Why do some parliamentary democracies, such as Britain, manage to produce highly durable governments, whereas others, such as Italy, are marked by rapid government turnover? While the government stability associated with Britain's "Westminster model" elicits public confidence in and respect for the model, the contrasting record of what is essentially the same regime model in Italy more often elicits criticism and ridicule. Through a wide-ranging quantitative investigation, this book seeks to unravel the puzzling, Janus-faced nature of parliamentary democracy and answer a central question of contemporary political science: what determines how long governments survive in parliamentary democracies?

Government survival is important because it constitutes an essential component of the overall functioning of parliamentary democracies. It is also closely associated with the introduction to the discipline of event history analysis, a highly promising statistical methodology. The investigation utilizes this methodology on the most comprehensive data set yet assembled on governments, comprising hundreds of variables measured for sixteen West European parliamentary democracies over the entire postwar period to 1989. The results fundamentally challenge the central thread of current theorizing on government survival and point to an alternative conceptualization of the relationship among governments, parties, and voters. Within this rich statistical portrait, the author attempts, ultimately, to account for the two faces of parliamentary government.

# GOVERNMENT SURVIVAL IN PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACIES

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# Preface

This book has its genesis in a confluence of enticing circumstances: the existence of an important but puzzling phenomenon as old as parliamentary democracy itself, the development over time of a profusion of incompatible explanations for the phenomenon, and the recent emergence of a methodology holding out the promise of resolving the confusion. The phenomenon in question is the well-known tendency for government survival rates to vary enormously both within and across parliamentary systems. If one accepts that the length of time governments survive strongly affects their ability to govern effectively, then it follows that our understanding of parliamentary democracy depends very much on the explanation of this variation. Identifying the correct explanation, however, has not proved to be straightforward. It has often been assumed, to cite one major example, that unbridgeable ideological or policy differences among member parties constitute a prime source of coalition government collapses, yet a recent survey (Laver and Schofield 1990:155) finds no systematic evidence to support the claim. To add fuel to the fire, there appeared in the 1980s a major school of thought that asserted that government dissolutions are essentially random and therefore unamenable to causal analysis. Fortunately, the past few years have also seen the introduction of a statistical methodology, event history analysis, that is capable of reconciling causal and random approaches, and a good deal else as well.

Any methodology is only as good as the data to which it is applied. The empirical investigation of government survival has been inhibited by the tendency for various hypotheses to be tested by their proponents on data sets expressly tailored for that purpose; alternative approaches, especially when they involved factors that are difficult to measure such as ideological diversity, were only rarely investigated. If the potential of event history analysis was to be exploited to the full, a much more comprehensive data set clearly would have to be developed, one that encompassed a variety of ways of defining controversial concepts and a broad range of potential causes. The data set that I created for this study ultimately included, in its largest form, well over 1,200 variables. Many of these, to be sure, were intermediate constructs used to create other variables, alternative versions incorporating different definitions of key concepts, or measurements of the same variable at different times; nevertheless, the range of causal factors remains considerable.

Although this study is concerned mainly with the empirical testing of these potential causes, it would be disingenuous of me to leave the impression that the approach is totally inductive. I have been persuaded for some time that the alleged failure of the ideological diversity hypothesis had less to do with its merits than with the inadequacy of the efforts to test it; a good deal of this study is therefore devoted to developing and testing a range of measures of the concept based on evidence from voters, political "experts," and party electoral manifestos. In other areas, to be sure, the approach is much more inductive; for instance, the introduction of evolving economic conditions, which event history analysis makes possible, proceeds in this fashion because very little work has been done in this area. Despite the inductive quality of much of the investigation, the model that ultimately emerges embodies, I believe, a reasonably coherent view of government survival. In the final chapter I attempt to articulate that view.

I have been aided in this effort by a number of institutions and individuals. A grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada gave me time to develop the data set, which incorporates the postwar experiences of sixteen West European parliamentary systems, and to launch the analysis. My knowledge of event history methodology benefited from an extended visit to the European University Institute in Florence, made possible by Professor Jean Blondel. Stanford University, through the auspices of its Center for European Studies, granted me the use of its facilities throughout the 1990–1 academic year. Stephen Easton, an economist at Simon Fraser University, proved an invaluable and tireless ally in the task of sorting out the various ideas, hunches, problems, and conundrums that cropped up in the course of the research. George Tsebelis of the University of California, Los Angeles, offered helpful criticism, especially of the final chapter, in his capacity as a manuscript referee. Kaare Strom of the University of California, San Diego, provided me with a copy of his own data set on parliamentary governments, making it possible for me to undertake some analytical work before my own data were ready. Needless to say, none of these individuals bears any responsibility for the final form of the book. Finally, the *American Political Science Review* (Warwick 1992b), the *American Journal of Political Science* (Warwick 1992c; Warwick and Easton 1992), and *Comparative Political Studies* (Warwick 1992a) allowed me to reproduce portions of the research reported in their pages. Readers who are familiar with those articles will find that what is presented here not only expands upon, but very substantially amends, those earlier efforts.