

Comparing Cabinets

Dilemmas of Collective Government

Why is cabinet government so resilient? Despite many obituaries, why does it continue to be the vehicle for governing across most parliamentary systems? Comparing Cabinets answers these questions by examining the structure and performance of cabinet government in five democracies: the United Kingdom, Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Australia. The book is organised around the dilemmas that cabinet governments must solve: how to develop the formal rules and practices that can bring predictability and consistency to decision making; how to balance good policy with good politics; how to ensure cohesion between the factions and parties that constitute the cabinet while allowing levels of self-interest to be advanced; how leaders can balance persuasion and command; and how to maintain support through accountability at the same time as being able to make unpopular decisions. All these dilemmas are continuing challenges to cabinet government, never solvable, and constantly reappearing in different forms. Comparing distinct parliamentary systems reveals how traditions, beliefs, and practices shape the answers. There is no single definition of cabinet government, but rather arenas and shared practices that provide some cohesion. Such a comparative approach allows greater insight into the process of cabinet government that cannot be achieved in the study of any single political system, and an understanding of the pressures on each system by appreciating the options that are elsewhere accepted as common beliefs.

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