***	0,702
Number of ministers (excluding PM)	0,289		0,289	
	<i>Variables below tested by themselves</i>	<i>Explanatory power less of background factors</i>	<i>Variables below tested by themselves</i>	<i>Explanatory power less of background factors.</i>
Historical Factors				
Time (1917=0)	0,011	-0,011	-0,036	-0,019
New Constitution	2,932	-0,008	3,609	
Parliamentary situation				
Single-party government	2,511	0,004	2,038	-0,009
Government support (% in parliament)	-0,071	0,003	-0,058	
Överlevt valförlust	0,212	-0,010	0,180	
Government composition				
Share Old (>60)	-0,471	-0,005	-0,974	0,009
Inherited ministers	0,263	0,010	0,333	
Prime minister				
No. of previous cabinets (PM)	-2,018*	0,018	-2,715**	0,032
Party(1=social democrats)	1,845	-0,004	3,689	

Two simple explanatory models				
No. Inherited ministers			0,261	0,029
No. of previous cabinets (PM)			-2,006*	
No. Inherited ministers			0,219*	0,191
No. of previous cabinets (PM)			-0,910	
Göran Persson	29,606***	0,179	27,973***	

Comments

1. Both background factors are included as controls in other analyses

2. Effektmåtten som redovisas är de ostandardiserade b-värdena; Signifikans anges i tre olika grader, * 90 procents;

** 95 procents och *** 99 procents säkerhet; Förklaringskraften anges i form av Adj-R².

Tabell 6.4. Reasons for exit from the cabinet when cabinet is reformed, 1945 – 2009 (percent)

	1917-45	1945-70	1970-2007	Totalt
Death and bad health	26	10	5	10
Age, pension	0	13	16	12
Own initiative	16	13	19	17
New work outside of government	21	48	16	26
Personal mistake	0	3	5	4
Sex scandal	0	3	0	1
Economic scandal	11	0	7	6
Departmental reorganizations	0	3	9	6
Personnel policy	0	0	5	3
Unsatisfactory results as a minister	0	0	9	5
Political disagreement	11	7	5	6
Personal conflict within cabinet	0	0	4	2
Unknown	16	0	0	3
Sum %	101	100	100	101
(n)	(19)	(31)	(57)	(107)
Total (less of PM:s)	217	117	340	674

Källa: Jesper Werners D-uppsats, samt egen komplettering.

Tabell 6.5. The Determinants of Cabinet Exits when Cabinets Reform (logistic regression; N=673)

Explanatory Factors	Average	Effect	Probability		Value 1	Explanatory
	e		value 1 – value	value 2	and 2	power
						(Nagelkerke)
Control variable						
Cabinet Duration in Years	3,050	0,356***	0,062	0,162	1 jfr 4	0,251
Variables below tested individually with control variable						<i>Explanatory power less of control variable</i>
Age when entering cabinet	49,33	0,064***	0,065	0,200	40 jfr 60	+0,040
Gender(man/woman)	0,18	0,008	0,122	0,121	kv jfr m	+0,000
Head of Government Department	0,74	0,083	0,115	0,124	ja jfr nej	+0,000
Status (index; 1—5)	2,68	0,124	0,102	0,141	1 jfr 4	+0,002
Experience as State Secretary (yes/no)	0,18	0,033	0,112	0,116	ja jfr nej	+0,003
Years as cabinet minister	2,296	0,032	0,113	0,126	0 jfr 4	+0,003
Experience from previous cabinets (No.)	0,88	0,172**	0,105	0,142	0 jfr 2	+0,009
Experience from previous portfolios	0,87	0,094	0,113	0,133	0 jfr 2	+0,002
Experience with previous PM (No.)	0,44	0,382**	0,102	0,144	1 jfr 0	+0,013
Member of Parliament when entering cabinet	0,63	-0,474**	0,154	0,102	nej jfr ja	+0,009
Status within party (index; 0—4)	1,194	-0,344***	0,164	0,065	0 jfr 3	+0,025

Kommentar: Effektmåtten som redovisas är de ostandardiserade b-värdena; Vid beräkningarna av sannolikheter har den korrigerade ministärlängden tilldelats sitt medelvärde. Signifikans anges i tre olika grader, * 90 procents; ** 95 procents och *** 99 procents säkerhet; Förklaringskraften anges i form av Nagelkerkes Pseudo R².

Tabell 6.6. *The Determinants of Cabinet Exits when Cabinets Reform (logistic regression; N=673)*

Förklaringsfaktorer	Effekc	Probability value 1 – value 2		Value 1 and 2
Cabinet Duration in Years	0,394***	0,05 0	0,147	1 jfr 4
Age when entering cabinet	0,059***	0,06 4	0,182	40 jfr 60
Status (index; 1—5)	0,042	0,09 9	0,111	1 jfr 4
Experience with previous PM (No.)	0,287*	0,12 2	0,094	1 jfr 0
Member of Parliament when entering cabinet	-0,312	0,12 6	0,095	nej jfr ja
Status within party (index; 0—4)	-0,302**	0,14 5	0,064	0 jfr 3
Constant	-5,928***			
Explanatory Power (Pseudo-R², Nagelkerke)	0,322			

Kommentar: Effektmåtten som redovisas är de ostandardiserade b-värdena; Vid beräkning av de två sannolikheter som jämförs tilldelas de övriga variablerna sitt medelvärde. Signifikans anges i tre olika grader, * 90 procents, ** 95 procents och *** 99 procents säkerhet; Förklaringskraften anges i form av Nagelkerkes Pseudo R².

Tabell 6.9. Förklaringar till att statsråd överlever ministärskiften (multivariat logistisk regression; N=495)

Förklaringsfaktorer	Medelvärde	Effekt	Sannolikhet		Jämförelse
			Värde 1	Värde 2	
Kontroll för typ av ministärskifte	-0,674	0,361***			
Statsrådets ålder	51,75	-0,042**	0,344	0,185	40 jfr 60
Kön	0,16	0,010	0,244	0,242	kv jfr man
Statsrådsperiodens längd	2,039	-0,079	0,258	0,215	1 jfr 4
Status statsråd (index)	2,74	-0,093	0,274	0,222	1 jfr 4
Erfarenhet som statsråd, antal statsrådsposter	0,85	0,345**	0,193	0,323	0 jfr 2
RD-ledamot	0,68	-0,809**	0,357	0,198	nej jfr ja
Statsrådets status inom sitt parti (index)	1,117	0,271*	0,191	0,348	0 jfr 3
Konstant		3,837***			
Förklaringskraft (Pseudo-R ² , Nagelkerke)			0,666		

Kommentar: Effektmåtten som redovisas är de ostandardiserade b-värdena; Vid beräkningarna av sannolikheter har den korrigerade ministärlängden tilldelats sitt medelvärde. Signifikans anges i tre olika grader, * 90 procents; ** 95 procents och *** 99 procents säkerhet; Förklaringskraften anges i form av Nagelkerkes Pseudo R².