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The initial puzzle that sparked this entire project was based on my experiences as an intern in the French National Assembly during the 1995 presidential campaign. I was curious about the relationship between the two mainstream Right parties after seeing that both were internally divided over which of the two mainstream Right presidential candidates to support. The odd thing was that the two candidates proposed by the mainstream Right were from the same party, and the choice of which one to support seemed to be unrelated to party affiliation or policy. In fact, I was unable to find anyone at the National Assembly who could explain what the policy differences between the two parties were. Partway through graduate school I returned to this puzzle, wondering why the parties remained separate when their policy agendas were so similar and when their failures to coordinate could sometimes have disastrous electoral consequences. Around this time, I ran into my undergraduate thesis advisor, Daniel Verdier, at an APSA meeting. After I attempted to explain my inchoate dissertation idea to him, he immediately restated the question in terms of why parties form electoral coalitions. His reframing of my project was much more elegant than anything I was able to articulate at the time, and it gave me a clearer idea of how to proceed. It certainly wasn’t the first time he had clarified my muddled ideas. Indeed, his willingness to provide round after round of criticisms of my undergraduate thesis—thereby improving it beyond all recognition—had an enormous influence on my decision to go to graduate school in political science.

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