The Logic of Pre-Electoral Coalition Formation

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CHAPTER FIVE

France and South Korea

In this chapter, I use a detailed investigation of electoral coalitions in Fifth Republic France and post-1987 South Korea to begin evaluating the plausibility and usefulness of the implications generated by the theoretical model presented in the previous chapter. To a large extent, the selection of these specific countries is somewhat arbitrary, since I believe that there is a general underlying logic of pre-electoral coalition formation that is not country specific. However, an analysis of electoral coalition history in France and South Korea is particularly informative for a number of reasons. First, the two countries are very distinct in terms of their geography, democratic history, and party systems. France is a well-established democracy in Western Europe whose party system is characterized by a well-entrenched left-right cleavage. In contrast, South Korea is a newly democratic country in East Asia whose party system is characterized by an almost total absence of ideological division. If similar factors are found to influence electoral coordination in such different contexts, then this would provide strong evidence that there truly is a general underlying logic to pre-electoral coalition formation.

Second, the unusual nature of France’s semi-presidential regime offers an almost unique opportunity to evaluate the impact of different institutions on pre-electoral strategies while holding other country characteristics constant. For example, the ability to observe legislative and presidential elections in the same country allows us to explicitly examine whether the divisibility of office benefits affects the likelihood of electoral coalition formation in a manner consistent with the theory presented in the previous chapter. France is also particularly informative because it offers so many clear examples of electoral coalition success and failure on both the left and right of the political spectrum. Moreover, the ability (or inability) of political parties to form electoral coalitions has often had a large impact on election
outcomes in France. The result of the 2002 presidential election, in which the extreme right candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, made it through to the second round because the left-wing parties failed to coordinate their electoral strategies, is perhaps the clearest example of this situation.

Third, the short overview of electoral coalitions in South Korea is useful for illustrating the danger of putting too much stock in personal feuds as an explanation for the inability of party leaders to reach pre-electoral agreements. Descriptive accounts of electoral campaigns and elections in countries such as France often emphasize the significant role that personal feuds and long-standing rivalries play in the electoral coalition formation process (Bell 2000; Knapp 1999). Although the absence of ideological divisions in Korean politics has meant that politics is largely driven by personal enmity and disdain, the history of electoral coalitions in South Korea clearly indicates that the most strident and long-held personal animosities threatening electoral coordination can be overcome if only party leaders can resolve the distributional issues associated with electoral coalition formation.

Finally, the investigation of electoral coalitions in France and South Korea illustrate that my theory can be usefully employed to explain pre-electoral agreements in semi-presidential and presidential regimes. Throughout the presentation of my theoretical model in the previous chapter, I was careful to indicate how it applied to both parliamentary and presidential regimes. However, as with the vast majority of the government coalition literature, the statistical analyses conducted in chapters three and six focus primarily on parliamentary democracies. Studying France and South Korea in this chapter helps to show that my theory can also provide insights into the electoral coalition formation process in non-parliamentary democracies.

5.1 French Fifth Republic

Pre-electoral coalitions have played an important and often dramatic role in determining electoral outcomes in France. Consider the surprising outcome of the first round of the 2002 French presidential elections. It had been widely expected that Jacques Chirac, the president and leader of the mainstream Right, would make it through to the second round, along with Lionel Jospin, the Socialist prime minister and leader of the mainstream Left. The real question for months had been which of the two men would win the second round. Then, unexpectedly, the left vote was split among so many candidates that the Socialist leader came in third behind the extreme-right politician Jean-Marie Le Pen. The French press described the event as an earthquake, and the French elections were, for a couple of weeks, the subject of world-wide speculation. Most analyses of this particular election will
no doubt focus on the disturbing success of the extreme Right. However, it is
worth emphasizing that this political ‘earthquake’ had as much to do with the
inability of the French Left to form a coherent pre-electoral coalition as it did with
an increase in the strength of the extreme Right. After all, Le Pen enjoyed only a
rather modest increase in his vote share compared to what he had received in the
previous presidential elections of 1995.1

The outcome of the first round in 2002, though admittedly a surprise, is not
unprecedented. The Left had approached the 1969 presidential elections in such
“total disarray” that none of the left-wing candidates made it to the second round
(Pierce 1980). This situation enabled a little-known centrist candidate, Alain
Poher, to compete in the second round against Georges Pompidou. In 1981, the
unwillingness of Jacques Chirac to publicly encourage his electorate to support the
remaining mainstream right candidate (Valéry Giscard d’Estaing) after Chirac had
been eliminated in the first round of the presidential elections clearly contributed
to François Mitterrand’s electoral victory (Wright 1995; Ysmal 1989). The inabil-
ity of the moderate Right to form a cohesive electoral alliance in these elections
and at the subsequent legislative elections a few weeks later enabled the first left-
wing government to come to power since the Popular Front in 1936.

These examples raise the question as to why party leaders were willing and able
to form pre-electoral coalitions in some French elections, but not in others. The
bargaining model presented in the previous chapter suggests that it should be pos-
sible to explain the observed variation in terms of the changing concerns of party
elites with votes, office, and policy.

5.1.1 Votes

The first question to ask is whether parties in France have an electoral incentive to
form pre-electoral coalitions. As my analysis in chapter three indicates, party elites
are more likely to form pre-electoral coalitions when there are many parties and
the electoral system is disproportional. Since France is well known both for its
plethora of parties and its highly disproportional electoral institutions used to elect
its president and legislature, French party leaders nearly always have incentives to
form pre-electoral coalitions.

The French party system consists of numerous parties spread all across the
political spectrum. At the moment, the mainstream Left consists of the Socialist
Party (PS), the Communist Party (PCF), the Left Radical Party (PRG), and vari-
uous environmental parties such as the Green Party (Greens), the Independent
Ecological Movement (MEI), and Ecological Generation (GE-Les Bleus). On the
extreme left are several other parties such as Workers’ Struggle (LO), the
Communist Revolutionary League (LCR), and the Workers’ Party (PT). On the
mainstream right there are the Gaullists (UMP), the Union for French Democracy (UDF), and an environmental party called Citizen Action and Participation (CAP21). On the extreme right there is the National Front (FN) and the breakaway National Republican Movement (MNR). There are also a number of personalistic parties such as Pasqua (Charles Pasqua) and Movement for France (Philippe de Villiers), as well as several rural parties such as the Hunting, Fishing, Nature and Tradition party (CPNT) and the Right to Hunt party (DC). Many of these parties win a significant number of votes and legislative seats. Fully 16 parties managed to win more than 1% each of the national vote in the 2002 legislative elections and at least 10 of these parties won legislative representation, according to the *Election Politique* website.

The French electoral system is highly disproportional. Presidential and legislative elections both have two rounds of voting, in which a limited number of candidates progress to the second round. If a presidential candidate wins an absolute majority of the national vote in the first round, then he or she is automatically elected president. If this is not the case, then the top two candidates go through to the second round, which is held two weeks later; since the introduction of direct presidential elections in 1962, all presidential elections have gone to a second round. Whoever wins the most votes in the second round becomes president. Legislative elections are very similar. Each electoral district is a single-seat district, and any candidate who passes a threshold of electoral support in the first round of voting is eligible to enter a second round one week later. The particular threshold that must be overcome has changed twice since the foundation of the Fifth Republic. It was originally set at a relatively low 5% of the vote in 1958. This percentage was subsequently increased to 10% for the 1967 election and 12.5% for the 1978 election. The plurality winner in the second round of voting becomes the elected deputy. The first-past-the-post nature of legislative and presidential elections, along with the fact that only a limited number of candidates can progress to the second round, clearly provides incentives for electoral coalitions to form. In fact, the right-wing president Giscard d’Estaing specifically increased the threshold that needed to be overcome to enter the second round of legislative elections to 12.5% in 1978 in order to force centrist and center-right parties to merge or form alliances with his own party. This move was motivated by the growing success of the Socialists and the Communists at local elections in the mid-1970s (Duhamel 1999).

Given the nature of the electoral system in France, party leaders have a range of pre-electoral choices for legislative and presidential elections. One option is for parties to compete independently at election time and refuse to form an electoral coalition in either round of voting. This is what happened on the left prior to 1965, and it is what typically occurs now between the National Front and the
moderate right-wing parties. A second option for party leaders is to compete against each other in the first round and then form an electoral coalition for the second round. This has been a common occurrence in legislative elections among the mainstream parties on both the left and the right. A third option is for parties to form an electoral coalition prior to the first round. This option requires choosing a single candidate to run in each district. Although this option is not as common as the previous one, it does occur with some frequency on both the left and the right. The last option is for parties to move beyond electoral coalitions and simply merge into a single party. The center-left parties chose this option when they merged to form the Socialist Party in 1969. The non-Gaullist parties on the right also chose this option when they formed the UDF in 1978 (Massart 1999; Portelli 1994; Bell & Criddle 1984). Something similar seems to have occurred after the 2002 legislative elections, following the success of the UMP pre-electoral coalition between the Gaullists, the Liberal Democrats (DL), and part of the UDF.

5.1.2 Office

The fact that the disproportional electoral institutions employed to elect presidents and legislators are very similar might lead one to expect that pre-electoral coalitions are equally common in presidential and legislative elections. One might even argue that pre-electoral coalitions should be slightly more common in presidential elections, given that only two candidates can actually enter the second round. However, the information provided in table 5.1 illustrates that this is not the case. While electoral coalitions are relatively frequent in legislative elections, they are quite rare in presidential contests. In fact, pre-electoral coalitions have only formed twice in presidential elections.

What explains this variation across legislative and presidential elections? The bargaining model from the previous chapter notes that while party leaders should react to the potential electoral gains that might accrue from forming an electoral coalition, they are just as likely to be concerned with the expected office benefits associated with the coalition. The salient point about presidential elections is that only one party leader can win the presidency. The fact that the presidential office is not divisible means that the other coalition partner essentially receives no office benefits. As a result, the expected utility of joining a presidential electoral coalition is likely to be quite low for at least one of the coalition parties. In contrast, distributional issues are likely to be resolved more easily in legislative elections, because ministerial portfolios and National Assembly seats are more divisible—both coalition partners receive office benefits. Thus, one explanation for why electoral coalitions form more often in legislative elections than in presidential ones has to do with the relative divisibility of office benefits across these elections.
### Table 5.1
Electoral Coalitions in French Legislative and Presidential Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Presidential Elections</th>
<th>Legislative Elections</th>
<th>Round 1</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>PCF+FGDS (FGDS:SFIO+PRG+CIR)</td>
<td>UNR+UDT+RI</td>
<td>UNR+UDT+RI+CD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FGDS:SFIO+PRG+CIR</td>
<td>FGDS:PCF+PSU</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UNR+RI</td>
<td>UNR+RI+PDM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FGDS+PCF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>UDR+RI+UC</td>
<td>UDR+RI+UC+REF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UGDS:PS+PRG</td>
<td>UGDS:PCF+PSU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>PCF+PS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>UDF:CDS+PR+RI</td>
<td>UDF+RPR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS+PRG</td>
<td>PS+PRG+PCF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986*</td>
<td>RPR+UDF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS+PRG</td>
<td>PS+PRG+PCF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>RPR+UDF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS+PRG</td>
<td>PS+PRG+PCF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>RPR+UDF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS+Greens+PRG</td>
<td>PS+Greens+PRG+PCF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates that the legislative elections employed proportional representation; there was no second round. All coalitions that formed in the first round also formed in the second round; only additional coalitions are listed as forming in the second round. If the parties ran under a common coalition name, this is shown first followed by a colon and the names of the member parties.


**Right-Wing Parties**: Union for French Democracy (UDF); Gaullists (UMP: 2002–, RPR: 1976–2002, UDR: 1968–76, UDVe: 1967–68, UNR-UDT: 1962–67, UNR: 1958–62); Liberal Democrats (DL); Democratic Union of Labor (UDT). Democratic Center (CD); Social Democratic Center (CDS); Independent Republicans (RI); Progress & Modern Democracy (PDM); Republicans (PR); Reform Movement (REF); Center Union (UC).

**Electoral Coalition Names**: Federation of the Democratic & Socialist Left (FGDS); Union for a Presidential (Popular) Majority (UMP); Democratic & Socialist Union (UGDS); Union for French Democracy (UDF). Several of these coalitions became single parties.
This explanation is exactly as suggested by the theoretical model in the previous chapter. I now illustrate the importance of distributional conflict in more detail with a description of coalition formation in French presidential and legislative elections.

**Presidential Elections** The fact that only two candidates can go through to the second round of French presidential elections would suggest that party elites should have considerable electoral incentives to form pre-electoral coalitions. Presumably, party leaders on the left would like to avoid the outcomes of the 1969 and 2002 elections, where the left-wing vote was split among so many candidates that none of them made it into the second round. The electoral incentives for parties to coordinate their pre-electoral strategies would not be so great if the presidency held little power. However, the presidency is considered to be an extremely important political prize. Indeed, when the president enjoys a legislative majority, he holds the most powerful position in the country (Duhamel 1999; Keeler & Schain 1996; Charlot 1994; Hayward 1993). It is only when the president lacks a majority that the system behaves as if it were a parliamentary regime dominated by the prime minister. The presidency has been the dominant political position throughout the Fifth Republic, with the exception of the three periods of ‘cohabitation’ between 1986–88, 1993–95 and 1997–2002. The nature of the semi-presidential regime in France means that party leaders care a great deal about controlling both the legislature and the presidency.

Despite the obvious importance of the presidential position and the incentives created by the electoral system, there have only ever been two examples where parties on the left or the right actually coordinated their strategies so as to present a single presidential candidate for election. In both cases, the Communist Party (PCF) accepted a non-communist candidate as the main standard bearer for the Left. Both times, the electoral coalition quickly collapsed under the strain of distributional conflicts, as the PCF came to realize that the chief beneficiary of these pre-electoral agreements was the Socialist Party (Johnson 1981).

The willingness of the Communist Party to accept a Socialist candidate in 1965 and 1974 stems from the widely held belief that a Communist could never be elected president during the Cold War period. It is important to remember that the rise of the Socialist Party (PS) as the dominant party on the left was almost unthinkable in the 1960s and early 1970s. The PCF had been the largest party in 1945 and was still the dominant party on the left by a considerable margin during the early years of the Fifth Republic. To a large extent, the PCF could only expect to benefit from supporting François Mitterrand as the single candidate of the left in the 1965 presidential elections. The PCF hoped to gain from a show of left-wing unity without ceding any authority to the Socialists. In fact, the PCF probably did not expect Mitterrand
to even make it into the second round, let alone make the election competitive—Mitterrand won 44.8% of the vote in the second round compared to Charles de Gaulle’s 55.2% (Johnson 1981). It was only because a centrist candidate, Jean Lecanuet, managed to win 15.6% of the vote in the first round that a second ballot involving Mitterrand and de Gaulle was actually required. It was this unforeseen occurrence that indirectly began to establish Mitterrand’s reputation as the leader of the Left.

It was the Socialists who were the most reluctant to consider an electoral coalition with the Communists in the early years of the Fifth Republic. To some extent, this reluctance can be traced to the traditional and deep-seated hostility on the non-Communist left toward the PCF (Jackson 1990; Judt 1986). However, more important were the relative positions of the two parties among the electorate. The PCF was by far the dominant party on the left, and any alliance with the Communists would automatically position the Socialists as minority partners. Many feared that the emerging left-right polarization of the political system threatened the very existence of the Socialist Party, given its small size relative to the PCF. This situation helps to explain why one-third of Socialist voters refused to support the PCF in the second ballot of the 1962 legislative elections (Williams, Goldey, & Harrison 1970). A national electoral coalition with the Communists also threatened the Socialists’ ability to conclude alliances with both the Center and the Left. For example, it threatened the Socialist policy of allying with the center-Right in Marseilles but with the PCF in certain regions of Paris. Moreover, an alliance with the PCF was expected to cause problems in winning over those center-Left and center-Right voters who had not thrown in their lot with de Gaulle in 1962. These voters were influential, since they represented the swing vote throughout the 1960s (Portelli 1994; Ysmal 1989).

The Socialists ultimately accepted an electoral coalition in 1965 only after having unsuccessfully attempted to build a federation of the center-Left around the presidential candidate of Gaston Deferre. Deferre had wanted to build a ‘grande fédération’ of progressive forces reaching rightward to the Christian democratic movement (MRP) (Jenson 1991). However, center-Right voters seemed more likely to vote for the Gaullists than for the center-Left (Hanley 2002). This center-Left federation eventually fell apart at the end of 1964 because of reluctance on the part of the MRP to participate in it. It also collapsed under the pressure exerted by the Communists in municipal elections, from parts of the Socialist Party that refused the centrist discourse, and from the reappearance of the Catholic school question (Jenson 1991). The failure of the center-Left federation left the way open for Mitterrand to run against de Gaulle in 1965. Mitterrand had organized the non-Communist Left under the banner of the Fédération de la Gauche Démocrate et Socialiste (FGDS) and allied it with the Communists. The relative success enjoyed by his candidacy helped to cement the idea of a Left-Left alliance.
The events of May 1968 and the presidential elections of 1969 provided further evidence that a Left-Left alliance was capable of providing realistic opposition to the Gaullists. In February 1968, the Socialists and the Communists reached an agreement on a common electoral ‘platform,’ thereby consolidating the initiative that had begun in the 1965 presidential elections. However, the left-wing alliance soon began to disintegrate in May 1968, after several weeks of widespread strikes and rioting by students and workers. Without consulting the leadership of the PCF or the FGDS, Mitterrand announced that he was willing to lead the Left in taking up its responsibilities for transition after the defeat of de Gaulle, which he argued was imminent. This announcement appeared as a coup d’état to the FGDS and “reeked . . . of Fourth Republic centrisms” to the Communists (Jenson 1991). The alliance between the FGDS and the PCF collapsed; the FGDS itself fell apart. As a result, each party on the left put up its own candidate and refused to form electoral pacts in the 1969 presidential elections. This situation meant that two right-wing candidates, Poher and de Gaulle, contested the second ballot run-off. The disastrous outcome of these elections for the Left provided further evidence that a change in electoral strategy was needed.

With the Left balkanized as never before during the Fifth Republic, a number of lessons cried out to be learnt from the disasters of 1969. First, [Socialist candidate Gaston] Deferre’s exclusively Centre-Left version of Socialism had been routed at the polls, securing indeed the lowest Socialist vote ever. Second, the Communist go-it-alone strategy was shown to be no way for that party to get a candidate through to the second round, despite a remarkably avuncular performance by Jacques Duclos. It had been amply demonstrated how not to play the presidential game, and the most certain long-term beneficiary of the Left’s fragmentation of 1969 was François Mitterrand, who had shown four years earlier how far a united Left could go. (Bell & Criddle 1984)

Thus, by the end of the 1960s, it had become apparent to the Left that there were no electorally viable alternatives to a left-wing alliance. The total number of votes cast for the Left as a whole had not dramatically declined in 1969. However, the failure to coordinate meant that the Left lost a huge number of seats. This result suggested that if the Left could only reach agreement, then they might achieve electoral success. In 1972, the Communists, the Socialists, and the small left-radical MRG successfully negotiated a ‘Common Program,’ in which they agreed upon a platform for an eventual left-wing government, as well as cooperation in future elections (Bell 2000; Frears & Parodi 1979; Johnson 1981). The Left as a whole advanced in the 1973 legislative elections, drawing higher than usual vote shares. The PCF was still the leader by a small margin, with 21.3% of the vote.
to the Socialists’ 20.4%. The PCF leadership, not yet worried about the increasing strength of the Socialist Party, backed the Left’s most viable presidential candidate (Mitterrand) in the 1974 presidential elections. Mitterrand led the vote in the first round of balloting before narrowly losing to the mainstream-Right candidate, Giscard d’Estaing; Mitterrand won 49.2% compared to Giscard d’Estaing’s 50.8%. Shortly thereafter, the Communist-Socialist alliance hit rocky ground because of shifts in the electoral support for the two parties.

Even though opinion polls in 1977 foreshadowed an almost certain victory for a united Left in the parliamentary elections of 1978, most analysts agree that the electoral coalition collapsed under the weight of strong distributional conflicts between the Communists and the Socialists. The Communist Party had agreed to the Common Program at a time when it was the largest party on the left and could expect to dominate a coalition government. However, the Socialist Party had been the chief beneficiary of the Common Program and had displaced the PCF as the dominant party on the left. The 1977 polls indicated that the Socialists could expect to win 35% of the vote compared to 20% for the Communists (Wright 1995, 425). From this perspective, Mitterrand’s claim in the early 1970s that his fundamental objective was to build a great Socialist Party on the terrain occupied by the Communists in order to demonstrate that “out of five million communist voters, three million can vote socialist” turned out to be remarkably prescient (Portelli 1994; Bergounioux & Grunberg 1992). The Socialists could now expect to call the shots in any left-wing coalition government. As Wright (1995, 426) states, “To the Communist leadership, such a prospect must have seemed a worse threat than a continuation of conservative rule.” Once the Communist leadership realized that the Socialist Party was getting nearly as much support as the PCF, they withdrew from the electoral alliance agreements in an attempt to arrest the Socialist Party’s growing momentum (Melchior 1993; Johnson 1981; Frears & Parodi 1979).

Ever since the late 1970s, the PCF has been fighting against Socialist hegemony on the left. This fight has meant refusing to form electoral coalitions with the Socialist Party prior to the first round of both presidential and legislative elections. Indeed, the PCF has sometimes taken steps to directly undermine the electoral advance of the Socialists. For example, the candidacy of the Communist Party leader Georges Marchais prior to the 1981 presidential elections “was an act of pure defiance. It was motivated by the desire to build up, as in the elections of 1978 and 1979, a Communist resistance to Socialist advance, and by a particular concern to establish a strong base from which to defend Communist positions in the municipal elections due in March 1983” (Bell & Cridde 1984).

Unlike the Left, the parties on the right have never formed an electoral coalition in presidential elections. Until the mid-1970s, the dominance of the Gaullist
party meant that there was never a need to form a coalition. In the early years of the Fifth Republic, de Gaulle had managed to sweep through the floating electorate on the right and in the center that had not been tied down by party allegiances under the Fourth Republic. He picked up 50% of the vote from the National Center of Independents and Peasants (CNIP), 30% from the People’s Republican Movement (MRP), and 30% from the Radical Party in the 1962 legislative elections, thereby wiping out most of the political center (Charlot 1971). The dominant role played by the Gaullist party only came to an end in 1974, when the party split following the death of the incumbent Gaullist president, Georges Pompidou. The majority of the party supported Jacques Chaban-Delmas in the 1974 presidential elections, while a minority followed the rising politician Jacques Chirac in supporting Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and his new party (UDF). This split initiated a long-standing power struggle between the Gaullists and the UDF for supremacy on the mainstream right.

Although Giscard won the 1974 presidential elections, the Gaullists remained the largest party in the legislature. As a result, Giscard relied on Gaullist support to implement his policy and was forced to appoint a Gaullist prime minister, Jacques Chirac. Although Chirac was a loyal prime minister at first, he soon began to assert himself as the real leader of the mainstream Right and as the only candidate capable of arresting the electoral rise of the Left. By 1976, the tension between the two men had become so great that Chirac resigned and positioned himself to challenge Giscard in future presidential elections (Portelli 1994). Following an acrimonious presidential campaign in 1981, first-round loser Chirac conspicuously failed to encourage his supporters to vote for Giscard in the second round (Bell 2000; Becker 1994; Ysmal 1989). The leaders of the two parties were fighting for supremacy of the Right more than they were fighting against their left-wing opponents (Bell 2000; Martin 1993). When Chirac was unable to advance to the second round, he may well have calculated that a second presidential mandate for the UDF leader would give the UDF too much of an advantage over his own party. Ultimately, Giscard lost the election, even though the aggregate score for the Right had been higher than that for the Left in the first round (Du Roy & Schneider 1982; Bréchon 1995).

Ongoing coordination failures on the right have had significant consequences in terms of its ability to enter government and control policy (Bréchon 1995; Ysmal 1989, 76–77). In fact, the Right was only able to control the government for six years in the period from mid-1981 to mid-2002. The Socialist Party was the primary beneficiary of this internal fighting. The most egregious example of conflicts on the right helping the Left was perhaps the 1981 presidential election, in which the Right lost control of the presidency for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic. Since then, voters have not coordinated on a single preferred
mainstream right party, and party elites have been largely unwilling to compromise. As a result, the Left was able to dominate French government for a couple of decades.

Given the high political cost and the incentives generated by the electoral system, it is hard to explain the unwillingness and inability among right-wing leaders to coordinate their pre-electoral strategies without emphasizing the distributional issues that separated them. After all, there were very few ideological differences between the two mainstream parties in this period (Golder 2000). Some scholars have pointed to the personal animosities or plain ‘stupidity’ of party leaders to explain the dearth of right-wing presidential coalitions (Bell 2000; Knapp 1999). However, these accounts are unconvincing for several reasons. For example, they cannot explain why the non-Communist Left managed to merge into the Socialist Party in 1969 and why the Left managed to form two presidential coalitions in 1965 and 1974 despite party leaders sharing personal animosities at least as large as those on the right (Alexandre 1977). Nor do they explain why the Right has been able to form successful coalitions for legislative elections.

**Legislative Elections** Table 5.1 illustrates that electoral coalitions on both the left and right have been much more common in legislative elections than in presidential elections. Although some pre-electoral agreements are concluded in particular districts in the first round of voting in legislative elections, most occur prior to the second round. Pre-electoral coalitions for legislative elections have become increasingly comprehensive over time on the mainstream left and right, and this fact has resulted in a sharp decrease in the number of second-round contests with more than two candidates. This case is shown quite clearly in table 5.2.

The catalyst for these increasingly comprehensive agreements was the conclusion of the 1972 Common Program committing the Socialists and the Communists to a policy of withdrawal in favor of the best-placed candidate on the left after the first round. The goal of this agreement was to avoid splitting the left-wing vote in the second round. It was remarkably successful, given that only one of the 81 second-round presidential contests with three or more candidates in 1973 involved multiple left-wing candidates. Seventy-eight of these second-round contests involved multiple mainstream-right candidates. Moreover, a left-wing candidate managed to win the seat in four of these 78 contests, even though the right-wing candidates won a majority of the votes. It was in response to the Left’s success in 1973 that the Gaullists and the UDF signed a ‘Majority Pact’ in June 1977 with a similar withdrawal policy (Jaffré 1980; Frears & Parodi 1979). As with the Left, the effect on the number of mainstream-right candidates competing in the second round was quite dramatic. Table 5.2 illustrates that there was only one second-round contest in 1978 with more than two candidates. While there
were 79 second-round contests with more than two candidates in 1997, all but three of these contests were the result of an extreme-right (FN) candidate maintaining his candidacy and not the result of multiple candidates from the mainstream left or right maintaining their candidacies.\(^9\)

In order to further match the success of the Left’s withdrawal agreements, the mainstream-right parties have made efforts to nominate a single right-wing candidate for the first round in each of the legislative elections since 1978.\(^10\) For instance, the Gaullists and the UDF agreed on 385 unique candidates for the first round of the 1981 elections (Bell 2000). The fact that nearly all of these ‘unique’ candidates were incumbents suggests that agreeing to allow sitting deputies to run unopposed from fellow moderate-Right politicians is one way that party elites on the right have been able to resolve distributional issues associated with electoral coalition formation. Of course, making such agreements is likely to work only in those districts where a reasonably popular deputy is seeking reelection. Despite attempts by party leaders to coordinate their electoral strategies through nomination agreements such as these, some politicians refuse to step down. Electoral contests where this situation occurs are referred to as unapproved primaries (*primaires sauvages*). For example, although the mainstream-Right parties designated over 450 unique candidates for the 1993 elections, many politicians who were not

### Table 5.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Threshold (% of Registered Voters)</th>
<th>Average Number of Candidates Eligible for 2nd Round</th>
<th>Number of 2nd Round Contests with More than Two Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>5(^*)</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>5(^*)</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^*\) indicates that the threshold is based on the number of actual votes cast rather than on the number of registered voters. Figures in columns three and four are calculated based on the official election results from the Ministry of the Interior.
selected decided to run anyway (Backman & Birenbaum 1993). On the whole, though, the pre-electoral coalitions (withdrawal and nomination agreements) between parties on the mainstream left and right have been successfully implemented and have been instrumental in reducing the number of candidates who compete in the second round of legislative elections. Indeed, the nomination agreement reached by the mainstream Right prior to the first round of the legislative elections in 2002 was the most comprehensive and successful electoral coalition in the history of the French Fifth Republic.  

One might argue that the sharp reduction in the number of second-round contests with more than two candidates after 1973 was caused by the introduction of a larger electoral threshold (12.5%) for the 1978 elections and not the increasing use of pre-electoral withdrawal agreements on the left and right. While it is fairly obvious that rising electoral thresholds have reduced the average number of candidates qualifying for the second round, table 5.2 suggests that the higher thresholds do not fully explain the drop-off in the number of second-round contests with more than two candidates. For example, the number of second-round contests with more than two candidates in 1997 (79) was similar to that in the 1960s, despite the use of the higher (12.5%) electoral threshold. As I have already stated, all but three of these 79 contests in 1997 involved an extreme-Right (FN) candidate maintaining his candidacy in the second round. The important point here is that these FN candidates were precisely those candidates who were not participants in any pre-electoral pact. Thus, it seems safe to say that both electoral thresholds and pre-electoral agreements have clearly helped the reduction in the number of second-round contests with more than two candidates.

Empirically, table 5.1 indicates that electoral coalitions are much more common in the second round of legislative elections than in the first. Why might this be the case? Traditional explanations have claimed that the French two-round majority system does not provide any incentives to form a coalition in the first round, because parties are free to compete in the first round and coordinate in the second (Massart 1999). This notion of how the electoral system works fits with the popular refrain that “in the first round, you choose; in the second round, you eliminate” (Cayrol 1971; Mény 1996). I believe that these traditional explanations are wrong.

The presence of electoral thresholds creates incentives for parties to form electoral coalitions in the first round rather than waiting until the second round. The most obvious reason is that a pre-electoral pact might be the only way for a party to make it into the second round. However, it is worth noting that there may be benefits to forming an electoral coalition in the first round even if a party already knows for sure that it is going to make it into the second round. Unlike American elections, in which there are often several months between party primaries and leg-
islative elections, there is only one week between the two in French elections. As Tsebelis (1990, 191) argues, this short delay means that if “the two partners of a coalition go too far in criticizing each other in the first round, they will not have time to change their strategies in the second round and heal the wounds (even if they wish to).” Parties could avoid these difficulties if they formed an electoral coalition in the first round. It must also be remembered that the transfer of votes between rounds from one candidate to another is often far from perfect. Thus, waiting until the second round before forming an electoral coalition can be a dangerous strategy (Cole & Campbell 1989). For example, Jaffré (1986) notes that right-wing losers in the first round do not necessarily offer their full support to the right-wing politician who continues on to the second round, even when this politician is facing a left-wing opponent. The fact that the number of parties competing in the first dual-ballot election in 1958 was half that typically found in the proportional representation elections of the Fourth Republic provides tentative evidence to suggest that party elites were already aware of these strategic incentives at this early date (Bourcek 1998, 119). It is for these reasons that the traditional explanation as to why electoral coalitions are more common in the second round is not entirely convincing.

A more plausible explanation for the observed variation in the timing of electoral coalitions in French legislative elections has to do with the distributional issues at stake in coalition formation. Though party leaders may have an incentive to coordinate their pre-electoral strategies in the first round and have a single candidate representing their camp, it is not always possible to find an agreement that suits everyone. Hanley (1999) makes this point when he states:

If proximate parties can agree on a single candidacy on the first ballot, their chances are maximized even more. Voters’ attention is focused on the sole real choice (assuming that not too many are put off by the withdrawal of their traditional champion), and the possibility of winning more seats at the first round increases. If désistement [withdrawal agreement] is one way of restricting competition, then first-ballot agreements are, potentially, an even better one. The main problem is to strike an agreement among the competitors that suits everyone.

Striking an agreement that suits everyone is the problem. Even if it is easier to reach pre-electoral agreements in legislative elections than in presidential ones, this does not mean that there are no distributional issues to overcome. For example, such agreements still require some candidates to step down in favor of candidates from other parties. To some extent, these distributional problems can be overcome in those districts in which one party has a clear competitive advantage over its
potential coalition partner. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is precisely what happens in those districts where electoral coalitions are formed in the first round (Hecht & Mandonnet 1987; Spoon 2004). However, it is not immediately obvious how party leaders can reach agreement in those districts where both candidates are competitive. After all, why would a candidate be willing to step down if he or she has a distinct possibility of progressing to the second round and winning? Waiting until the second round to form a coalition allows these divisive choices to be made by the electorate. All the party elites have to agree to is to abide by the decision made by the voters and support whichever candidate from their camp receives the most votes. It is arguable, then, that electoral coalitions are less common in the first round of legislative elections, because party leaders prefer to let the electorate solve distributional disputes for them.

5.1.3 Policy

Distributional disputes that lie at the heart of the coalition formation process help to explain why pre-electoral coalitions in France are more common in legislative elections than in presidential elections. However, they do not explain why the Left did not consistently engage in electoral coalition building prior to the 1970s or why the Right was more divided in the 1980s than it had been in the early years of the Fifth Republic. Distributional issues cannot explain this temporal variation. It is only by focusing on the policy differences among potential coalition partners and between opposing electoral coalitions that one can explain this observed variation. The bargaining model that I presented in the previous chapter suggests that potential coalition members with widely divergent ideologies will find it difficult to reach pre-electoral agreements. It also predicts that electoral coalitions are more likely to form when the opposition party or coalition is more extreme in its policy preferences. The history of electoral coalitions in France provides significant support for these predictions.

Differences within Electoral Coalitions One explanation for why left-wing electoral coalitions were relatively rare prior to the 1970s is that the Socialist Party was vehemently opposed to the Communist Party’s dogmatic allegiance to Stalinism. Many Socialists believed Guy Mollet’s famous remark that the French Communist Party was “not on the left, but in the East” (Du Roy & Schneider 1982, 25). During the height of the Cold War, the close ties between the PCF and the Soviet Union were a distinct electoral liability (Hanley 2002). Although the PCF was the largest party on the left, a majority of the French electorate opposed its ideology. This situation probably contributed to common perceptions of it as an undesirable coalition partner. The fact that the other parties on the left were small and
fragmented meant that these parties could not credibly offer the electorate a moderate policy if they were to govern with the Communists (Bell & Criddle 1984). As a result, the PCF found few willing electoral partners.

The Communists did begin to seek out some limited withdrawal arrangements for the second round of legislative elections following the disastrous results of the 1958 election. The PCF leaders had little choice but to reach some kind of electoral agreement with the other parties on the left if they were to avoid being marginalized. Although these withdrawal agreements were far from perfect, they were sufficiently effective to increase the number of seats received by the Communists from 10 in 1958 to 41 in 1962. The non-Communist parties on the left also benefited, increasing their number of seats from 65 to 106 (Williams, Goldey, & Harrison 1970).

Although the PCF abandoned its strategy of militant autonomy in favor of limited left-wing alliances for the 1962 elections, it was not until the reorganization of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party’s sustained policy of ‘destalinization’ and democratization in the late 1960s that pre-electoral agreements on the left became common. The revision of the PCF’s Stalinist policies derived from its desire to reenter mainstream politics, prevent the Socialists from drifting into an alliance with the centrist parties, and regain some of the popularity it had lost owing to its ‘betrayal’ of the student and worker uprising in Paris in 1968 and its timid reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Besides making a commitment to party pluralism, negotiated programs, and internal democratization, the Central Committee’s manifesto of Champigny-sur-Marne in December 1968 acknowledged that while the revolution remained an end, it was no longer a means (Gildea 1997). This revision of PCF ideology showed that the Communists had adopted a more conventional interpretation of electoral democracy and were willing to play by a set of coalitional rules that were more acceptable to its potential left-wing allies (Jenson 1991).

The reorganization of the Socialist Party also made electoral coalition formation on the left easier. In 1969, various non-Communist parties merged into the Socialist Party (PS). This move was seen as part of a larger plan to eventually contain the PCF within a wider left-wing alliance (Melchior 1993; Bell & Criddle 1984; Johnson 1981; Frears & Parodi 1979). By this stage, the leaders of the moderate left-wing parties had accepted the conclusion that a broad electoral coalition encompassing the entire Left was a necessary prerequisite to winning national elections. To some extent, this reorganization of the Socialist Party created a greater ideological affinity between the PS and the PCF. The new Socialist Party united three currents of the non-Communist Left that each had some sort of ideological affinity with the ‘reformed’ Communist party. The PS accepted the dogma of the necessary ‘break with Capitalism,’ and the PCF accepted that democracy would
not be replaced by a dictatorship of the proletariat if the Left won. This acceptance made it much easier for the party elites to form a programmatic alliance in 1972.

Despite these ideological changes, it would be wrong to overstate the extent to which the PCF and the PS shared similar policy objectives. Moderate voters on the left were never entirely willing to vote for the Communists (Frears & Parodi 1979; Williams, Goldey, & Harrison 1970). Since Communist voters were typically willing to support Socialist candidates, the shifting of the electoral fortunes of the two parties is not entirely surprising. By the mid-1970s, the PS attracted more votes than the PCF did. Leaders on the right still played on the electorate’s fear of Communist rule, as this had always proven to be an effective campaign tactic. The rupture of the left-wing coalition prior to the 1978 legislative elections was particularly advantageous for the Right (Hanley 2002; Du Roy & Schneider 1982; Fabre 1978). The PCF actually campaigned against the Socialists, and many moderate voters seemed hesitant to support a potentially unstable PS-PCF government (Jaffré 1980). The day after the first round of the legislative elections, the Socialists and the Communists tried to reestablish their electoral alliance (Lavau & Mossuz-Lavau 1980). However, by then it was too late. By not agreeing to the electoral coalition publicly and further ahead of time, the transfer of votes was not sufficiently effective to obtain the left-wing victory that had been expected (Bell 2000). Jaffré (1980) argues that “the incessant quarrels between the Communist party and the Socialists . . . destroyed the Left’s credibility as an alternative governing coalition [in 1978]. An important segment of public opinion felt that Communist participation in a Government would have a negative effect in many areas.” The election results confirmed the Socialist Party’s new dominance on the left—the PS received 24.4% of the vote, compared to 20.5% for the PCF. From this point on, there was little the PCF could do to prevent increasing levels of support for the Socialists. In the end, being the smaller partner of a victorious Left coalition may have seemed better than continuing with the Right’s conservative policies (Johnson 1981). This idea helps to explain the PCF’s willingness to form cohesive second-round (though still not first-round) electoral coalitions with the Socialists through the 1980s and 1990s.

While ideological differences have often made the formation of left-wing electoral coalitions difficult, this has never really been the case on the right. Among the elites of the moderate Right, there are “very few real differences of policy” (Frears & Parodi 1979, 23–24). There is also strong evidence that the electorates of the Gaullist party (RPR) and the UDF share similar policy preferences and are willing to support candidates from either party. At least one poll asked RPR and UDF voters in 1986 whom they would vote for in the upcoming legislative election according to two different hypotheses: (i) if the UDF and RPR ran separate lists, and (ii) if the UDF and RPR ran a single list. Using voter intentions and sim-
ulations, pollsters concluded that the unified list would receive 15 more seats than the two parties could expect to receive running separately. Given that the Right only had a majority of two seats in the 1986 elections, an extra 15 seats would have been a significant gain (Bourlanges 1986). Other survey data have consistently shown that most voters on the mainstream right were in favor of a union of the two parties (Jaffré 1986; Charlot 1993; Wilson 1998; Duhamel 2000). These survey data were echoed by a growing number of French political scientists and commentators (Duhamel 1995, 319–20; Donegani & Sadoun 1992; Duverger 1996, 473; Jaffré 1986, 66; Wilson 1998, 40; Cole & Campbell 1990, 133).

The 1995 presidential election provided further evidence that the mainstream Right cannot be separated into two parties with substantive policy differences. The UDF failed to present its own candidate and simply divided its support between two RPR candidates, Jacques Chirac and Edouard Balladur. Although the UDF split its support between these two candidates, there were no real policy differences between them (Mazey 1996, 13; Fysh 1996, 74; Goldey 1997, 56; Gaffney 1997, 78). The weight of the evidence suggests that there was little division between the ‘Orleanist’ UDF and the ‘Bonapartist’ RPR in these elections. Instead, it seemed that the divisions in the UDF were related to what they expected each RPR candidate to offer them if he won.

If ideological divisions among potential coalition partners were the only determinant of how easy it is to reach pre-electoral agreements, then the Right should have found it easier to form electoral coalitions than the Left. The fact that the Right was much more divided in the 1980s and 1990s than earlier, even though the UDF and RPR remained ideologically similar, therefore suggests that other factors are also important. The bargaining model in the previous chapter suggests that the ideological position of the likely opposition party or coalition might be able to explain this temporal variation in electoral coalition formation on the right.

**Differences between Electoral Coalitions** The French case offers considerable evidence that electoral coalitions are easier to form when parties face a more extreme opposition party. For example, one explanation for why the Right was more divided in the 1980s and 1990s than it had been previously focuses on the collapse of the PCF as the dominant left-wing party in the 1970s. The threat posed by the Communists was largely responsible for the rise of the Gaullist hegemony on the right and the electoral collapse of the centrist parties (CNIP, MRP, and Radicals) between 1958 and 1962. Moderate voters were simply unwilling to support center parties if doing so risked increasing the likelihood of a Communist government. Moreover, vote transfers on the right in the second round of legislative elections were more effective when the Left candidate was a Communist rather than a Socialist (Frears & Parodi 1979; Williams, Goldey, & Harrison 1970). In
sum, electoral coordination on the right was strong when there was a realistic threat of a Communist-led government. It was only when the Socialists had obviously become the dominant party on the left that the non-Gaullist parties on the mainstream right broke away from the Gaullists to form their own united party (UDF) in 1978. Right-wing parties no longer had to worry about a Communist-led opposition coming to power if they failed to sufficiently coordinate their electoral strategies. The moderate nature of Socialist policies in the 1980s and 1990s has not created overwhelming incentives for the Right to overcome its internal distributional conflicts. Mitterrand’s experiment with nationalization, state subsidies, and minimum wage increases between 1981 and 1983 was relatively short-lived. Since then, the Socialists have consistently implemented moderate neoliberal economic and social policies (Schmidt 1996).

To some extent, the fact that the mainstream parties on the left and right are now so similar has increased the relative importance of distributional conflicts in French politics. Individual party leaders seem to be less willing to make compromises under these circumstances. In the 2002 presidential elections, there were nine candidates representing the Left. The parties on the left no longer felt obliged to support a single left-wing candidate. In fact, many of the extremist parties on the left justified presenting their own candidates by saying that this was the only way to give the electorate a meaningful choice. Although extreme-left candidates have typically been inconsequential, they gathered so much support in the 2002 presidential elections that the Left lost its realistic chance to regain control of the presidency. Prior to the election, it was not clear whether the Left or Right would win the presidency. Thus, it was all the more devastating a blow to the Left that their candidate was unable to advance to the second round because so many Left voters turned to parties on the extreme left.

The reaction of mainstream parties to the rise of the extremist National Front (FN) also underscores the importance of policy differences to coalition formation. Parties on the extreme right in France have typically failed to enjoy electoral success or political longevity. For example, while the Poujadists managed to win 11.7% of the national vote in 1956, their support had diminished to 1.2% by 1958, and they did not compete in any other elections. Jean-Marie Le Pen’s National Front represents an exception. Since its breakthrough in the early 1980s, it has managed to consistently win over 10% of the vote in legislative elections. Although the FN’s electorate does come from both the traditional left and right, most FN voters place themselves on the right of the ideological spectrum. This situation has put pressure on the UDF and the RPR, since they have been losing voters to the moderate Left and the extreme Right. The RPR and the UDF have also been deeply aware that the electorate is unlikely to judge them favorably if their ongoing electoral divisions allow the National Front to win seats in the National
This situation explains why the leaders of the moderate Right have consistently made public statements denouncing local alliances with the extreme Right.

As time has passed, these developments have increasingly forced the leaders of the mainstream Right to overcome their remaining coordination problems. As I mentioned in the previous section, the leaderships of the two mainstream-Right parties have attempted to coordinate on a single candidate in the first round of legislative elections. Recently, this is less a reaction to the Left as it might have been in the early days of the republic than a reaction to the threat of the extreme-Right opposition gaining national power. For example, it was in response to Le Pen’s strong showing in the 2002 presidential elections that the Right formed the most comprehensive and cohesive pre-electoral coalition to have emerged during the Fifth Republic. Partly as a result, the FN candidates were unable to win any seats in the 2002 legislative elections despite the party’s strong showing in the presidential elections a few weeks earlier.

The rise of the extreme Right has even led to pre-electoral agreements between the Left and the Right. If the National Front appears to have a realistic chance of winning a legislative seat, then the Left and Right occasionally form a ‘Republican Front,’ in which the best-placed candidate from either camp is given a free run to compete against the FN candidate in the second round. The increasingly similar position of the mainstream parties on the left and the right has led to a situation in which the moderate Right is arguably closer to the moderate Left in ideological terms than to the anti-system FN. In sum, there is strong evidence that the ideological position of opposition parties influences the ease with which electoral coalitions form.

5.1.4 Summary

The French analysis is replete with instances where pre-electoral strategies on the left and right have had a significant impact on who becomes president, which party wins a legislative majority, and who gets to implement policy. It is impossible to deny that electoral coalitions matter in important substantive ways to French voters. Although electoral coalition failure is often blamed on the personal animosities or plain stupidity of party leaders, the evidence presented here suggests that there are some underlying systematic factors that influence electoral coalition formation.

While the electoral systems employed in presidential and legislative elections create incentives for party leaders to coordinate pre-electoral strategies, it seems that difficulties overcoming distributional issues have meant that electoral coalitions are much rarer in presidential elections than in legislative ones. As I indicated in the pre-
vious chapter, party leaders pay close attention to the electoral viability of pre-electoral coalitions when making their decisions whether to coordinate their electoral strategies. If a potential electoral coalition is unlikely to attract significant votes, then distributional conflicts become a moot point. The early reluctance on the part of the Socialists to join forces with the Communists illustrates this point, since the Socialists feared that the coalition might end up losing votes, with disgruntled voters moving toward the Center and the moderate Right. When pre-electoral coalitions look like they are going to be electoral failures, they soon collapse. For example, Deferre’s attempt to create a coalition between the Left and the Center in the early 1960s failed because it did not attract a sufficiently large number of voters.

As my theoretical model predicts, ideological differences within coalitions can influence the ease with which pre-electoral agreements are reached. For example, the history of the Left in France suggests that the growing ideological affinity between the Socialists and the Communists was important for reaching an agreement on the Common Program in the early 1970s. Note, though, that the history of the Right shows that ideological affinity between potential coalition partners is not sufficient to guarantee that an electorally beneficial coalition will form. Also, as predicted, electoral coalitions form more easily if opposition parties are ideologically extreme. This finding was illustrated by the fact that the French mainstream Right was more willing to overcome their divisions in the 1960s and 1970s, when they faced a powerful Communist Party, than in the 1980s and 1990s, when they faced a powerful Socialist Party.

The French analysis indicates that the timing of electoral coalition formation matters. For example, the failure of the Socialists and the Communists to form a pre-electoral coalition until late in the game in 1978 clearly benefited the Right. In contrast, the Right’s early and very public announcement that they would form a coalition in the legislative elections of 2002 bore fruit with a large legislative majority. These examples provide some support for my decision to add a cost of delay into the two-stage bargaining model in the previous chapter.

Finally, when French party leaders choose unique candidates prior to the first round of legislative elections, the number of districts given to a particular party is largely in proportion to that party’s overall level of national support. Thus, when the small Left Radical Party forms first-round coalitions with the larger Socialist Party, the Socialists get to put up candidates in the lion’s share of the districts. Similar patterns have emerged, with first-round coalitions between the Socialists and the Greens in the elections of 1997 (Boy & Villalba 1999) and 2002 (Spoon 2004). The fact that the bargains reached between party leaders in France seem to reflect the relative electoral strength of parties provides some support for my assumption in the bargaining model that office benefits and coalition policy are determined by the proportional size of the players.
5.2 South Korea (Sixth Republic)

The history of pre-electoral coalitions in France suggests that the assumptions and implications of the theoretical model presented earlier are plausible. But are they generalizable? In this section, I briefly evaluate the extent to which the model can also help explain the history of electoral coalitions in South Korea. There has been enormous variation in electoral coalition formation in South Korea since the first democratic elections in 1987. At some points in time, pre-electoral agreements have been reached between feuding party leaders, despite striking personal animosities. Yet it has also been the case that ideologically similar, pro-democracy presidential candidates preferred to compete against each other rather than form a winning coalition against the official candidate of the former military dictatorship. As in the French case, conflict over the distribution of office benefits plays a central role in explaining the variation in coalition formation. Unlike France, though, electoral coalitions have been relatively common in presidential elections. I argue that the use of constitutional term limits in the South Korean case reduces the distributional conflict that plagues party leaders who are deciding whether to form a coalition in presidential elections.

5.2.1 Office

South Korea has not been a democracy in much of the postwar period. It was arguably under authoritarian rule, even in the ‘democratic’ period of Syngman Rhee between 1948–60 (Henderson 1988). After a brief flirtation with democracy following Rhee’s downfall, military rule was imposed. It was not until 16 years later, in 1987, that the first direct presidential elections were held in South Korea. The intense coalition negotiations that have preceded every presidential election since then have centered on the distribution of office benefits.

Consider the transitional elections of 1987. As one might expect, the only important cleavage in this election was between the supporters of the authoritarian regime and those of the democratic opposition. The presidential election was to be held under simple plurality rule, and it was clear that a majority of the electorate preferred the democratic opposition to General Roh Tae Woo, the official candidate of the military regime. General Roh was the hand-picked successor of the military dictator, President Chun Doo Hwan. The wide gap between the pro-democracy policies that the opposition camp wanted to implement and the policies that the military incumbent preferred created strong incentives for the opposition to present a single candidate. However, the pro-democracy camp split its support between two leaders of the democracy movement, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung. In spite of the significance of the elections and the tremendous
pressure on the two pro-democracy candidates to form an electoral alliance, neither would yield. In the end, General Roh won the 1987 elections with 36.6% of the vote. Kim Young Sam came in second with 28.0%, and Kim Dae Jung came in third with 27.0%. Kim Jong Pil, a leader in the 1961 military coup and former prime minister during the military dictatorship, came in last with 8.1% of the vote. It is typically assumed that had the pro-democracy forces united behind a single candidate, then they would have won these transitional elections (Oh 1999, 109–10; Han 1997, 52–55; Nam 1989, 317; Dong 1988, 170, 185–86; Kihl 1988, 15).

One explanation for why the pro-democracy candidates failed to form a pre-electoral coalition in these elections focuses on the uncertainty that surrounded the electoral outcome. Electoral uncertainty tends to be high in new democracies, where polls are often unreliable and voters, as well as candidates, do not have previous election results on which to base their expectations. Thus, one interpretation of the 1987 pre-election coordination failure is that Kim Dae Jung thought his prospects were so ‘favorable’ in a four-party race that he was willing to split from Kim Young Sam and form his own opposition party (Kim 2000b). According to one country expert, “It appears that both camps truly believed that their candidates would win the election even with both Kims running” (Kim 1997, 91).

However, others have argued that the opinion polls prior to the election clearly indicated that if both candidates were to remain in the presidential race, then the pro-democracy forces would likely lose (Kihl 1988b). Why would the two opposition leaders take this chance? Remember that both Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung considered themselves to be the legitimate leader of a democratic South Korea. In terms of the theoretical model outlined in the previous chapter, it may be the case that the expected payoff from running alone was high enough, given that the election outcome was in doubt that neither candidate was willing to withdraw. Certainly, the cost of reaching an electoral agreement was high for the candidate who would be forced to withdraw from the competition. After all, stepping aside in this foundational election likely meant running the risk of relinquishing all political power in the future. The candidates may not have considered a potential electoral loss from running a separate campaign to be such a terrible thing, especially if they could increase their bargaining power in future elections by polling a significant percentage of the vote. In many respects, this situation mirrors the competition between Jacques Chirac and Valéry Giscard d’Estaing for supremacy over the moderate Right in the 1980s in France. In both situations, party leaders were willing to suffer the loss associated with having the opposition implement policy in order to guarantee their survival as influential political actors.

The Korean political scene has witnessed a whirlwind of party mergers and splits since the transitional elections in 1987. To some extent, this situation has
been aided by the fact that there is an unusual absence of policy differentiation among the various parties (Kim 2000b; Jaung 2000; Oh 1999; Park 1990). The issue of democracy has been absent from electoral politics since the 1987 elections, and no divisive subject other than geographical affiliation has really emerged to take its place. With no substantive ideological or policy differences, political competition in South Korea has been characterized primarily by personal animosity and long-standing political enmity.

Despite this situation, personal animosities have regularly been put aside in the pursuit of votes and office. For example, Kim Young Sam decided in 1990 to merge his party with those of two former members of the military regime, President Roh and Kim Jong Pil. Kim Jong Pil became the party leader, and Kim Young Sam was rewarded with becoming the party’s next presidential candidate. This coalition emerged despite the fact that Kim Young Sam had been imprisoned, placed under house arrest, and expelled from the National Assembly during the military regime’s rule. Similarly, despite having nearly been executed by the military regime in 1971 (before being put under house arrest, imprisoned, and sent into exile), Kim Dae Jung later formed an electoral alliance with Kim Jong Pil for the 1996 legislative elections and 1997 presidential elections (Oberdorfer 2001). These examples represent just a few of the cases in which personal enemies put aside their differences to form electoral coalitions. The history of these coalitions in Korea represents as compelling a case as can be made against those who would explain pre-electoral coordination failures purely in terms of personal animosities between party leaders.

Unlike France, pre-electoral coalitions in presidential elections are common in South Korea. This fact raises the question as to how party leaders in Korea have been able to overcome the distributional issues that lie at the heart of presidential coalition formation, whereas their French counterparts have not. Part of the explanation for this empirical difference might lie in the absence of ideological divisions between Korean parties. While there is presumably some truth to this statement, it is important to remember that a lack of ideological conflict also characterized several instances of coordination failure within the French mainstream Right. Perhaps a more compelling explanatory factor is the fact that according to the Korean constitution, the president is permitted to serve only a single five-year term (Kihl 1988a).

Consider the 1990 coalition between President Roh, Kim Jong Pil, and Kim Young Sam. Although the presidency is by far the most important position in Korea, the legislature does have the ability to hold up legislation if it is controlled by the opposition (Morris 1996). It was because he did not enjoy a majority following the 1988 legislative elections that President Roh eventually suggested merging his party with those of Kim Young Sam and Kim Jong Pil. The new party
that emerged in 1990 controlled a majority of the seats in the National Assembly. The point here is that Kim Young Sam and Kim Jong Pil were probably more willing to enter into this sort of electoral arrangement because they knew that President Roh could not run again for office and would retire from politics at the end of his term. It is precisely because a president can stay in office for only a single term that the promise of stepping down in favor of one's coalition partner becomes somewhat credible. In this case, President Roh had promised to step down and support Kim Young Sam as the new party’s official presidential candidate in the 1992 elections. It seems fairly clear that Kim Young Sam would have been less willing to merge his party with that of President Roh without the institutional feature of term limits.

In fact, pre-electoral agreements of this sort are quite common. Kim Jong Pil had formed his own party in 1992 but was able to command only about 10% of the vote. While this result was certainly not enough to win an election on his own, it was sufficiently large to be useful in an electoral coalition. Kim Jong Pil eventually formed an electoral alliance with another former enemy, Kim Dae Jung. Kim Dae Jung had finished second to Kim Young Sam in the 1992 presidential elections. His problem was that although he typically won almost all of the votes in his native Cholla region, he was unsuccessful elsewhere.\footnote{Kim 2000a} As a result, Kim Dae Jung was unlikely to ever win a national election on his own. The pre-electoral coalition bargain reached between these two men involved Kim Dae Jung becoming the presidential candidate for the 1997 elections and Kim Jong Pil becoming the prime minister, with the right to choose his own cabinet.\footnote{Kim 2000b}

President Kim Young Sam was unable to run for reelection in 1997, and his party was unable to field a unique candidate against the Kim Dae Jung-Kim Jong Pil electoral alliance. Instead, two candidates, Lee Hoi Chang and Rhee In-je, competed for the votes of the president’s party. Lee Hoi Chang was able to co-opt a fifth candidate, Cho Soon, into an electoral alliance of his own. Cho agreed to merge his party with that of Lee Hoi Chang and withdraw his candidacy from the presidential race. In exchange, Cho became leader of the new party, a position that was ‘guaranteed’ for two years (Kim 2000a). The results of the 1997 presidential election were close: Kim Dae Jung received 39.7% of the votes, Lee Hoi Chang 38.2%, and Rhee In-je 18.9% (Kim 2000b, 61). Kim Dae Jung clearly benefited from the alliance with Kim Jong Pil. His support from Kim Jong Pil’s Ch’ungch’ong region was 20% higher than in any previous election. Given the slim margin of victory, it seems likely that the support from Kim Jong Pil’s region was instrumental in finally getting Kim Dae Jung elected (Kim 2000b).

The fact that a coalition partner can be promised a prime ministerial position and support as the official presidential candidate in future elections with some
credibility, thanks to the institutional feature of term limits, has clearly facilitated the formation of electoral coalitions during presidential elections in South Korea. Term limits are important because they make the presidential office more divisible across time. They are also influential because they place a constraint on the power of the president. By weakening the power of the office that party leaders are fighting over, term limits make it easier for them to compromise.

It is important to remember, though, that even if term limits make electoral coalition proposals more credible, they do not make them sacrosanct. For example, Kim Young Sam offered the role of prime minister and future presidential candidate to Kim Jong Pil in exchange for his support and that of his electorate in the 1992 elections. However, following his successful election with 42% of the vote, President Kim Young Sam changed his mind about his successor. He announced in the middle of his term that he now supported a general policy of 'generational change.' This declaration enabled him to fill most of the leadership posts with his own supporters and consolidate his grip on his party and on the government (Kim 2000b). This experience made Kim Jong Pil very wary of future coalitions, and it was only after "two years of an intense courtship" that Kim Dae Jung was able to get him to agree to his 'power sharing' plan for the 1997 elections outlined above (Kim 2000b).

Even if term limits ease the coalition formation process in Korea, they can only go so far in helping party leaders overcome their conflicting preferences concerning the distribution of office benefits. Party leaders still have to agree on who is going to step down in favor of whom. It turns out that South Korean presidential candidates have employed highly imaginative mechanisms to make these types of decisions easier. For example, in the 2002 presidential elections, two presidential candidates used opinion polls to decide which of them would withdraw from the race in an attempt to avoid defeat by a third candidate. Poll results indicated that the opposition leader Lee Hoi Chang would win in a three-way race, but that either Roh Moo Hyun or Chung Mong Joon might beat Lee in a two-way race. The second- and third-placed candidates agreed to form an electoral coalition. The question of who would withdraw from the race was decided by polling a sample of the electorate after a televised debate between Roh and Chung. According to the few thousand people voting in the private poll, Chung came in second, and he promptly withdrew from the presidential campaign. Chung began acting as Roh's campaign manager, and it was widely assumed that Roh had promised him significant spoils if they won the election. It is interesting to note that Chung and Roh used the electorate to take the decision about who was going to run for the presidency out of their hands in a similar way to how the French parties use the electoral vote in the first round of legislative elections to decide who is going to withdraw prior to the second round.
5.2.2 Summary

This brief analysis of South Korea provides further evidence of the important role played by office-seeking preferences in the formation of electoral coalitions. Other than the foundational election of 1987, none of the Korean presidential elections have had a significant policy element to them. Thus, policy did not hinder coalitions from forming. Nor did extreme ideological positions on the part of one party encourage opposing coalitions to form, as occurred in France. Distributional conflict was the only significant issue in the coalition formation process. In 1987, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung both preferred to fight each other instead of guaranteeing a victory for the pro-democracy forces against the incumbent military dictator. Quite possibly, this preference was because neither wanted to jeopardize his future role in a democratic South Korea. Since that election, various electoral coalitions have formed between former adversaries. One factor that has facilitated electoral coalition formation in presidential elections is the use of term limits that, in practice, enable the benefits of the presidential office to be divided across time.

5.3 Conclusion

The theory presented in the previous chapter suggests that the distribution of office benefits, the ideological location of potential coalition partners, and the ideological location of opposition parties play an important role in the formation of electoral coalitions. It is easier to reach an agreement to form a pre-electoral coalition if the parties that are bargaining have similar policy preferences. Also, a large enough ‘pie’ of expected office benefits is crucial. This requirement is because each party leader will compare the expected share of office benefits and the utility of the coalition policy if part of an electoral coalition to what he or she could get by competing independently. Though party leaders will trade off the two types of benefits, the bottom line is that they agree to join an electoral coalition only if they expect doing so to make them better off. They will be more willing to sacrifice some office benefits if necessary and join an electoral coalition when they expect that by doing so they will be able to prevent an ideologically ‘extreme’ opposition group from coming to power. By providing incentives to form electoral coalitions, electoral institutions that favor larger parties will also play an important role here. These hypotheses were supported in this chapter with evidence from France and South Korea.

The French analysis illustrated that parties had to be sufficiently ideologically compatible for coalitions to form. For instance, the Socialists and the Communists were willing to consider forming electoral coalitions only after their ideological
positions drew sufficiently close to each other in the 1970s. There was also compelling evidence that coalition formation was facilitated if the policy proposed by the likely opposition was extreme. Right-wing parties and voters in France were able to coordinate much more effectively when the Communist Party was considered the dominant party on the left. Likewise, moderate parties on the left and the right occasionally coordinate their pre-electoral strategies if doing so will help defeat a candidate from the extreme right.

In addition to policy and electoral incentives, the history of electoral coalitions in both France and South Korea clearly show that the divisibility of office benefits matters. The bargaining model suggests that it is easier to form electoral coalitions when the benefits of office can be divided in a manner that makes members of both parties better off than they would have been if competing independently. Evidence in support of this idea comes from the fact that electoral agreements have been much more common in legislative elections in France than in presidential ones. One explanation for this variation across elections has to do with the fact that there are nearly 600 offices and government portfolios to share out in legislative elections compared to a single office in presidential elections. It is simply easier to divide office benefits in legislative elections to the satisfaction of both parties in a coalition.

While forming pre-electoral coalitions is easier in legislative elections, the Korean case illustrates that presidential electoral coalitions can form in certain circumstances. In particular, the use of term limits in South Korea makes electoral coalition formation easier by providing for the temporal divisibility of the presidential office. This example suggests that institutional features that can reduce distributional disputes between potential coalition partners will make electoral coalitions more likely. Evidence from both South Korea and France indicate that party leaders try to avoid conflict over the distribution of office by allowing voters to choose the coalition candidate when they can. The institutional feature of the French two-round electoral system helps in this regard. In general, electoral rules that allow voters to vote for more than one party should be especially conducive to the formation of pre-electoral coalitions. Finally, the evidence from France and South Korea suggests that party leaders’ personal animosity and myopia, which receive so much emphasis in the description of campaigns and politics in particular countries, play no systematic role in pre-electoral coalition formation. This argument is particularly striking in the South Korean analysis. Indeed, the old adage that ‘politics makes strange bedfellows’ is perhaps the more appropriate observation.