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Economics and disproportionality: the determinants of early elections in four parliamentary democracies

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University of Iowa

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ECONOMICS AND DISPROPORTIONALITY: THE DETERMINANTS OF
EARLY ELECTIONS IN FOUR PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACIES

by

Howard Bartlett Sanborn, IV

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Political Science
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2009

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Douglas K. Madsen

ABSTRACT

In this analysis, I investigate the causes of early elections in four parliamentary democracies across the world: Great Britain, Australia, Japan, and New Zealand. While I consider a number of explanations for the decisions to hold early elections, I find most theoretical and statistical support for Smith's (2003; 2004) informational thesis. He maintains that governments look to future economic conditions when making their timing decision. This approach, however, also leaves open the possibility that other, non-economic factors can explain why prime ministers call elections earlier than is necessary. I argue that the degree of disproportionality, the measured gap between a party's vote share and seat share, is a key attribute to explain the early election decision. When prime ministers weigh their decision to dissolve government, they cannot assess the effect of changes in their support in the population as accurately when a high degree of disproportionality is present. Using survival analysis, I find some support for a comprehensive attributes and events approach. New Zealand proves an exception; governments tend to fail sooner when high levels of disproportionality are present. This appears to be a result of particular factors related to disproportionality as a political issue, leading to electoral reform in 1996.

Abstract Approved: _____

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Title and Department

Date

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH. D. THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES		iv
CHAPTER		
I.	ECONOMICS, DISPROPORTIONALITY AND THE TIMING OF ELECTIONS	1
	Gordon Brown and the Election that Wasn't	1
	Literature Review	5
	Government Termination	6
	Election Timing	10
	Informational Thesis: The Brown Government	19
	The Confluence of Attributes and Events	22
	Attributes: Disproportionality	33
	Attributes: Government Strength	41
	Discussion	44
II.	CASE SELECTION, DATA, AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS	49
	Introduction	49
	The Cases	50
	Institutional Constraints	58
	Methods: Survival Analysis	62
	Main Variables	70
	The Data	77
	Discussion	78
III.	ELECTION TIMING IN TWO MAJORITARIAN DEMOCRACIES	81
	Introduction	81
	United Kingdom	82
	Australia	85
	Analysis	89
	Bicameralism	98
	Discussion	102
IV.	ELECTION TIMING IN CONDITIONS OF CONTRASTING DISPROPORTIONALITY	111
	Introduction	111
	Japan	112
	New Zealand	116

Comparison of Japan and New Zealand	121
Electoral Reform in Japan: The Switch to MMM	126
Electoral Reform in New Zealand: The Switch to MMP	128
Analysis	132
Discussion	146
V. CONCLUSION	157
Introduction	157
Institutions	161
Methods	164
Disproportionality and Uncertainty	165
Government Strength	166
Expectations of Elections	170
Discussion	174
BIBLIOGRAPHY	175
Books and Articles	175
Newspaper and Data Sources	181

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Economic Conditions and Disproportionality.	47
Table 1.2	Economic Conditions and Government Strength.	48
Table 2.1.	Average Values of Inflation, Disproportionality and Government Strength in Four Parliamentary Democracies, 1972 – 2005.	79
Table 3.1.	Indicators of Disproportionality and Economic Competence in the United Kingdom, 1974 – 2005.	104
Table 3.2	Indicators of Disproportionality and Economic Competence in Australia, 1972 – 2005.	105
Table 3.3	Survival Analysis of Election Timing in the United Kingdom and Australia using Inflation Rate, 1972- 2005	106
Table 3.4	Survival Analysis of Election Timing in the United Kingdom and Australia using Retrospective Measure of Inflation, 1972- 2005	107
Table 3.5	Prospective Model of Election Timing in the United Kingdom and Australia Using Survival Analysis, 1972 – 2005.	108
Table 3.6	Government Duration and the Prevalence of Double Dissolutions in Australia.	109
Table 3.7	Comparison of Disproportionality and Government Duration in the United Kingdom and Australia.	110
Table 4.1.	Indicators of Disproportionality and Economic Competence in the Japan, 1974 – 2005.	149
Table 4.2	Vote Share and Seat Share at the Time of Election Call in New Zealand, 1984 – 2005.	150
Table 4.3	Indicators of Disproportionality and Economic Competence in New Zealand 1982 – 2005.	151
Table 4.4	Survival Analysis of Election Timing in Japan and New Zealand using Inflation Rate, 1972 - 2005	152

Table 4.5	Survival Analysis of Election Election Timing in Japan and New Zealand Using Retrospective Measure of Inflation, 1972 – 2005.	153
Table 4.6	Prospective Model of Election Timing in Japan and New Zealand Using Survival Analysis, 1972 – 2005.	154
Table 4.7	Comparison of Disproportionality and Government Duration in Post-Reform Japan and New Zealand	155
Table 4.8	Survival Analysis of Election Timing in Japan with Further Controls, 1972 – 2005	156

CHAPTER I

ECONOMICS, DISPROPORTIONALITY AND THE TIMING OF ELECTIONS

Gordon Brown and the Election that Wasn't

In June 2007, Tony Blair resigned from his post as prime minister. He had served ten years in this role and a total of thirteen years as the leader of the Labour Party. He left as the longest serving Labour executive, and the first to lead the party to three electoral victories. Despite this record, he was, essentially, forced from power. A significant number of MPs had clamored for his replacement; they vociferously campaigned for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, to take Blair's place as Prime Minister.

Many observers referred to accounts of a deal struck in 1994, when Blair and Brown were vying to replace the late John Smith as head of Labour. Brown agreed to step aside and let Blair take over leadership of the party. In return, Blair granted Brown a position in the Cabinet and promised that he would step aside as Prime Minister at a future date so Brown could assume the post. In 2007, with so many party members calling for his resignation, Blair finally acquiesced and relinquished his duties to Brown. With the Queen's blessing, Brown ascended to his new position as Prime Minister and took his position as head of the government (BBC June 27, 2007).

One of the first questions that Brown faced upon his assumption of his new role was whether he was going to call an election. Labour had already won a majority of seats in Parliament in a May 2005 election, although its vote share had declined from the previous election in 2001. Brown faced no immediate pressure to call an election before June 2010, since the Labour government had not even served

half of its latest term. However, many observers suggested that Brown wanted to construct a mandate for himself and the government. With a poll victory, he would be in better position to implement his vision for Britain over the course of his subsequent term in office (BBC June 25, 2007).

Indeed, many of these pundits predicted an election as early as Fall 2007. This speculation consequently removed the element of surprise from a possible election. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats had more time to prepare, which limited the usefulness of sudden dissolution for Labour. Despite this, media reports suggested that an election would be called by Spring 2008, at the latest.

Expectations of an election grew throughout Summer 2007. Surprisingly, instead of offering support to the new Prime Minister, voters grew increasingly dissatisfied with Brown's desire to call an early election. By September, Brown's poll numbers had rebounded a bit, but it was clear that the electorate was not as ready to give a mandate as Brown was to ask for one (Economist October 4, 2007).

Finally, on October 6, Brown announced that he would not be calling an election. He cited his desire to implement his changes, noting that he did not need a mandate in order to do so. Brown then confirmed that he would most likely not call an election until 2009 at the earliest. He faced a considerable deal of ridicule from both opposition leaders and the media for his decision not to call an early election. The whole ordeal was viewed as a major embarrassment and, most notably, a sign of weakness in Brown's government (Economist October 6, 2007).

What motivated Brown to want to call an election? More interestingly, why did he not call an election after all the fanfare that had occurred during the summer of

2007? Much was made of the potential for an election, so much so that Brown, himself, had to dispel the rumors in an interview. Yet, was this much ado about nothing?

I propose to study why prime ministers call elections when they do. In the case of Gordon Brown, I will demonstrate that it was not his desire to gain a mandate by calling an early election. Rather, he possessed insight into the future performance of the British economy because of his position of power. It was chiefly this motivation that led to his desire to prematurely dissolve the government.

His failure to dissolve the government, however, is evidence of further constraints on his decision. Labour's tenuous position in the electorate, combined with a smaller majority, prevented Brown from going to the polls in 2007. While he has suffered through great personal and professional embarrassment, his choice to forego an early election most likely saved his administration from being voted out of office.

The 2007 election timing debate in Britain is one example of how a number of conditions influence leaders who have the ability to call an election. In this case, Brown sought to call an election almost three years earlier than he needed. I seek to explain what motivated him to want to call an election and what prevented him from doing so.

In part, the election timing decision is based on a number of assumptions, detailed later, about the relationship between voters and the government. Voters choose parties to represent them in the legislature. These parties, either individually or in coalition, form governments to expedite the process of turning policy into

legislation. Voters then judge the performance of these governments, either rewarding the governing party, or parties, with continued support, or punishing them by voting for another party, or not voting at all.

Prior work has focused on the factors that make elections more or less likely. In the government termination literature, this was the source of a contentious debate. In predicting how long a government would last, some argued that the characteristics of a government at the time of its formation dictated its lifespan. Others advocated for the importance of exogenous shocks to the system in understanding duration. Eventually, this approach was unified as a stochastic process conditioned by both attributes and events (Lupia and Strom 1995).

In the election timing literature, most work has focused on the role economics plays in the prime minister's decision to call an election. This mirrors the approach of those in the government termination debate who argued for the importance of exogenous shocks; changes in economic conditions affected the likelihood of elections. While this argument has gained traction over the years, it has remained incomplete. In part, this is because of the lack of consideration given to government attributes in the prime minister's decision.

In this dissertation, I attempt to accomplish two goals. First, I argue for a more prospective approach to the election timing literature. I agree with most scholars that economics is one of the chief explanatory factors in determining whether an election would be called. I support, however, a different perspective in how a prime minister views economic data in relation to her decision.

Second, I argue for a more complete approach to studying election timing by incorporating government attributes into my theory. Much as with the government termination, there have been many studies advocating different ways to assess the likelihood of elections. These studies have focused on the effect of economic indicators, which would be classified as shocks to the system. I include an assessment of economic shocks but also argue for the analysis of important government attributes in explaining the timing decision. Ultimately, I hope to unify the prior emphasis on shocks with the attributes in this study for a comprehensive explanation of the timing calculus.

If we assume that representatives in government want to remain in power, then they should have incentive to use their power to increase their chances of re-election. In systems where government leaders control the timing of elections, leaders may increase their probability of remaining in office by dissolving government and calling for an election at an optimal time. Thus, it is important to understand prior work on the dissolution of governments and the subsequent development of the election timing literature.

Literature Review

The study of election timing fits within a larger government termination literature. In studying these related phenomena, scholars attempt to discover the motivations of actors in dissolving government. The government termination literature has long focused on the characteristics of strong and weak governments that make dissolution more likely, while studies of election timing describe the conditions for dissolution. These conditions are often a matter of advantage; government actors

are concerned with the degree of advantage an election at a particular time confers on the party in power. First, though, I offer a brief description of the government duration scholarship.

Government Termination

Laver (2003) outlines the general evolution of the government termination debate. He notes the emergence in the 1970s and 1980s of two schools of analysis, the attribute and events approaches. Proponents of the attributes approach argued that certain characteristics of coalitions were significant indicators of whether the government would survive deep into its term or die an early death. Those that supported the events approach countered by noting the importance of sudden and unpredictable episodes that led governments to dissolve early.

Strom (1985; 1988) was one of the most ardent advocates of the attributes approach. He followed the example of earlier scholars that had noted certain indicators of government durability (Laver 1974; Sanders and Herman 1977). Strom focused on the performance of minority governments, noting that they were often less durable than majority coalitions. He defended the game-theoretic framework utilized by many of his fellow scholars and argued from an institutionalist perspective.

Laver and Strom recognized the importance of these government characteristics as important predictors of duration. This approach, though, has not been incorporated into the more specific election timing debate that is the focus of this study. Most election timing assessments do not seem to consider this approach for anything more than a fruitful assessment of potential control variables for stochastic analysis.

By contrast, supporters of the events explanation believed that government duration was best understood as part of a stochastic process. They were less concerned with the attributes that contributed to government durability. Instead, they focused on critical events that caused an abrupt end to the government. Such events included corruption scandals, economic downturns, international crises, and the deaths of influential leaders. These events occurred at random; there could be no way to predict when ministers would, for example, suffer through scandal or governments would declare war (Browne, Frensdreis, and Gleiber 1984; 1986; Frensdreis, Gleiber, and Browne 1986).

This approach was not completely divorced from the attributes literature. Scholars in the critical events camp acknowledged that the attributes of a government would create expectations of how soon it would fail, what they dubbed the inherent durability of that government. Frensdreis, Gleiber, and Browne (1986) explain further:

A plausible scenario is that inherent durability creates a central tendency for the duration of a government, with the actual duration rather distant in most cases. Put somewhat differently, duration is distributed around a durability-determined central point, but with a large standard deviation (Frensdreis, Gleiber, and Brown 1986: 622).

These scholars found only a weak correlation between durability and duration.

This forms the basis for my contribution to the literature. Supporters of the events hypothesis allowed for the influence of durability on the lifespan of a government. However, they fundamentally believed that random events shocked the government into dissolution. In this way, they neutralize the attributes argument; exogenous shocks would trump the effects of any attributes.

Unfortunately, these scholars do not seem to account for a proactive approach on the part of the government leaders. Prime ministers do react to bad news and sometimes even dissolve government. This assumes, however, passivity in the timing decision. Certainly, prime ministers are concerned about the chances for re-election in the future. Thus, a proactive approach is more appropriate, where government actors use the information at their disposal to ultimately assess the timing decision.

The debate between the two duration camps became quite heated at its peak. Supporters of the events approach decried the attributes approach as unrealistic, relying on too many simple assumptions of party behavior. For example, Browne, Frensdreis, and Gleiber (1984) dismissed the assumption that party preferences remained stable over the course of a legislative term. They also lambasted what they perceived as the deterministic character of the attributes approach; they criticized the notion that duration could be explained by the constitution of the government immediately following its formation. Finally, they pointed to the relatively low R-squared values (.20-.30) of many of the models specified by Strom and others (Browne, Frensdreis, and Gleiber 1988).

Strom (1988) defended the attributes approach from these criticisms. He argued that scholars who endorsed the events approach were too focused on model-fit and too little concerned with providing a cogent explanation of government duration. Strom's critiques centered on what he viewed as the a-theoretical approach employed by Browne et al. While they viewed their work as an improved, alternative view to the attributes approach, Strom countered that the events approach was an "ill-conceived" and "un-illuminating" agenda better suited to critique than explanation (Strom 1988: 928).

Much of this disagreement was a byproduct of the early reliance on OLS regression. With the use of a more appropriate event history analysis, scholars were able to unify the two approaches. This more advanced model allowed for the effects of random events on government duration, while also testing which coalition attributes led to longer periods in office. Many of the attributes found to be significant in the event history analysis were the same as those proposed by Strom and others over the prior twenty years. Proponents of this unified approach lauded the contributions of both attributes and events supporters, but echoed Strom's desire for a theoretical guide to further work (King, et al 1990; Laver 2003).

The event history approach gained a great deal of currency with government duration scholars over the course of the 1990s. One issue that emerged, though, was how best to understand the hazard rate, the probability that a government would fail at any given time. Did it remain constant over time, as Brown et al had implied? Or, did it increase over time, with older governments having a greater likelihood of failing than newly formed governments? Much support was offered for the latter proposition (Warwick 1992; 1994), though some evidence restricted the rising hazards proposition to governments that were terminated by dissolution (Diermeier and Stevenson 1999). While these scholars demonstrated that the assumption of a rising hazard rate was more accurate, there was little evidence that the assumption of a flat hazard rate altered findings significantly (Alt and King 1994).

Lupia and Strom's (1995) work added further perspective to the government termination literature. They argued for a bargaining model built upon the unified approach described above. While they acknowledged that random disruptions were

important, they challenged the prior conceptions of what made an event “critical.” Instead of the actual character of the event, they reasoned that true relevance came in how the disruption affected parliamentary bargaining. These events altered the incentives of government leaders, incentives that were conditioned by the attributes noted earlier.

Diermeier and Stevenson (2000) applied Lupia and Strom’s framework to a stochastic analysis and found further support for this approach. They also noted the important distinction between time elapsed and time left in a government’s term. Most importantly, they found further evidence of a strategic approach to government dissolution. More recently, scholars have focused their work on the institutional attributes that affect duration, such as bicameralism (Druckman and Thies 2002). They also have explored the strategic nature of government termination. Much of this has been confined to majoritarian systems (Smith 2003; 2004) where the motivation for dissolving government is clearer.

It was in this work during the last decade of the twentieth century that we find a more appropriate unification of the attributes and events approaches. However, there is much to be done in building upon Lupia and Strom’s bargaining model. They offer a strong framework to those working within the election-timing field, yet work has only begun in expounding upon their findings.

Election Timing

In the election timing literature, there is much more focus on the strategic selection of election dates in order to maximize the chances of re-election.

Governments look to the timing decision as a means to further chances for re-

election. However, they run the risk of losing power by going to the polls at an inappropriate time. Balke (1990) sums up the dilemma governments face:

If it calls an election at the current time, it might lose and be thrown out of power. If it waits and doesn't call an election its popularity may fall, and, consequently, its future election chances might be worse than its current election chances. The exact time of the election will then depend upon this tradeoff between current and future election chances, the utility derived from being in power, and the opportunity costs of losing the election (pp 203-204).

He proceeds to offer a number of propositions that, when taken together, present a rational assessment of why elections may or may not be called early. Balke first theorizes that elections should be called later in the term. He argues that the opportunity costs of going to the polls early in the term are quite high; the value of holding office is highest right after an election and decreases over time as the constitutionally imposed term limit approaches. A government would not want to chance losing an election very early in the term with several years left. It would, however, be more inclined to go to the polls later in the term when there is not much time left.

Balke places a great deal of importance on the value of holding office. For this reason, he also argues that governments with longer maximum terms should be less likely to call elections early. We can infer that these governments, like the ones that serve five-year terms in Britain, would have more to lose than governments with shorter terms, like the governments that serve a maximum of three years in Australia and New Zealand. If a government in Britain calls an election halfway into its term and is voted out of office, it has lost two and a half years of office-holding. Also, this government might not have a chance to regain its position for, at the very worst, five years. By contrast, a government

in New Zealand that loses an election held halfway through its term leaves power with a year and a half left but can compete for election in, at most, three years.

A quick glance through the cases evaluated in this study offers a contradictory story. New Zealand and Australia should go to the polls much more often than Japan and the United Kingdom. The opposite, however, is true. In fact, New Zealand has only gone to the polls early three times over the last half-century. It should be noted that Balke's work is more a theory-building exercise than an empirical analysis. He assesses general conditions that make an election timing decision more or less likely. It is left then to other scholars to fill in the details and explain how context leads to deviations from these propositions.

Much of the literature on election timing has developed from the examination of single cases. Scholars have explored a number of macro-level data with the hope of whittling down the complex election timing decision to an economic one. Inoguchi (1979; 1981) was one of the first to explore election timing. He found support for the effects of economic conditions on the seat share of parties in the Japanese House of Representatives. Many scholars have continued to focus on Japan (Ito and Park 1988; Ito 1990; Cargill and Hutchinson 1991) while others have sought alternative examples, like India (Chowdury 1993), Canada (Roper and Andrews 2003), Turkey (Telatar 2003) and the United Kingdom (Smith 2003; 2004; Keppo, Smith, and Davydov 2006). In most cases, the authors were primarily concerned with whether governments actively massage the economy to generate electoral success or react to macroeconomic conditions when deciding when to hold an election.

Supporters of the *manipulative government thesis* posit that governments purposefully engineer short-term economic success, often to the detriment of long-term economic performance. The government then schedules an election to coincide with this boom. Kohno and Nishizawa (1990) describe this argument in detail, illustrating the growth in spending on public works projects in Japan that occurs around the time of an election. The LDP allocates funding to specific areas of the economy with the hope that the increase in the number of jobs and public construction projects will generate popular support.

Telatar (2003) tests this hypothesis in her study of the timing decision in Turkey. She finds that Turkish governments repeatedly manipulated the economy to increase their chances of being re-elected. Government officials would do their best to prime the economy before an election, though there is limited support for this. She finds much more support for the government pushing off downturns; Turkish governments often waited until after the election to implement policies that would lead to increased inflation. Implicit in this is the hope that voters would have a short enough memory to forget about the negative economic conditions of the early part of a government's term.

Those scholars who support an *opportunistic government thesis* maintain that governments react to positive economic conditions instead of actively generating them. Government leaders “surf” national business cycles and call elections somewhere near a peak in economic performance. Chowdhury (1993) describes how governments in India do not manipulate business cycles as other scholars had suggested. Instead, leaders are constrained by the unpredictability of the economy as well as by rules mandating an election be held, at most, 90 days after the parliament

has been dissolved. There is too little time for a government to generate the boom needed to manipulate the economy in its favor. They can only react to positive upswings in economic conditions.

Much of the debate between the manipulation and opportunism camps has been confounded by the presence of simultaneity bias in the studies. Cargill and Hutchinson (1991) discuss the feedback loop between business cycles and elections. Government officials may institute policies to prime the economy for an election. However, those officials in charge of the timing decision might then respond to strong or unanticipated growth by deciding to call an election earlier than they had expected. They might then institute policies to promote growth in order to increase their chances of re-election in an upcoming election, and so on.

Many of the above scholars account for this bias by utilizing a simultaneous equation model (this was before the widespread usage of survival analysis), controlling for the effects of the economy on the timing decision and vice versa. Even then, their findings were far from conclusive. Often, scholars would determine that there was a strong link between the timing decision and the business cycle. However, the nature of that link was never conclusively determined (Cargill and Hutchinson 1991; Chowdhury 1993).

For the better part of the 1980s and 1990s, scholars attempted to disentangle the two theses from one another. They did not consider, though, that the assumption underlying both of these theses was flawed. While they haggled over the relationship of the government to the economy, these scholars ignored their common ground: they all

saw the timing decision as a retrospective one. They had not entertained a hypothesis that challenged this backwards-looking assumption.

There have been subsequent attempts to reconcile the opportunistic and manipulative schools of thought. Kayser (2005)¹ explicitly links the government termination and election timing literatures. He attempts to discern when a government might surf positive swings in the business cycle and when it might manipulate them. Using a dynamic, stochastic model, he reasons that opportunistic timing should occur in states that are prone to exogenous economic shocks. Those economies that are more stable should be subject to manipulation ahead of elections. In other words, when a government has an increased ability to anticipate economic performance, it will move to manipulate. When the economy is more volatile, the government can only react to the business cycle.

He also notes that governments that have an uncertain future should be more likely to be opportunistic. Minority governments and governments with slim majorities or low party discipline cannot be sure of their continued tenure. They will, therefore, take advantage of an economic upswing, in order to take their chances with the voting public. Though these governments may lose power altogether, they will be willing to take that risk in order to, perhaps, solidify their position.²

Kayser notes that a higher maximum term length creates incentives for both opportunistic and manipulative behavior. Governments that have a longer maximum term length are better able to ride out bad economic patches and respond to better ones. There

¹ Kayser (2006) discussed the role of increased trade on the timing decision. While this is an interesting piece, it remains a bit outside the scope of this paper.

² This echoes some of the findings in Roper and Adams (2003)

is also more time to wait for the effects of priming the economy to the government's advantage. He only begins, though, to discuss how much time spent in office is optimal for a successful election call. Others have pursued this discussion further, arguing that governments balance how much time is left in office with their approval among the electorate. The economy, they argue, is the most direct path to increasing favor with voters (Keppo, Smith, and Davydov 2006).

Some scholars have focused on the electoral outcomes of the timing decision. Do parties win or lose seats dependent upon when they called their election? Preliminary work has shown that full-term governments were more likely to lose seats in a subsequent election. The motivation for this punishment is unclear. Do voters experience weariness from a party staying in office its full term? Do governments stay in office the full duration because conditions are too poor to justify an early election? Does the decision to serve the entire term damage at voters' perception of the government's competence? This strand of literature is thin but generates many interesting questions worthy of further study (Roper and Adams 2003).

It was not until Smith (2003; 2004) that election-timing scholars were given a better framework. He suggests an *informational thesis*, where a government is assumed to possess an asymmetry of information in relation to voters; it knows more about future conditions than voters do and can make a timing decision based on its foreknowledge. If the government knows an economic downturn is on the horizon, it initially has an incentive to call an election before the decline. It can ensure its place in power before its popularity suffers as a result of declining conditions. Smith notes:

[L]eaders have access to more and better information and are in the best position to assess their own abilities as well as problems they are likely to face . . . [those leaders] who have a reasonable prospect of reelection at a particular time during their term may be prepared to gamble on securing another term by calling an election early then; they know that by waiting they are less likely to win in the future (Smith 2004: 35)

Unfortunately, for these leaders, voters are perceptive. If a leader decides to call an election early, she is signaling to its citizens that its future performance is not going to be any better than it is at present. In fact, future conditions might be much worse. Voters take this decision as a cue of incompetence, that the government is unable to keep the country from being exposed to these conditions (Smith 2003; 2004). This is an important assumption of the informational model.

Voters subsequently punish those leaders that try to call an election early. They see an early election as a white flag from the government, signifying that the present is “as good as it gets.” While the future might not bring dire conditions, it still will not be as prosperous as the present. A prime minister going to the polls early in the term signals that she believes her chances for re-election will decline as the term continues.

The fundamental difference between the earlier approaches and the informational approach is, as noted above, direction. According to the manipulative and opportunistic hypotheses, government leaders look at past information to make their timing decisions. They react to favorable economic conditions, either of their own design or as part of a larger business cycle.

Contrast this with the informational hypothesis. I assume that leaders have the most up-to-date knowledge available. They can look ahead to the future because they

possess privileged information about upcoming performance. These leaders cannot call an election early simply based on upcoming conditions. Sophisticated members of the electorate will use the election timing decision to discern the government's opinion of the future state of the country.

Why, then, would any government ever call an early election? While citizens will be suspicious of a popular government seeking to extend its stay in office, there is little recourse for those citizens if the opposition to the government is weak or lacks cohesion. Also, as I chiefly argue, there are other influences on prime ministers aside from economic shocks, such as disproportionality, and government strength. A government leader may have incentive to call an election prior to a downturn, but she may be dissuaded from choosing to go the polls by the size of her party's majority and the uncertainty of the election outcomes. Margaret Thatcher did not call an election immediately after the victory over Argentina in the Falkland Islands War, barely three years into her term. She did, however, call an election the following year, when the Labour party was weak and of little threat to the Conservative party's power. Voters penalized the Conservative party, but that was offset by the government's popularity and the inability of the opposition to pose as a credible alternative (Smith 2003: 400-401).

Additionally, Smith considers whether elections are expected to occur. If a prime minister calls an election when the electorate is expecting one, then voters may be less likely to punish the government. In this circumstance, the government would not seem to be taking advantage of foreknowledge to cut and run. However, if a prime minister calls an election when the electorate is not expecting one, she may raise

more suspicions than support. Voters, caught of guard by this surprise announcement, may read into this decision more closely than if they had anticipated an election call. Much of the difficulty in applying this argument lies in measurement; how does one know when an election is expected? I discuss this in greater detail in the Conclusion.

In a sense, the informational thesis reconfigures the election timing debate. Rather than assess surfing and manipulation separately, Smith collapses these two explanations into one retrospective thesis. The informational thesis is forward-looking, or prospective. If a government has generated a positive economic cycle with the intention of calling an election at the peak, then voters should be aware of a subsequent downturn after the election is held. If, instead, the government is reacting to a positive upswing, then the voters will know how confident the government is in its future performance with its election timing decision.

Informational Thesis: The Brown Government

My theoretical approach, combining attributes and events, is a useful way of investigating the election timing decision. It will also prove useful, I argue, in assessing government duration in sum. Instead of limiting analyses to one of two categories, it allows the blending of these hitherto conflicting studies.³ Previously, scholars assumed that government leaders may manipulate the economy or they may surf business cycles. With a better, prospective framework, this response to prior conditions is much less important. Voters look to future performance when assessing a prime minister's decision to call an early election.

³ This is most notable in the case of Japan. Inoguchi (1981) and Ito (1988; 1991) are proponents of opportunistic explanations while Kohno and Nishizawa (1990) and Cargill and Hutchinson (1991) find more support for a manipulative thesis.

Let us return to the controversy surrounding Gordon Brown's decision not to call an early election in 2007. The oft-noted motivation for this proposed election was to garner a mandate from voters. With this mandate, he would be able to implement his agenda more effectively; he would have leverage over the opposition with a renewed endorsement of the Labour party.

According to the informational thesis, though, Brown was not concerned with a mandate at all. Instead, he foresaw an imminent downturn in the economy. He sought to call an election while he had some measure of popular support, what pundits called the "Brown bounce." If he had been able to hold an election in the fall and won, Brown could have served through this impending economic crisis and had time to rebuild his popularity with voters; he would not have needed to call an election until Fall 2012 at the earliest. Instead, he decided to wait for the election.

As evidence of Brown's prospective motivation, the British media reported economic deficiencies in a multitude of areas six months after Brown's announcement that he would not dissolve government. Retail sales dropped precipitously, especially during the holiday season. Retail corporations also faced declining sales, which would be reflected in jobless claims later in 2008 (Economist January 24, 2008).

Inflation also became a concern after Brown's failed announcement. While inflation certainly did not approach levels reached in the 1970s and 1980s, it rose above official government forecasts. The Treasury reported an inflation rate of 2.5%. This rose above the 2% target put forth by the Bank of England (BBC April 15, 2008). Most notably, the United Kingdom entered the initial stages of a severe

housing crisis in 2008. Much as in the United States, loose lending policies allowed many more individuals to have the ability to buy houses. This increase in demand contributed to the subsequent rise in housing prices. According to the IMF, the housing market in Britain might have been overvalued by as much as 30%. As this bubble deflated, and prices fell, homeowners suffered from the devaluation of their homes. British banks that foreclosed on these properties also took a major hit; they were forced to sell a glut of repossessed homes and cover massive losses on these properties (Economist April 8, 2008). In addition, the United Kingdom's GDP growth slowed and jobless rates fell over the last half of 2007.

If we assume that Gordon Brown was aware of the potential for these economic issues to emerge, then we possess a better explanation of why he wanted to call an election when he did. These economic woes, expected to continue through 2008 into 2009, did not leave his government much time to build back credibility with voters before the 2010 term limit. By holding an election in Fall 2007, he would not have held office through an economic downturn and faced the voters with this stain on his record.

As Smith notes, voters are aware that governments often call elections in anticipation of poor economic performance. In the case described above, British voters were, at the very least, suspicious of the government's motives for calling an election early. Brown ultimately decided not to go to the polls, in part, because of this. He weighed the tradeoff between calling an election that Fall and waiting until 2009, at the earliest. The question then becomes, thus: what made Brown decide not

to call an election with the economic downturn looming? I will address this in a subsequent section.

The Confluence of Attributes and Events

The informational thesis allows us to consider how structural features of the system affect the decision to call an early election. Do the electoral rules and their subsequent effects constrain the behavior of government leaders? As much as the informational thesis blends past work together, it also opens the debate to other complementary explanations of why governments call elections when they do.

In the discussion of government duration, election timing is often referred to as an example of one possible instance of termination. More notably, the election timing literature does not incorporate much of the government duration literature during theory formation. For the most part, these two strands of literature have been treated separately.⁴

This is a mistake. Both literatures offer much explanatory power to one another. While many election-timing scholars might not acknowledge the influence of government duration on their work, they implicitly confirm the events approach; prime ministers who call elections based on changing economic conditions, be they retrospective or prospective, are making decisions based on exogenous shocks. The economic conditions at the beginning of the term are certainly not constant over the course of the government's lifespan, and the changes in these conditions lead to changes in the likelihood an election will be called early.

Likewise, the government duration literature would be well served by a more thorough consideration of the applicability of the various theories of election timing.

⁴ With the notable exception of Kayser (2005; 2006).

While the duration debate has been primarily couched in terms of the attribute and event approaches, there was a movement toward a unification of these theories in the mid-nineties (Lupia and Strom 1995). However, much of the focus has been placed on government actors and their bargaining strategies. There has not been enough focus on the pressure voters exert in the dissolution decision.

The election timing literature predominantly features voters as actors across the various approaches. Economic conditions must be just right for an election to be called. Otherwise, the government will face harsh repercussions at the ballot box. The voters, subsequently, place a great deal of pressure on government actors as they seek to maximize their chances for re-election.

In considering how to explain the timing decision in the countries I study, I attempt to unify the best features of the government duration and election timing literatures. While there has been a great deal of successful scholarship that explains early elections, this work appears incomplete. So many early election decisions that appear likely, such as the Brown example in 2007-2008, often end with the lack of an election call. This is a major problem with the informational thesis; it provides a framework for understanding why elections are called but does not offer a cogent explanation for why they are not called. If prospective, economic explanations in the election timing literature are not sufficient, what else can help explain the timing decision?

Smith (2003; 2004) argues for a further consideration of exogenous shocks, specifically in public opinion. He maintains that high levels of popular support will lead prime ministers to call elections; low levels of support will negate the incentive to call an election early because of declining economic performance. Governments want to return

to power and need to balance their future performance in office with the public's perception of their present-day performance.

Though this approach seems logically consistent, there are two problems with applying Smith's approach to other cases. First, he includes a good deal of public opinion data in his model. However, in generalizing from Britain to other cases, polling data is neither as readily available nor as reliable. Japan, for example is notorious for inaccurate or unscientific public opinion data.⁵ In many cases, public opinion data was not collected on a regular basis prior to the 1980s. This may also explain the lack of this type of data about New Zealand (McRobie 1980; Smith 2003: 12).

Second, and more importantly, public opinion data is only a snapshot of voting preference at a given time. It is difficult to project the results of a poll to public preference in an election several weeks away. Yet, projection is what Smith hinges his theory upon. If a prime minister seeks to predict his government's performance in an election in the future, his use of public opinion data would certainly be a risky gambit. He might be able to evaluate the tenor of the country's opinion toward the government, but his decision to call an election is a signal of future incompetence for which he and his party will most likely be punished at the polls.

It is not inconceivable that a party's rating in a poll would lead a prime minister to be more or less likely to call an election. However, I argue that Smith relies too heavily on events in explaining a prime minister's decision; there must be something a bit more tangible for the prime minister to rely on when making this decision. Scholars in the

⁵ This was noted to me by Ellis Krauss, professor of Japanese politics and policy-making and director of Japanese studies at the University of California-San Diego, through a personal communication in August 2007. Data in Japan is much harder to come by than one might expect. The more particular data that is collected is often held in proprietary datasets. This is understandable, given the time, effort, and money used to acquire the data, but makes first-hand analysis beyond macro-level indicators quite difficult.

government duration literature debated over the use of attributes, characteristics of the government at the time of its formation, in explaining the lifespan of a government. I maintain that this, more than exogenous opinion poll shocks, is a more predictable means of assessing the chances for re-election.

I, much like Smith, propose that governments fail sooner in the face of declining economic conditions. This is the chief tenet of the informational thesis, first noted by Balke: governments fail when chances for re-election will only decline in the future. I maintain, though, that this decision is made in the context of pre-existing attributes rather than solely exogenous shocks, as he argues. Leaders who seek to optimize their chances for re-election want as much certainty in their decision as is possible. If a prime minister looks to opinion polls, she can gauge the short-term support for the party and attempt to project that to the actual election. However, much can change in the time between when an election is announced and when it is held. A prime minister might want to call an election when opinion polls are favorable, but may see her support erode as economic conditions worsen or as the opposition highlights unpopular decisions made by the government.

Prime ministers, instead, look to the attributes of their government to form a more confident prediction of their support come election day. Government attributes are set in place, generally, for the entirety of the term. Officials work within the constraints of these characteristics, be it government strength or disproportionality, over the course of their time in office. In making the timing decision, a prime minister is sensitive to exogenous shocks, but only inasmuch as the constitution of the government is strong enough to weather the shocks or weak enough to fail.

A party's performance in opinion polls, then, only matters to the degree that it can or cannot sustain a penalty for calling an election early. I argue that the strength of a government is much more important to consider when investigating why it may fail early. Most models that explain duration and timing include both attributes and events. Attributes, though, are usually inserted as controls; if Labour governments in New Zealand are bound to fail earlier than National governments, then the researcher must control for the party in power in his analysis. These attributes are rarely used as the main components of a theoretical explanation of the decision to call an election.

I do not argue that attributes of government solely explain the timing decision. Likewise, I do not advocate the study of only events. Rather, I assert that attributes and events complement one another in the explanation of why governments call elections early. Attributes make a government more or less weak; shocks to the government force the leaders to recalculate their timing decision calculus and either call, or not call, an early election. However, a government might not fail early in the face of a shock because certain attributes ameliorate a prime minister's concerns, just as the presence of particular attributes might be limited in their effects in the absence of certain types of economic shocks.

In making this argument, I make a number of assumptions. First, voters want competent government. That is to say, they want governments that will perform well. In my formulation, this means that a government's economic performance will be satisfactory to the electorate and increase the chances of re-election, while incompetent government will be punished at the polls. There has been considerable literature investigating the link between voting behavior and economic performance (Kiewiet 1983;

Lewis-Beck 1988; Anderson 1995; Palmer and Whitten 2000, among others). This assumption is important because it forces leaders to consider future bouts of “incompetence,” where economic performance is so poor that a leader expects his party to sustain losses in an election (Smith 2004: 36-41). If a leader knows her government will be perceived as incompetent in the near future, then she would rather call an election in the present before this decline in performance is exposed.

Second, and related to the previous assumption, is that leaders have foreknowledge of future outcomes. This knowledge includes expectations of economic performance in the short term. The prime minister is privy to progress on trade agreements, macro-level projections, and other data to which the average voter does not pay much attention or has little access. A leader uses this knowledge to make determinations of her future competence in the eyes of voters and adjusts the timing decision accordingly. With declining conditions, voters will begin to call the government’s competence into question, which may lead to a decrease in the chances of re-election for the government. Much of the literature on political business cycles reinforces this assumption; if government leaders have a desire to manipulate the economy, it is because they anticipate deleterious economic conditions in the future, which will hurt their chances for re-election (Beck 1987; Alesina, Cohen, and Roubini 1993; Schultz 1995; Alesina, Roubini, and Cohen 1997). Leaders must have some knowledge of future conditions to justify them wanting to manipulate the economy.⁶

Third, the announcement of an early election is a signal of a future decline in competence. A leader calls an election when she either has no time left or sees a decline

⁶ Certainly, public opinion polls offer information to government leaders who are considering calling an election. This may be the ideal way to explain the decision calculus of these leaders, but the use of this tool may be limited in other cases where data is either not reliable or unavailable.

in her government's chances for re-election decline. In the former, a government might last the entirety of its term because the leadership has been unable to determine an optimal time for an early election; perhaps the prime minister knows she had better stay in power as long as possible because she knows the government's chances to win at the polls are so poor. In the latter case, a leader calls an early election because she knows the government is as popular as it can be; future performance will lead to a decline in the regard that voters hold the government.

Fourth, I assume that voters are sophisticated; they take the decision of leaders to call an early election as sign of future decline and will punish the government accordingly. Smith (2004) makes an under-developed, and informal, argument that voters are Bayesian updaters, including the timing of an election as part of their calculus to make inferences about future performance. However, even if one cannot assume that society is comprised of voters who can make the connection between the timing decision and future economic conditions, one can find support that the majority naïve voters take cues from their sophisticated counterparts (Lupia 1994; Sanders 2000). In this case, voters might not all be sophisticated, but, through cue taking, will collectively behave as though they are.

Given these assumptions, we must then consider how applicable this approach is to non-majoritarian systems. While the informational thesis is theoretically bound to majoritarian systems with one-party government, I argue that there should be similar incentives for elections to be called early in proportional systems with coalition government. In fact, Smith has acknowledged as much (Smith 2004: 10). Given the extensive work tying economic performance to electoral results (e.g. Lewis-Beck 1988;

Anderson 1995), it should not go outside the realm of possibility that government officials would be swayed in their decision to call an election by the macro-level indicators of the health of the economy. Indeed, some scholars who have studied government duration point to exogenous shocks, which would include drastic changes in economic conditions. The main difference between these arguments would be that the government duration literature focuses on the cooperation of government actors to prevent failure, whereas the election timing literature focuses on the potential electoral penalties that a poorly performing government faces.

The main drawback of the application of the informational thesis to proportional systems is this failure to consider coalitional politics. Certainly, there are a number of instances where governments could fail early, aside from a prime minister's decision to call an election. There might be a fissure in the ruling coalition, or a government defeat in a vote of no confidence (Huber 1996; Laver and Shepsle 1998). However, the effects of economic performance should be roughly the same; declining future performance will put pressure on the government to call an election well before the last day of the term. This might be conditioned by which government actor is most directly blamed for economic performance, and if one coalition member above all others might bear the brunt of the blame for economic incompetence. In the end, I assume that this pressure is shared by all coalition members and has a significant effect on the government's lifespan; parties in power are equally affected by declining economic health. Further work is needed, though, to understand the subtleties of these effects.

My argument is that we must consider exogenous economic shocks and government attributes together if we are to understand why prime ministers call elections

when they do. In presenting this theory, I offer a number of contributions to the government duration and election timing literatures. First, I continue the unification of the events and attributes approaches to government duration initiated by Lupia and Strom (1995). The failure of government is a stochastic process that is conditioned by both short-term shocks, such as declines in economic performance, and characteristics of government, like disproportionality. This unification has proven to be an effective means of observing trends in government duration. In this way, I merge the government duration literature with the election timing literature. Specifically, I place the prospective decision-making thesis in the context of the attributes/events debate. It is a blend of both, though many scholars of election timing do not explicitly note this. Characterizing the informational thesis as a combination of government characteristics and short-term shocks allows for the further application of the duration literature.

This leads to a second contribution of this work: the development of the attributes argument in the election timing literature. Governments use their informational advantage to optimize their chances for reelection. While the literature is fully developed with regard to how short-term shocks affect this process, it does not appropriately address the constitution of government. This is peculiar, given the ferocity of the support for the attributes approach as a general explanation of government duration over twenty years ago. I include a development of the attributes approach because government characteristics factor into the information a government possesses as much as exogenous events.

Finally, I argue that of these attributes, the chief characteristic that figures into a leader's timing decision is government disproportionality. This is not a

characteristic that appears often, if at all, in either the duration or timing literatures. I argue it is important, though, because it focuses on the fundamental core of the timing decision: reelection. If a government is considering its future competence, it is doing so with the hope of maximizing its chance for reelection. It will be sensitive to its potential vote share as it relates to its seat share. Any major disconnect between these two quantities makes future approximation more difficult than in less disproportional systems. Indeed, it should greatly affect the confidence, or lack thereof, that government has in winning another term in office.

Importantly, the opposition is not a key element of this thesis. Opposition leaders are at a great disadvantage in that they do not know when an election is going to be called, which potentially leaves them unprepared. They also are not privy to the same amount of information to which the government has access. Therefore, their projections about future performance are not as accurate as the government and their aspiration for power is largely controlled by the decisions of the government. The opposition might play a larger role within a particular election cycle, but the theory focuses more on the decisions of many governments and the expected reaction of voters across several cycles.

This theory is comprised of both events and attributes; I first assess the explanations for the events component. From the discussion of the election timing literature above, I have the theoretical basis for three competing explanations of the role of the economy in the timing decision. The first explanation is basic: Does the inflation rate on a given day cause a government to be more or less likely to call an early election? I measure this likelihood in terms of the hazard ratio, which is the likelihood a government will call an election on a given day, conditional on not

having called one before. Poor economic performance should act as a disincentive to calling an early election.

I next consider the retrospective theses described earlier. While there are different theoretical arguments underpinning the manipulative and opportunistic theses, they both assume that government actors are retrospective decision-makers. Therefore, whether governments actively manipulate the business cycle or surf it, they look to the past performance of the economy in making their timing decision. When economic conditions have improved in the short term, these governments should have incentive to take advantage of an upswing and the popularity it generates.

The two retrospective theses suggest that an improvement in economic conditions would give more incentive for a government to call an election. Likewise, a decline in economic performance would make an early election less likely; put another way, as inflation over the last six months increases, the likelihood of an election being called decreases. In short, this explanation assumes that prime ministers respond to favorable economic conditions by calling earlier elections.

My main contention, however, is that a prime minister is more likely to call an election preceding poorer economic conditions than what exists at present. Government leaders should have access to information about future economic performance and make their decisions prospectively. If the inflation rate six months into the future is higher than the inflation rate at present, then these leaders will be fearful that voters will punish the government at the polls for its poor economic performance. Instead, prime ministers will call an election before an economic

decline to assert their party's position in power, which is Smith's (2003; 2004) contention in his informational thesis:

Hypothesis 1.1: Informational Thesis: As the prospect that inflation will rise over the next six month increases, the likelihood a government will call an election early will also increase.

I expect that prime ministers who call elections many months earlier than usual will be the same ones that face worsening economic conditions. They may see other advantages in calling an early election, such as high popularity figures or a fractionalized opposition. However, these leaders will simply not want to face a volatile economic and political climate where re-election becomes that much more difficult.

When a government fails, it is because of both weak coalition attributes and future incompetence. A prime minister must make judgments about the future, which are subject to a variety of inaccuracies. These pre-existing attributes, though, are clear to the prime minister and should have an important effect on the government's lifespan. To understand the timing decision, then, is to understand future economic conditions and government attributes. I turn, next, to a discussion of two important government characteristics and the hypotheses that follow from the attributes aspect of my theory

Attributes: Disproportionality

In assessing attributes scholars have considered the size of party systems and how the number of actors constrains the timing decision (Laasko and Taagepera 1979). Others have looked at the polarization of these actors, with more extreme parties undermining the government's stability (Powell 1982). One could also

consider the number of issues in society as a constraint (Lijphart 1984) or how responsive the party system is to the electorate. In this latter instance, one might consider Strom's (1990) conceptualization, defining responsiveness as the participation of parties with increased seat share in the government. Parties are concerned with re-election and could be likely to exit coalitions sooner when they see continued participation in government as a detriment to their electoral success.

There is also the consideration of opposition support and cohesiveness (Strom 1985; Warwick 1994). A concentration of non-cabinet party seats into a unified opposition could disrupt government activities and contribute to a lack of stability. Likewise, the degree of electoral volatility could serve as an influence; if voters are more likely to turn out elected officials by switching parties from election to election, then government might pause before dissolving early (Pederson 1979).

Prime ministers could look to their seats in the legislature and their vote support to determine how volatile, or predictable, a system they work within. In cases of high disproportionality, for example, there is a large disparity between a political party's electoral support and its seat share in the legislature (Taagepera and Shugart 1991; Gallagher 1991). This would, when coupled with a government's seat share in the legislature, constrain leaders' ability to call an election at the most advantageous time. A decision to call an election with high disproportionality could prove disastrous if a government does not have an excess majority to absorb a backlash from the voters.

Disproportionality, then, should serve as a highly significant government attribute that influences the decision of prime ministers making the timing decision.

In assessing the chances for electoral success, party leaders must consider if they are going to gain or lose from the dissolution of the chamber. Prior work on linking disproportionality to government duration is limited. However, Taagepera and Shugart (1989) attempt to connect a number of government characteristics and processes to one another. Deviations for proportionality (D) contribute to a relative reduction in the number of parties (r). D , through r , constrains the number of parties in an assembly. They refer to an inverse square law of coalition durability, where an increase in the number of parties leads to a decrease in cabinet durability⁷ (Taagepera and Shugart 1989: 99 – 103, 205 – 210). The hypothesized relationship between durability and disproportionality is an indirect one, but their point is taken; there is more pressure on a government when more actors are involved in its formation.

The clearest way to assess this is by calculating how much support that they have in the electorate. One possible indicator is vote share in the previous election. Another is by gathering district-level public opinion data to determine how many close seats are up for grabs prior to the polls. The problem with the former is that it does not capture changing attitudes, which is why public opinion data would make more sense. An official can know what a random sample of the population thinks of his party and can adjust the decision accordingly. Likewise, in a coalition, members can rank how much they benefit, or are penalized, from their association with other coalition partners.

As noted before, though, public opinion data is only a snapshot of opinions, and these opinions will change over time. With the application of the informational

⁷ What they refer to as durability is probably better considered as duration, at least as Frensdreis, et al. understand it. Durability is the potential for failure while duration is the term in office. This is a small distinction for Taagepera and Shugart's argument, but one that should be noted.

thesis, one would assume that any election call is going to lead to some decline in support. If this is the case, then decision-makers must desire extremely high approval ratings to insure themselves from this penalty.

Public opinion data is fraught with a number of difficulties. There are issues of random and systematic bias. The latter issue is of particular concern, as generalizations to a population could be jeopardized by the influence of omissions and inclusions of respondents based on common traits. Fortunately, the more reputable news organizations in the Western world control for these biases, but these issues still remain a pervasive threat to the accuracy of data analysis (Weisberg et al 1989).

Additionally, for the purposes of cross-country comparison, public opinion data can be subject to conceptual variability. What is asked in one country in one language could be interpreted a different way in another country (Schuman 2008). In the end, for both academics and government officials alike, public opinion data can serve as a useful guide when it is available and reliable. As I note, and prior scholars have discovered, data is neither as available (New Zealand) nor as reliable (Japan) as one would want.

How can disproportionality constrain government leaders in their decision to call an election? Governments in highly disproportional systems should tend to fail later, especially when controlling for government strength. One can imagine a situation where a party sits in government after an election that produces highly disproportional results. This party has gained more seats in the legislature than its vote share justifies. Moreover, an opposition party now exists that is supported by

more voters than is represented by its seat share. An election leaves the government open to a correction, especially if several marginal seats tip in the direction of the opposition

To minimize miscalculation of popularity, parties must rely on the support that they know they have. That is to say, they must be sure of their electoral support before they make a decision to call an early election. If they are unsure of how many votes they will get, then that leaves their decision to go to the polls early much more up in the air. The government must consider if it can rely on its bases of support.

This should be much easier the more proportional a system is. When seats and votes are lined up fairly well, a government can observe with confidence the support it should anticipate in a future election. Contrast this to a more disproportional system. Here, a party's vote share does not justify its seat share. A prime minister can look to his support base, but cannot be sure of a victorious outcome in a subsequent election. This is because he might not be sure of how vote shares might translate to seat shares in so disproportional a system.

Consider a brief example. If Party A controls government in a more proportional system, then it can be assured of legislative representation commensurate with its share of voter support. So, in a 100 person legislature, if Party A received 40% of votes cast in a prior election and it received roughly 40% seat share, then this is a signal that estimates of support in the electorate will translate into similar strength in the legislature. However, if Party A controls a government in a highly disproportional system, it is much more unsure of how its electoral support will relate to its seat share. If Party A received only 35% of the vote, yet received

55% of seats, then it cannot be certain of what its performance in opinion polls will mean for its continued position in government after a subsequent election.

Prime ministers should be much more suspicious of their vote support the more disproportional the system. They endeavor to time an election when it is most feasible to win re-election. Leaders of governments in office during periods of higher disproportionality should be fearful of going to the polls without a great deal of cushion in their seat share. Not only might they be punished for perceived economic incompetence, per the informational thesis, but they might not gain the seats they thought they would because of tenuous voter support in the electorate.

High levels of disproportionality should, then, preclude prime ministers from calling elections early. This is especially true when the government's seat share is tied to a comparatively smaller vote share. The prime minister will be disinclined to call an early election when a small shift of voters could produce a radically different distribution of seats in the legislature. I suggest disproportionality as the main attribute that should have a significant effect on the timing decision. Prime ministers that lead governments in more disproportional electoral systems should be less likely to end early. When there is a larger disconnect between seat share and vote share, a government is not as certain of its support in the electorate as a government in a more proportional system. At the very least, the leader of a government in a disproportional system knows that it might only take a few swing districts to give power to the opposition. If the goal of the timing decision is to call an election at the most optimal time, then the uncertainty of a disproportional system should restrict prime ministers from calling earlier elections and possibly losing power.

Using the various cases, I can observe the effects of disproportionality as they vary within each system. In Australia, disproportionality has fluctuated over time. In Japan, it increased drastically after electoral system change, while in New Zealand it decreased drastically after a similar switch to a mixed-member system. Given the inability to justify seat share with a commensurate vote share, prime ministers should be wary of going to the polls. I, therefore, hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1.2: Leaders of governments elected during periods of higher disproportionality will be less likely to call an election early than those leaders elected during periods of lower disproportionality.

In Table 1.1, I offer a brief summation of expectations for economic performance in times of high and low disproportionality to illustrate my expectations. In the top-left cell, I argue that a prime minister in a less disproportional system, that anticipates a decline economic performance, will call an early election. With the government's competence surely to be called into question, and its certainty in gauging electoral outcomes, a prime minister should be more likely to gamble in calling for an election for conditions worsen.

Contrast this to the bottom-right cell. Here, a prime minister should be quite afraid to call an election given a decreased ability to anticipate election results. A highly disproportional electoral system makes the bases of support harder to determine; small vote margins in a few districts can drastically alter the electoral fortunes of the government. When combined with no change in perceived competence in the future, a prime minister has little incentive to call for an early election. I would expect this to be the least likely scenario for elections to be called.

In the bottom-left cell, when there is a low level of disproportionality, and future economic conditions do not worsen, there may be some motivation to call an early election. A prime minister can be more confident in how her party might perform in the polls because she can better assess the connection between seats and votes. However, this is mitigated by the fact that there is the chance of losing an election whenever one is called. A prime minister might not want to take that chance in the continuation of perceived economic competence over the subsequent few months. While there is incentive to call an early election here, it is certainly not as likely as under the conditions illustrated in the top-left cell.

Likewise, conditions in the top-right cell also create incentives for calling an early election. However, an election is not as likely as under conditions of low disproportionality and declining economic performance. When future economic performance is anticipated to decline under the watch of a highly disproportional government, leaders have a complex decision to make. They do not want to serve through a period of poor economic performance and eventually be punished for this lack of competence. They also cannot be as certain of their electoral support because of the disconnect between votes and seats. They cannot absorb the electoral punishment that they will receive from sophisticated voters as effectively, or as confidently, when it is not clear how the seat allocation in legislature will play out. Leaders might call elections under these conditions, but it is more of a gamble than strategy under conditions of lower disproportionality. In comparing this cell to the one on the bottom-left, a leader must balance electoral performance with a decline in competence. This debate may be a function of government strength and time left in

the term, which makes comparing likelihoods of early elections in these two cells difficult.

Attributes: Government Strength

Additionally, I consider the strength of the party, or parties, in government. Predominantly, this is an attribute; bare majority coalitions should behave differently than minority governments. However, government strength can be viewed as part of an events explanation, where the government is shocked into an early election. For example, the mass defection of members of a party, or the deterioration of a coalition, can bring about sudden enough change to go to the polls.

This should work in tandem with disproportionality. How it works is a more difficult proposition. On the one hand, government leaders in highly disproportional systems should seek a cushion when calling for an election early. They cannot be sure of their seat support, so the leaders of stronger governments should be more likely to call elections than weaker governments. On the other hand, the leaders of weaker governments should be more likely to call elections because they are more likely to encounter breakdowns in coalitions and defections.

If we are to evaluate the effect of government strength on election timing, we must determine how valuable holding office is to the leadership. The more valuable the office, the less likely the prime minister and her associates will want to lose it. In terms of the timing decision, leaders from the government should be more likely to minimize their chances of losing office if it is worth more to them.

What would determine the value of holding office? One can imagine the case of a very weak government that has a bare majority or minority. The leaders of this

government would be subject to threats of defection and, depending on the rules of the legislature, attempts from the opposition to stymie legislation. This could, at the very least, be quite exhausting and time-consuming and, at the very most, prevent the leadership from achieving its legislative goals. Weak governments, then, should be much less valuable.

Contrast this to stronger governments. Holding a considerable majority better insulates the government's leadership from backbench revolts and a consolidated opposition. The cabinet should be better able to implement its agenda. This would make the value of holding office quite high.

In terms of the informational thesis, one should expect a higher likelihood of an election call when prospective economic conditions are declining in the near term and the strength of the government is weaker (Table 1.2). A prime minister will want to avoid suffering through a period of economic incompetence. However, the value of holding office is markedly lower than in a period of high government strength. So, in short, there is incentive to call an election because the weaker government does not have as much to lose as a stronger government.

In a government that is stronger, we should expect a decreased likelihood of an election being called. This should be especially true when future economic conditions are not declining. Leaders of a strong government that are perceived as economically competent should want to hold office as long as possible without introducing the uncertainty of an election. This should be the optimal state for a government; the leadership should be able to pass its agenda because of the government's strength. It should also benefit from ruling through a period of

economic stability. It would appear a prime minister would only have a great deal to lose from going to the polls early.

Leaders of a government that is weaker, but not facing a decline in economic conditions, might still have an incentive to call an early election. The government's economic competence might not be called into question, but there still might be other incentives that would cause a leader to go to the polls. Likewise, a leader of a stronger government facing a decline in economic performance might want to call an election to forestall and future punishment at the polls, despite its firm control of the legislature. In these two cases, further mathematical modeling might better illustrate the difference between the two conditions. More important, though, are the states listed in the top right, where an early election should be assured, and in the bottom left, where it should not be likely at all.

I argue, then, that prime ministers that lead stronger governments should be less likely to call an early election; they have considerable support and can suffer through periods of economic instability. Leaders of weaker governments, with fewer seats, are more vulnerable to the effects of instability, most notably the defection of party members. While one or two defections might not put a dent in a strong government, the same number might completely sink a weaker government, i.e. one with only a one or two person majority. Government leaders should view their time in office as more valuable when they have a larger seat share; they are able to get much more done to appease constituents and increase their chances of reelection. Leaders of weaker governments, those with smaller seat shares, have to work harder to get legislation passed and meet with more obstructionist tactics. They view their

time in office as less valuable and, therefore, have much less to lose if they are not reelected.

Hypothesis 1.3: As government strength increases, the likelihood that an election is called decreases.

Larger values in this measure of government strength signify that the government is very strong; these positive values illustrate how far above the fifty percent threshold these governments are. Smaller values represent weaker governments. In fact, I will generate negative values for this variable when I consider minority governments. The smaller the value, the weaker the government. It stands to reason that a weaker government will be likely to fail sooner than a stronger government. I continue this discussion in chapter two; suffice it to say, including the strength of government into the model is not a straightforward exercise.

Discussion

I began this chapter with a question: why would Gordon Brown not call an election in 2007 when prior studies would predict one should have occurred? After I examined the literature on election timing, I elaborated on the informational thesis, which laid the framework on which this dissertation is based. I also discussed the effects of disproportionality and government strength on the timing decision. These attributes figure into a prime minister's strategic assessment of timing conditions. This is a more complete argument than that of a prime minister simply relying on exogenous shocks of future conditions to dictate when to call an election. Ultimately, I argue that the informational thesis provides a good starting point for assessing

dissolution decisions, but it is not until we consider the attributes of a particular government that we best understand the timing decision. The frequency of early elections in a parliamentary system is due to prospective economic shocks and characteristics of the government that observes those future shocks.

I proceed through the remainder of this study in parts. In the second chapter, I discuss the four countries I investigate: the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, and New Zealand. My goal is to present them as interesting cases of differing experiences with disproportionality. These choices also allow for meaningful cross-country comparisons; the United Kingdom and Australia are both very similar systems that possess distinctions, which could affect the timing decision. Likewise, New Zealand and Japan experienced similar shifts in electoral systems, with very different results. I, then, describe the method I use, survival analysis, and how it allows me to sufficiently assess and interpret my hypotheses. I offer a defense of survival analysis rooted in the fact that it has become the chief analytical tool used by scholars to understand the timing decision.

In the third chapter, I discuss the United Kingdom more in detail, replicating Smith's work and assessing the applicability of my covariates to his model. I also evaluate Australia and to establish if these hypotheses can be extended to a country that has many similarities to the United Kingdom. Most importantly, I will compare these similar systems with the goal of teasing out the effects of more actors in the Australian timing decision. In Australia, an upper house might not be able to veto of a prime minister's timing decision, but it can serve as a powerful player in the dissolution game. Thus, I can compare a symmetrically powerful, bicameral

legislature in Australia to an asymmetrical, bicameral legislature in the United Kingdom to see if elections fail sooner when fewer actors are involved.

In the fourth chapter, I will analyze Japan and New Zealand to determine how Smith's model functions in opposing conditions of disproportionality; Japan has seen a marked increase in the space between vote and seat shares post-reform, while New Zealand has seen a marked decrease. After considering each case separately, I will compare the effects of electoral reform on the timing decisions of prime ministers. The degree of disproportionality in the system prior to reform creates certain incentives for prime ministers in making the timing decision. While both countries switched from majoritarian to mixed-member electoral systems, the differences in formulas used is meaningful enough to test whether one is more conducive to early elections than the other.

Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of similarities and differences across cases. There is a great deal more research to conduct as part of a larger study of institutional constraints on the timing decision. Using Strom and Swindle (2002) as a guide, I illustrate the potential for a greater understanding of strategic dissolution with the collection of more data. Additionally, there is the potential of more refined analysis with more advanced statistical measures.

Table 1.1 Economic Conditions and Disproportionality

		DISPROPORTIONALITY	
		HIGH	LOW
FUTURE INFLATION	HIGH	Desire for early election tempered by potential inaccurate assessment of support.	Early election
	LOW	Little motivation for early election.	Some desire for early election, but not justified by continued economic prosperity.

Table 1.2 Economic Conditions and Government Strength

		GOVERNMENT STRENGTH	
		HIGH	LOW
FUTURE INFLATION	HIGH	Desire for early election tempered by the potential loss of valuable office in an election.	Early election.
	LOW	Little motivation for early election.	Some desire for early election, but not justified by continued economic prosperity.

CHAPTER II

CASE SELECTION, DATA, AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Introduction

Scholars have assessed the many theses designed to explain the timing decision across a number of cases, using a multitude of analytic tools, over the course of numerous time periods. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is three-fold. I discuss case-selection and explain the context of my analysis within four countries. I assess the best method for evaluation of the timing decision. Finally, I describe the dataset I use to conduct my analysis.

First, I present my choice of cases and expounding upon the benefits they offer for comparison. Although the four countries I investigate, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan and New Zealand are among the more popular cases studied for this purpose, they are not often compared to one another. I do compare these cases; I assess the United Kingdom and Australia as a most different systems comparison, while I evaluate Japan and New Zealand as similar systems. In the first comparison, I also consider the presence of strong bicameralism in Australia as an important institutional difference. In the second comparison, I note how different electoral systems produced drastically different levels of disproportionality and how this affected the timing decision in each case.

Second, I propose the use of survival analysis as the chief method of analysis. As I detail below, the government duration and election timing literatures were once full of methodological debates due over which statistical tools were best suited to explain the failure of governments. The introduction of event history analysis has

mostly quelled these disagreements and I explain the benefits from using this approach. Third, I discuss the operationalization of the variables for my analysis, which should make their use in later chapters clear.

The Cases

In selecting cases for this analysis, I looked to advanced democracies with established economic systems so that I can evaluate the economic theses listed above. Economic data at the quarterly or monthly level is widely available. I can test the effects of inflation on the timing decision to determine whether governments make retrospective or prospective decisions, or if they simply react to economic conditions in the present. However, there are many points of comparison beyond economic indicators on which to base my selection of cases. I spend a great deal of time outlining the institutional features that constrain the timing decision. For the most part, I choose countries with minimal constraints, but consider how one constraint in particular, bicameralism, affects the timing decision. Additionally, I also demonstrate how electoral system change, specifically to mixed-member systems, can produce dramatically different results. This, too, should have a significant impact on the frequency of dissolution.

I focus, in this study, on the disconnect between votes and seats. For this reason, I base my comparison of systems on the electoral systems that assign seats to representatives based on vote share. I first consider a most different systems approach comparing the FPTP system of the United Kingdom and the AV system of Australia. I also consider a most similar systems design, comparing the post-reform

mixed-member systems used in Japan and New Zealand (Przeworski and Teune 1970).

I initially include the United Kingdom for the period from 1970 through 2005 in order to replicate Smith's (2003; 2004) work, though with a different model specification to test my hypotheses. Smith also recommends Australia as a good example of majoritarian government that would serve as a further test of the informational thesis. He acknowledges, though, a number of caveats. First, Australia has a strong bicameral system. A prime minister can call early elections of the lower house, but this might be tempered by the actions of the upper house. A divided chamber might create an additional set of incentives for dissolution, or, perhaps, mute the decision a bit. Second, Australia has a strong federal system with vibrant state governments. Smith argues that this could lead the government to threaten an early election as a response to state government behavior. This has been most comprehensively studied in Canada (Gallego 1998) and is a consideration when assessing timing in Australia.

I include Australia, for two reasons. First, it can serve as a further test of my theory in conditions similar to those of other descendants of the Westminster system. Australia has a two party system, where the government is elected with a majoritarian, albeit preferential, voting system. As noted above, it has a mixed experience with disproportionality; over the time period under investigation, from 1973 through 2004, it has recorded values as low as 5.96 and as high as 14.93 on the Gallagher index. Second, the differences in legislative structure make possible an

interesting comparison of Australia to the United Kingdom. I detail the potential for upper house influence below.

In Table 2.1, I present a summary of the average for the main indicators in my analysis. For both the United Kingdom and Australia, there are similar values for inflation, disproportionality and government strength. I, thus, expect similar effects of these indicators on the likelihood of that an early election will be called. The prime ministers of the United Kingdom and Australia should be influenced by similar shocks in economic conditions. Likewise, they will view the higher levels of disproportionality as an indicator of uncertainty in their chances for re-election. Finally, since power similarly alternates between two groups in each country, stronger governments should be less likely to call elections

Taken together, these two cases offer a comparison of different systems, specifically with regard to elections. Both use majoritarian electoral systems; however, the first past the post system is an example of a categorical ballot while the alternative vote system employs an ordinal scale. In the former, voters choose among candidates, selecting one. In the latter, voters rank the candidates from the first choice on down.

As I demonstrate in Table 2.1, the differing ballot structures produce small differences in disproportionality; the United Kingdom has an average disproportionality score of 13.8 over the course of this study, while Australia has an average score of 10.3. Both these scores are considerably higher than that of a much less disproportional system, like New Zealand's MMP system (Gallagher index=2.3). Subsequently, a prime minister should not have her decision-making calculus altered

by the different types of ballot structures used by the United Kingdom and Australia because the degree of disproportionality produced by each system is similar. The prime minister will factor the uncertainty of a period of high disproportionality into her decision regardless of whether it was produced by a categorical or ordinal scale.

While the difference in electoral systems should not change the prime minister's timing calculus, the presence of a strong upper house in Australia does have the potential to alter a prime minister's payoffs from calling an election. This is an important distinction in cases that could lead to differences in the likelihood of early elections. I do not explicitly test for this difference, but I do address the effect it may have on election timing in Australia.

In addition to these two different systems, I compare two similar electoral systems in New Zealand and Japan. These cases vary both individually over time and in comparison to one another. For example, there has been drastic change in electoral systems within New Zealand over the last two decades. New Zealand had majoritarian governments, with Labour and National alternating in power for several decades up until the early 1990s. The prime minister has also possessed a great deal of autonomy to call an election when he sees fit. After the electoral reform of 1993, however, the two main parties served in government as either parts of coalitions or as minority governments with confidence and supply support from smaller parties. Smith (2004) does not include New Zealand in his study, in part, for this reason; he cannot justify New Zealand's inclusion in his dataset because of the non-majoritarian governments post-1993. Smith relies on poll data to gauge the exogenous effects of voter opinion on the timing decision.

Unfortunately, poll data is very difficult to acquire for New Zealand; Smith says it is “much less prevalent” than opinion poll data in Britain (Smith 2004: 12).

Also, Smith notes that failed governments do not happen often in New Zealand. There have been only three in the last thirty years that have not made it to the end of their term (1984, 1996, and 2002). He bemoans this lack of early elections as a sign that New Zealand is not worth considering for his theory. Governments in New Zealand have historically lasted the entirety of the term. From 1954 until 1981, elections were held every third year during the last week in November. There were no complete collapses of governments and changes in leadership did not lead to calls for a new election. Even during the period under investigation, from 1982 through 2005, there does not appear to be a marked difference in term lengths; all governments entered their third year. The fact that some of these governments did not last over one thousand days, however, should be a sign of some pressure on leaders that had not been present over the previous three decades.

As noted above, there has also been a dramatic electoral reform that proves worth studying given its effect on the degree of disproportionality in the system. Before 1996, when it used a FPTP system, New Zealand had disproportionality scores that ranged from 8.89 to 18.91. After the switch to a mixed-member proportional system (MMP), the disproportionality scores have ranged from 1.13 to 3.43. I include New Zealand, in part, because of these unique conditions. It has one of the shortest maximum terms in the world: three years. Of the OECD countries that allow endogenous election timing, only Australia has as short a constitutionally imposed limit on government duration. Japan has

a maximum term of four years and the United Kingdom has a maximum term of five years.

I compare my study of New Zealand to one of Japan. When its officials were elected by single non-transferable vote (SNTV) electoral system, Japan did not experience much more than moderate disproportionality. From 1972 through 1993, the disproportionality level ranged from 4.27 to 7.22. However, from 1996 until the present, Japan has used a mixed-member majoritarian system (MMM); consequently, its disproportionality index has ranged from 8.52 to 15.63. There has been a great deal of change over time, much as the case in New Zealand.

Japan, as noted in Chapter One, has a history of governmental volatility; an overwhelming majority of governments since the 1950s have ended with an early election. It is a rigorous case with which to test my hypotheses, as I can also directly address the conclusions made by previous scholars who surveyed Japan with more of a retrospective bent. I, thus, use Japan from 1972 through 2005 to test this combination of the government duration and election timing literatures.

Additionally, the concurrent change in electoral systems makes a comparison of New Zealand and Japan apropos. Both switched to similar, mixed systems. However, the difference in linkage between the two tiers of representation has created the drastic difference in disproportionality (Table 2.1). I discuss why this change happened, and whether it has, subsequently, had an effect on the timing decision within each country.

Thus, I compare Japan and New Zealand post-reform as two most similar systems. Both countries employ a mixed-member electoral system, where seats are

allotted, in part, by single member districts. The remaining seats are allotted by party lists. Reformers often champion the benefits of the mixed-member systems as “the best of both worlds” (Shugart and Wattenberg 2001).

There is variation among the types of mixed-member systems used, however, and this has a meaningful effect on the degree of disproportionality generated after an election. In Japan, the mixed-member system implemented produced high levels of disproportionality, much higher than had previously been experienced. In New Zealand, the opposite held true; the mixed-member system installed produced much lower degrees of disproportionality. These differences should lead to different outcomes in the timing decision. There should be fewer elections in Japan post-reform than in New Zealand because prime ministers should be less certain of their government’s chances for re-election under conditions of higher disproportionality.

Many of the other chief indicators do not offer as clear a point of comparison across Japan and New Zealand. Inflation rates, especially post-reform, are roughly similar. While New Zealand experienced very little rise in prices, Japan actually suffered through a period of deflation. Additionally, governments in both Japan and New Zealand were relatively weak and often needed to form coalitions. This was a marked difference for New Zealand, which had fairly strong governments prior to reform. However, government strength does not offer as meaningful a comparison as disproportionality does for these two cases.

Across these four cases, there are similar levels of inflation except for Japan and New Zealand post-reform. Since electoral reform was enacted in the mid-1990s during a time of low inflation, both countries have significantly lower levels of

inflation under the mixed-member systems. Disproportionality also follows what one would expect; the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand under FPTP, and Japan under MMM all have higher levels of disconnect between vote and seat share. Japan under SNTV has a bit lower level of disproportionality, and New Zealand under MMP has a very low level. Finally, there is more variability across cases with regard to government strength. The United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand under FPTP all have average government majorities of five or greater. However, Japan's LDP typically only possessed majorities of about two and a half percent. After reform, both New Zealand and Japan typically had governments that did not possess a majority; the negative values signify how far below fifty percent a government in these countries was.

These four countries provide interesting single-case tests for my hypotheses. Also, the comparisons of Australia to the United Kingdom and New Zealand to Japan contribute to a wider breadth of understanding in the dissolution literature. A different systems comparison, in particular, has the potential to demonstrate how sub-system indicators, like prospective inflation and disproportionality, are important in assessing the timing decision. If these variables consistently influence the timing decision in the same way across cases, then the system-level variables are proven to be limited in their explanatory power. This approach is particularly effective when used as a guide to a statistical analysis; variation across countries is less important, as the overall goal is falsification (Peters 1998). It may be difficult to demonstrate causality in a different systems design but, through this approach, researchers can eliminate variables as possible explanations for certain phenomena, such as election timing.

The comparison of Australia and the United Kingdom illustrates some of the problems in comparing across countries that the use of a most different systems design attempts to rectify. Each country possesses specific institutional rules governing the timing of elections. Prime ministers may behave differently based on nuanced differences in these rules across countries. Most notably, the presence of a strong, bicameral legislature in Australia may influence government leaders' calculus. I briefly discuss institutional differences and their potential effects on the timing decision in the next section.

Institutional Constraints

In my analysis, I assume that governments, and specifically prime ministers, dissolve parliaments at will. Scholars working within a similar theoretical framework assume this to be true (Balke 1990; Smith 2003; 2004). However, the rules constraining dissolution are much more varied than one would first imagine (Strom and Swindle 2002). In fact, there are ten identified ways for an early election to be called, and these ten are not mutually exclusive. This means that the possibility exists for a number of unique combinations of rules particular to specific countries, making cross-case comparison less than ideal. I spend time, then, assessing particular rules for dissolution so that these differences are exposed prior to analysis.

Strom and Swindle (2002) identify twenty advanced, industrial democracies in their study of dissolution powers. These countries are predominantly European, with the exception of three democracies with strong ties to the Western world: Australia, Japan, and New Zealand. This pool offers a good universe of cases to draw from, given the

similar economic backgrounds of the countries, in addition to the possibility of endogenous election timing.

In assessing which cases to choose, I consider systems where the timing decision is as unconstrained as possible. Essentially, I wish to select systems with few veto players. A veto player, in this context, is defined as an actor whose consent is necessary to dissolve the parliament; this actor works as a constraint on the system, though he might not be the only player in the dissolution game (Strom 1995). The more institutional veto players in the system, the more chances for actors to affect the dissolution process based on reasons separate from economic conditions and government attributes (Strom and Swindle 2002). We should, thus, expect less deviation from the status quo (Tsebelis 2002).

However, I seek other cases where there are as few veto players as possible. This leads me to consider Strom and Swindle's second special case, where the head of state from the base model is non-partisan. Recall that the head of state was a veto player in the process if her permission was needed to dissolve the parliament. In the base model, the authors assume that the head of state must weigh the cost and benefits of dissolution, assessing this in terms of her own electoral prospects. In practice, though, a prime minister will not request dissolution if it will be defeated. Thus, the head of state acts as a constraint, though this is not quite observable to those outside the game.

If the head of state is non-partisan, though, she does not face the prospect of winning or losing election based on her decision to allow or deny the dissolution of parliament. She is, therefore, strategically indifferent to this choice, which means she should always allow the prime minister to dissolve parliament if asked. In systems with

no coalition partners in government, this essentially means that a prime minister who requires the assent of a non-partisan head of state to dissolve parliament can behave much the same as a prime minister that can dissolve unilaterally.

However, there are more restrictive constraints that could potentially constrain a prime minister. Australia, for example, possesses a strong, bicameral legislature, where the Senate is more powerful than the House of Lords in the United Kingdom (Tsebelis and Money 1997). This introduces another potential actor into the timing decision. The Senates is not truly a veto player; the prime minister is almost always a member of the lower house of the legislature and is only removed from office through defeats on confidence measures from the lower chamber. Upper houses, by convention, cannot prevent a lower house election, as the Governor-General conceivably could.⁸ Instead, the Senate is what Strom and Swindle (2002) call a powerful actor, affecting the payoffs of the timing decision. While a powerful player is an important actor, it cannot veto dissolution.

I do consider other restrictive cases of the timing decision. Of the countries I evaluate in this study, Japan is the only one that has a prime minister who cannot make the timing decision without the cooperation of other veto players; the Australian Senate is not a veto player. We can consider Japan another special case, much like New Zealand. In both countries, a head of state cannot affect the timing decision; neither the Emperor of Japan nor the Governor-General of New Zealand possesses a veto to prevent the dissolution of parliament. Yet, Japan is a more restrictive case of the dissolution game.

⁸ Of course, the Australian constitutional crisis of 1975 would appear to challenge this claim. Here, the Senate blocked a supply measure passed through the House of Representatives. The goal of the Senate was to initiate dissolution of the government, in violation of the prior convention of lower house supremacy. This debate raged for two months, until the Governor-General dismissed the Prime Minister.

A prime minister cannot simply dissolve unilaterally; the cabinet must agree through a majority vote. In Strom and Swindle's study, only one other country possesses this more restrictive constraint: Sweden. As noted before, Sweden had briefly experimented with more prime control over the dissolution process. As part of the constitutional reform of 1974, the cabinet was granted more control in dissolving parliament.⁹

Japan has a unique system of factions that also constrains the timing decision, which is reflected in the makeup of the cabinet. If the cabinet must decide, through a vote, to dissolve parliament, then the prime minister would appear to be severely limited in her ability to exert meaningful influence over the decision. However, not only does the Constitution of Japan allow the prime minister to appoint, and dismiss, cabinet ministers at his discretion, but it also requires that the prime minister countersign any cabinet action (Constitution of Japan: Articles 68 and 74). The prime minister thus holds an ex post veto over the process, giving him great leverage in the timing decision.

In sum, each of these four cases is worth studying in its own right. Taken together, though, they offer a multitude of examples of different system characteristics. I can evaluate the decision to dissolve parliament as a prospective act influenced by attributes of government in each country. Also, I contrast the strong bicameral system of Australia to the weak bicameral system of the United Kingdom; I can then assess how the addition of powerful players in the system constrains veto players, and whether this is worthy of further analysis in the future. Likewise, I discuss two similar, mixed-member electoral systems with very different linkage rules to demonstrate how they produce very

⁹ Upon first consideration, thirty years under this arrangement should be a long enough time to evaluate the effects of the economy and disproportionality on the timing decision in Sweden. However, there is not much variability in the amount of disproportionality in the system. As with Denmark, it has remained fairly and consistently low.

different levels of disproportionality. These variations in disproportionality influence government leaders in making their timing decision. These comparisons are not the major focus of this work, but they do allow for a further understanding of the effects of different levels of disproportionality on the timing decision. I, thus, have points of comparison to make across these cases that will further allow me to generalize in future research.

Methods: Survival Analysis

Turning, then, to the options for a statistical analysis of my hypotheses, I first consider ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to assess my hypotheses. I could set the dependent variable as the number of days a given parliament lasted before an election was called. The model covariates would then be used to predict how many more, or fewer, days a term would last.

Unfortunately, OLS regression is not as well suited for an analysis of government duration as other methods. Most notably, certain values of the independent variables, when multiplied by the appropriate coefficients, could predict an overall negative duration of government. While this is most likely a rare occurrence, there are other, more accurate measures of duration (Laver 2003).

Instead of OLS regression, I propose the utilization of event history analysis, or survival analysis, as prescribed by many government duration and election-timing scholars (King et al. 1990; Warwick 1994; Lupia and Strom 1995; Smth 2003; 2004; Kayser 2005; 2006). My small sample size makes the application of any statistical method difficult, but the use of survival analysis allows me to apply an appropriate distribution that suits the data. While the result is a more accurate explanation of

duration, the results of the various models using survival analysis are not too different than what was found by scholars using OLS regression to answer the same questions previously. Laver (2003) notes:

[R]erunning the earlier models on the same data with better methodology showed that the originals were not too wide of the mark in terms of substantive results. No stunning new discoveries were made, even if graduate students would now be taken out and shot for using simple OLS regressions to analyze government durations (29).

I, thus, take Laver's advice and implement estimation by survival analysis in this study.

I am better able to assess the validity of the attributes and events theory to explain election timing in the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, and New Zealand, using survival analysis. This is particularly appropriate because I am most interested in the conditions that exist prior to the dissolution of parliament. As the term progresses, I demonstrate how changing economic conditions make the likelihood of government termination more or less likely.

In addition, there is a definitive starting point: the opening of parliament. With the approval of the government, the countdown to the constitutionally imposed term limit begins. In The United Kingdom, the government has five years to call an election. In Japan, it has four, while in New Zealand and Australia, the government has only three years. Each parliament thus becomes a period that works its way down to this time limit. In the language of survival analysis, we look at the duration of the parliament, i.e. how many days it has been since the period began. As this increases, we get closer to the failure event. For this analysis, I use the date on which the subsequent election was called as the termination of that period.

When we conduct survival analysis, we are most concerned with the likelihood of failure, given that the period under investigation has not terminated already. We call this likelihood the hazard rate. The hazard rate is the relationship between the survival function and the probability that failure will occur. The failure event is conditional on how long the actor or institution has survived; therefore, the hazard rate is a conditional failure rate (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004).

The coefficients produced from survival analysis are called hazard ratios, which are measures of the degree to which independent variables affect the hazard rate. I present these hazard ratios in my analysis as a means to clearly illustrate these effects. A coefficient of greater than one signifies that an increase in the value of the independent variable leads to an increase in the chances that the failure event will occur. A coefficient less than one means the opposite; an increase in the independent variable leads to a decrease in the chances the failure event will occur. A coefficient of one signifies no effect of the independent variable on the likelihood the failure event will occur. Put in terms of this analysis, a coefficient of 2 for inflation rate would mean that for every increase inflation rate, the chances of an election being called double, given that an election has not already been called. Likewise, a coefficient of 0.5 would mean that for every unit increase in the independent variable, the chances of an election being called are cut in half.

Traditionally, survival analysis was used in the biological sciences. A researcher would conduct a study involving several patients to evaluate the effectiveness of a particular treatment. He would note the time elapsed from the

administration of the treatment until the period ended, when either the study had ended or the participants “failed.”

Over the last decade, political scientists have increasingly utilized survival models to explain phenomena such as cabinet duration and alliance durability (Warwick 1994; Bennett 1998). Indeed, Smith (2003; 2004) uses a survival model to explain the election timing decision in the United Kingdom. I similarly use a survival model to describe the timing decisions in the four countries in this study.

There are several distributions to choose from when conducting survival analysis. For example, I would assume an exponential distribution if I believed the hazard rate did not vary over time. I could also utilize a Cox proportional hazards model, a non-parametric measure where I would not have to assume any underlying distribution (Bennett 1999; Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004). However, given the small sample sizes of my datasets, nonparametric models cannot be effectively utilized (Smith 2004).

For the purposes of this study, I assume a Weibull distribution. In doing so, I can most accurately account for the higher likelihood of government failure later in the term.¹⁰ A Weibull distribution allows for the increase of the hazard rate later in the term; it is used when the data under investigation is time dependent. Given earlier work on government termination, this distribution should prove particularly relevant (Warwick 1992; 1994; Diermeier and Stevenson 2000).

¹⁰ I also ran my model assuming other distributions (exponential, lognormal, loglogistic, gompertz). My results were consistent across all except the exponential distribution. The exponential distribution assumes a flat hazard rate ($p = 1$) throughout the period in study and could not account for the sharp rise in likelihood of an election toward the end of the term.

Warwick (1994) offers the staunchest defense of the assumption of a non-constant underlying hazard:

Suppose there are a hundred governments under examination and the underlying termination or hazard rate is (a constant) one-tenth per day. On this basis, we would expect ten governments to fail on the first day. However, the number of surviving governments becomes smaller with each successive day... Thus, on the assumption of a constant termination rate, the largest number of terminations should occur on the first day, with progressively fewer terminations per day over time (Warwick 1994: 18).

A non-constant distribution, such as the Weibull, accounts for governments failing later in the term. In short, I cannot assume the chances of an election being called are the same on day 1 and on day 1000. History tells us that a government is much more likely to fail closer to end of the term rather than the beginning.

The shape parameter, p , is the most important part of determining the hazard rate when assuming a Weibull distribution. If $p < 1$, then we assume a rapid, immediate decrease in the hazard rate that level out over time. The increase in duration becomes a factor, itself, and it decreases the probability that the failure event will occur.

If $p > 1$, we can imagine a sharp increase in the hazard rate at the end of the period under investigation; I assume this to be the case in my analysis. The likelihood of an election called anywhere in the first year of a government's term is virtually nil. The Weibull distribution accounts for this delayed increase in the hazard rate. Prime ministers know they have a time limit, so I would expect that the hazard rate would increase dramatically as the end of the term draws near.

I utilize a daily unit of analysis. I can more accurately note when elections are called and avoid issues of assignment that would follow from a monthly or quarterly unit of analysis. Most importantly, given the short duration of the average governments in Australia and New Zealand, I can tease out any effects of my proposed independent variables with a daily analysis. The date upon which an election is called is considered the failure event

I analyze election timing by day because I can produce more precise results. I run the risk, however, of inflating my sample size by repeating monthly indicators thirty times or quarterly indicators ninety times. Subsequently, I run this analysis by quarter and find the same results and level of significance for my main independent variables. I only present the results of the daily analysis here.

My first predictor variable is inflation rate, in order to test the economic arguments made by the informational thesis. I initially include inflation rate in the model, before transforming it to more appropriately test the prospective hypothesis. Next, I test the effects of disproportionality using an index of the measure of the disconnect between seats and votes. I also include a measure of government strength; these are described in more detail below. These latter two variables do not vary as frequently as inflation rate. While this does not preclude their inclusion in this analysis, I acknowledge some limits in the generalizability of disproportionality and government strength. This is an unfortunate result of only possessing a small number of parliaments available for study.

To test the effects of these conditions, I control for a number of factors that have the potential to influence the timing decision. Following Smith (2003; 2004), I,

first, create a variable for the amount of time left in the term. Although time is already incorporated into the model, I need to account for the constitutionally imposed limit on term length. Prime ministers will feel more pressure to call an election as the term limit draws near. Smith suggests using a transformation of the number of days left in order to include the deadline that factors in to cabinet's decision-making. To that end, I include a squared transformation of the days left variable to account for the immediate pressure to call an election later in the term.¹¹

Second, when applicable, I control for partisanship in the system. In prior analyses, scholars accounted for polarization and party effects (King et al 1990; Warwick 1994). I do not incorporate a sophisticated measure of party; I simply control for the party in power. In Britain, this is either the Labour or Conservative parties. In Australia, the main blocs are the Australian Labour Party (ALP) and the Liberal-National Party coalition. I treat the Liberal-National Party coalition as one bloc because the Liberal Party, when popular among voters, has not ruled without some form of National Party support for several decades.

In New Zealand from 1982 until 1996, this was either the National or Labour parties. The introduction of MMP, however, allowed more parties into government. Since National and Labour remained the two major parties in the three post-MMP governments, I continue to code for their presence in government. This is not a precise measure, given the electoral change, but it should be a fair means to account for any variation in government behavior based on party allegiance.

¹¹ I used other transformations (reciprocal, squareroot, log,ln) in a number of model specifications and found robust results for my covariates throughout.

I do not control for the dominant party in Japan. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has held control of the government by itself or in coalitions for over fifty years, with the exception of a short period in 1993-1994. It has seen its support ebb and flow over time, but it still retains the most seats in the Diet. While it has greatly benefited from its largely uninterrupted position as the preeminent party in Japanese politics, it has also been well served by a fractionalized opposition that has been unable to pose a serious challenge.

Third, I do control for whether there has been a change in prime minister over the previous one hundred days. This accounts for a change in the mandate given to the leader of the government (Smith 2003). In Japan, from 1972 through 2005, there were a total of 17 prime ministers who held office, from Kakuei Tanaka through Junichiro Koizumi. This is often a result of factional politics, with different groups constantly battling for control of the LDP. Factions are an important part of Japanese politics and this variable serves as a proxy for the intensity of these struggles (Cox et al 1999; Park 2001).

I also include this control variable for both the United Kingdom and Australia. However, I do not include it for New Zealand. The National and Labour parties have not changed leaders close to the time of a general election, with the ascendancy of Mike Moore the lone exception.¹² There have been two notable leadership changes by the party in power between 1981 and 2005. David Lange resigned more than a year before the 1990 general election after the unpopular implementation of neo-liberal policies not normally associated with the Labour party. He was replaced by

¹² Mike Moore took over from Geoffrey Palmer in September of 1990, after the government had already called for an election in late October.

Geoffrey Palmer. Also, Jim Bolger was replaced by Jenny Shipley during a National Party caucus revolt two years before the 1999 election. In short, there have not been any leadership changes that have had immediate effects on the calling of an election.

Finally, I do not include a measure of voter preference for the parties in power. This is due, in part, to the difficulty in acquiring reliable data from weekly or monthly opinion polls during the 1980s. Data from less frequent polls, occurring once or so a year, would have defeated the purpose of its inclusion; a government would be hypothesized to respond to the immediate mood of the country instead of the mood a year or two earlier.

A prime minister who considers whether to dissolve government early will be swayed by public opinion inasmuch as it leads to his government's defeat. If he has a government that is elected from a highly disproportional system, where small vote shifts can remove him from office, he could be quite hesitant to call an early election. However, if he desires to call an election in a more proportional government, then he can better assess if the voter backlash for calling an early election will be something his government can withstand. Opinion polls, then, are useful tools but I argue that it is the disproportionality in the system that has a greater effect on the timing decision.

Main Variables

For my analysis, I assess a series of hypotheses for *each* country during the following time periods: the United Kingdom from 1970-2005, Australia from 1973 until 2004, Japan from 1972-2005, and New Zealand from 1982-2005. Additionally, I will offer a separate set of comparisons across cases. I compare Australia to the United Kingdom to evaluate if my theory holds across majoritarian systems, while

acknowledging the potential effects of a powerful upper house on the timing calculus. I compare New Zealand to Japan to determine if very different conditions of disproportionality produce very different effects on the timing decision.

First, though, I must assess the applicability of the attributes and events theory within the given time periods for each country. While Smith (2003; 2004) dives head long into his analysis only a cursory view of the duration literature, I propose a number of hypotheses that will help unify the two longstanding explanations of government duration: the events approach and the attributes approach. I will not recount in detail the debate outlined in Chapter One. In short, scholars who support the events approach (Frendreis, Gleiber, Browne, etc) argue that governments fail because of exogenous system shocks. A war or economic crisis would be enough to cause a government to fail earlier than it otherwise might have.

These scholars did not believe the characteristics of a government (majority size, party in power, etc) could accurately predict when it would fail early. They clashed with those who did vouch for this approach, notably Strom (1985; 1988). The supporters of the attributes approach argued that a government would be more or less likely to fail depending on the circumstances of its formation. Eventually, with the use of more sophisticated methodological tools, scholars could incorporate both of these approaches into one model. One could control for attributes while modeling changes in economic conditions during the term that might force a government into early elections (Lupia and Strom 1995).

The informational thesis, as Smith (2003; 2004) explains, is an economic explanation of the timing decision. When prime ministers or cabinets make their

decision to call an election early, they look to future economic conditions. If they see rough times ahead, they will call the election as close to present as possible. I assume that this decision signals to the electorate that economic conditions are as good as they will get for the remainder of the term. Voters will then punish these governments in the subsequent election for incompetence. This may only weaken the government's majority, but it may also lead to the government's defeat.

The informational thesis follows, then, from the events approach. Downward spikes in economic performance may be enough to cause governments to call early elections. We cannot know the overall economic health of a country at the start of a government's term, as would be needed to classify this as an attribute. Economic performance varies over time and should have a significant impact on the timing decision.

While there are a number of macro-level indicators to choose from, I focus on one economic variable: inflation rate. I initially include the rate itself in my model as an initial test of the effect of economic performance on the timing decision. I then transform the inflation to test the retrospective thesis. I take the inflation on a given day and subtract the inflation rate from 183 days earlier from it: Δ Inflation over the last six months = $\text{Inflation}_t - \text{Inflation}_{t-183}$. I use six months, as Smith does, because a half-year should be enough time to view an up or down swing in the business cycle, while not being too far in the past to be irrelevant.

To test the prospective decision-making model, I again transform the inflation rate variable. This time, I subtract the inflation rate on day t from the inflation rate 183 days in the future, or $t + 183$: Δ Inflation over the next six months = Inflation_{t+183}

- Inflation. Though one could argue for the inclusion of gross domestic product (GDP) or unemployment rate, inflation has proven to be the most effective measure of economic conditions in previous studies (Alesina, Roubini, and Cohen 1997; Smith 2003, 2004).

As noted earlier, the timing decision is predominantly an economic one. From this, we can infer that the timing decision is also largely related to exogenous shocks. I argue, however, that election timing is not totally dependent on these unpredictable events. There are attributes of a newly formed government that should give us some traction in predicting the duration of that government. Certain things that are true of a government at formation, and that remain true over its lifespan, can help us determine if a prime minister will have more or less incentive to call an election early.

In my analysis, I expect to find support for my prospective attributes and events theory; I test a model containing the untransformed inflation rate and another model containing a retrospective measure of inflation to evaluate competing explanations of economic effects on the timing decision. There is, however, the possibility that I could find support for more than one of the hypotheses. One can conceive of an economy that is doing well over six months but then takes a sudden drop over a subsequent six months; it is difficult to tell in what way the economy exerts pressure on the prime minister. Of course, if the retrospective thesis is correct, then disproportionality and government strength should have less of an effect on the timing decision. Prime ministers making the timing decision should only be reacting to positive economic swings. Given the certainty of this retrospective information, they would not need to assess as many factors as a prime minister looking to future

economic conditions. A forward-looking prime minister faces a great deal of uncertainty, and should rely more on these attributes to gauge her chances of reelection than one who is simply looking to “surf.” I can also assess this statistically, assessing each specification of the model with a goodness-of-fit statistic like the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)¹³ or the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). While I firmly believe in the theoretical logic of the prospective informational thesis, I also think that it will also best fit the data of the explanations so far.

In Chapter One, I also discussed a number of potential attributes that could affect the prime minister’s calculus. All of these factors are information the government has to assess the uncertainty of future election results. I highlight two attributes in particular that should significantly contribute toward determining when a prime minister calls an election when she does. Government leaders should consider disproportionality and government strength, as discussed in Chapter One, as indicators of the potential for electoral success in a future election.

First, I include disproportionality as one of the important independent variables in my assessment of the timing decision. I define disproportionality as the difference in the percentage of votes a party receives from the electorate and the percentage of seats that party receives in the legislature. There is almost always a small degree of disproportionality in any system; it is hard to line up exact percentages in votes and seats when there are a fixed number of seats in the legislature, for example. However, I consider true disproportionality to be more than just a byproduct of rounding error and the like. For there to be high levels of

¹³ AIC = $-2(\log \text{likelihood}) + (c+p+1)$, where c is the number of model covariates and p is the number of ancillary parameters.

disproportionality, there needs to be considerable deviation between vote share and seat share for a given party, as was the case in New Zealand prior to election reform in 1993.

I use the Gallagher index to measure disproportionality. This index is a cumulative measure, adding the deviation from votes to seats for each party.¹⁴ In addition, this difference between votes and seats is squared, penalizing systems that allow parties to gain many more seats than their vote share would allow in more proportional systems. This squared difference is then divided by two (Gallagher 1991).¹⁵

Disproportionality, as defined above, is an interval-level index. However, to further test the disproportionality effect, I also code it as an ordinal variable. I list the coding metric next to the measures of disproportionality in each country (high, medium, low) in the tables for analysis in the coming chapters; I essentially divide these scores into top, middle and bottom thirds, since determining the cardinal value of a disproportionality score is country-specific and difficult to generalize. For example, one country may be accustomed to higher levels of disproportionality with

¹⁴ Gallagher index = $\sqrt{\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^j (v_{[i]} - s_{[i]})^2}$, where v_i is the percentage of votes and s_i is the percentage of seats received by party i . Here, I only include parties that receive 5% of the vote or gain at least one electorate seat.

¹⁵ Determining an overall scale of disproportionality is difficult and so I assess what is high and low within each case. Theoretically, a country with a two-party system, where each party receives 50% of the votes and 50% of the seats, would have a disproportionality score of 0. A similar country, where one party receives 100% of the votes but 0% of the seats and the other party receives 0% of the votes but 100% of the seats, would have a disproportionality score of 100. We can designate this as the overall boundary, but in practice, disproportionality rarely creeps above 30, especially in parliamentary systems. As examples of the extremes, consider the following two cases. In 1984, Uruguay, with 2.95 electoral parties and 2.92 parliamentary parties, had a Gallagher index score of 0.39. In 1994, Hungary, with 5.99 electoral parties and only 1.38 parliamentary parties, had a Gallagher index score of 39.98.

scores consistently above 20. Another country might have scores that range from the single digits to above 20. It is, thus, difficult to compare values of disproportionality across cases because prime ministers may view the disconnect between vote and seat shares differently based on past experiences. I test my disproportionality hypothesis using both an interval and ordinal indicator of disproportionality. Since the effects are the same for both specifications, I include the interval value of disproportionality when assessing its effectiveness in my analyses in Chapters 3 and 4.

Next, I consider another dynamic characteristic of governments that affects the timing decision: government strength. In general, I equate government strength with how much of a seat advantage the government has over its opposition. As noted earlier, the operationalization of this variable is difficult given the mix of two-party and multi-party systems that are included in this study. For Britain and Australia, I use the simple subtraction of the opposition's seat share from the government's seat share. For Japan and New Zealand, I use a measure of how close a government is to 50 percent: $\text{Government Strength} = \text{Government Seat Percentage} - 50 \text{ percent}$. Bigger values equate to a stronger government. Smaller values, including negative ones for minority governments, should lead to increased instability and an increased likelihood of failure. In general, I hypothesize, then, that stronger governments should be less likely to see early election calls.

I considered a number of different ways to measure government strength before settling on the indicator above. While I think there is promise in considering these alternative measures, I do not think this is the main thrust of my theoretical argument. Government strength is an important measure to include in the model, but

the further assessment of various measures that encompass both majoritarian and coalitional systems is a bit outside the scope of this work. I will test other measures of government strength when I can; for now, I rely on a more straightforward measure of strength.

Majority governments with a seat share just exceeding fifty percent should be prone to instability. A defection matters much more to the government when it has a bare majority as opposed to a government with several seats to spare. In a disproportional system where governments are already more likely to fail early, we should expect governments with bare majorities to fail early as well. Given the differences in measurement, it is difficult to anticipate a hypothesis. Still, I plan to test this interaction of disproportionality and government strength in my analyses.

Data

For an analysis of four countries located on three different continents, the collection of data is fairly straightforward. Alastair Smith's data on election timing in the United Kingdom is publicly available, as are his notes for his analyses (<http://politics.as.nyu.edu/object/politics.facultyData.electiontiming>). To augment this dataset for the purposes of this study, I use electoral results from Adam Carr's Psephos website (<http://psephos.adam-carr.net/>). This repository provides comprehensive results for many democracies over several decades, including Australia, Japan, and New Zealand.

I use Michael Gallagher's official scores for disproportionality. These are available on his website (http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/ElSystems/index.php) or

through calculations from data available in his edited volume, *The Politics of Electoral Systems* (Gallagher and Mitchell 2005).

For economic data, specifically inflation, I found most statistics available through the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) web database: SourceOECD. Additionally, New Zealand's government statistics department provides a good deal of useful data (<http://www.stats.govt.nz>). Australia (<http://www.abs.gov.au/>) and Japan's (<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/index.htm>) government websites also were helpful in collecting economic information.

For the dates of timing, I used Smith's data and followed his same procedure: I designated the date of the election call as the failure event and the opening of parliament as the beginning of the next period. For New Zealand, these dates were available on the New Zealand Elections web site (<http://www.elections.org.nz/>). For Australia and Japan, I combed *The New York Times* for the exact dates of the election call and parliament opening, in addition to checking papers like *The New Zealand Herald*, *The Guardian*, and other English-language papers from these regions of study.

Discussion

In short, the cases I choose should prove a fruitful source of study. I will test the hypotheses outlined in Chapter One in each case over time. I will then offer a comparison of two sets of cases to test hypotheses outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. Is there evidence that more powerful actors in a system constrain the timing decision, as in Australia? Does the difference in electoral system create different degrees of disproportionality that also constrain the dissolution of governments, as in New Zealand

and Japan? I spend the bulk of my time assessing the prospective model in each case, but do evaluate these comparisons to determine if they warrant further research.

The timing decision has been subject to a great deal of methodological critique, and, while advances in the types of methods used has helped to answer old questions, it has allowed for the pursuit of answers to new, more sophisticated queries. One potential refinement is the use of expected and cumulative hazards as independent variables. Also, the use of formal models is as, Strom and Swindle (2002) demonstrate, an effective means to simplify the discussion of the dissolution decision; I discuss the benefits of these methodological considerations in the Conclusion. However, I hope my analyses will contribute to these efforts as scholars unveil even more accurate measures of why prime ministers call elections when they do.

Table 2.1 Average Values of Inflation, Disproportionality, and Government Strength in Four Parliamentary Democracies.

	Electoral System	Inflation rate	Disproportionality	Government Strength
United Kingdom	First past the post	7.78	13.81	5.32
Australia	Alternative Vote	6.31	10.30	8.29
New Zealand	First past the post	7.26	14.79	8.16
	Mixed-member proportional	1.89	2.32	-1.75
Japan	Single non-transferable vote	4.54	6.54	2.50
	Mixed-member majoritarian	-0.06	10.55	-1.12

Sources:

SourceOECD: www.sourceoecd.org

Michael Gallagher's elections website:

http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php

CHAPTER III

ELECTION TIMING IN TWO MAJORITARIAN DEMOCRACIES

Introduction

In this chapter, I begin my test of the attributes and events theory. I evaluate the applicability of this prospective thesis with separate, longitudinal analyses of the United Kingdom and Australia. These two countries do share much in common, especially as it pertains to the thrust of this study. However, both electoral systems are different, though they each produce similar variability in disproportionality and government strength. I expect to find, then, similar decisions made by prime ministers on the timing decision in each of these systems; this would rule out certain system-level variables as possible explanatory factors in the decision calculus.

The United Kingdom has been a popular case of study for election timing scholars. Its First Past the Post (FPTP) system and its winner-take-all rules generated a large disconnect between votes and seats. A British prime minister will consider disproportionality and government strength with future economic performance in order to judge whether she should go to the polls and, if she does, what her government's chances for re-election are. Likewise, I argue the same decision-making process for prime ministers in Australia, as the first step in assessing the generalizability of this theory. Alastair Smith (2004) acknowledges the need for this analysis in his study of election timing in the United Kingdom. He argues that Australia is one of the more logical cases for study and comparison.

Like the United Kingdom, Australia has an electoral system that favors the formation of larger parties at the expense of smaller ones. Though this Alternative Vote

(AV) system requires the ranking of candidates, as opposed to a choice among them, the result is the formation of a government that is typically controlled by one of two groups. Subsequently, the disproportionality scores over the last several decades have fluctuated a great deal. For my purposes, this makes for an interesting complement to the investigation of the United Kingdom.

I argue that prime ministers, across these two cases, should be affected similarly by attributes and events in making their respective timing decisions. Prime ministers make prospective judgments about the economy and gauge their future electoral success based on government characteristics like disproportionality and government strength. As in the United Kingdom, I expect to find that elections are more likely to be called in Australia under conditions of higher disproportionality and lower government strength.

However, the presence of a powerful upper house in Australia serves as an important distinction in the comparison of the two cases. The presence of another actor could complicate the timing process, as the upper house might influence a prime minister's decision to call an election. I, thus, include a discussion of the Australian Senate and the pressure it potentially could bring to bear on the lower house. I cannot meaningfully generalize about the effects of symmetrical bicameral legislatures on the decision to dissolve parliament, but I spend time discussing the constraints an additional, powerful player provide for a prime minister.

United Kingdom

Smith devotes much time to the assessment of the informational thesis in the United Kingdom, so I will not go into his discussion in great detail. Suffice it to say, he finds considerable support for the prospective decision-making model. Most notable is

the use of inflation as a macro-level indicator. He argues that British governments tend to fail early when inflation rises in the near term.

The most concrete example Smith offers of his theory is in the case of Margaret Thatcher's first term in office. After a period of low popularity for the first few years of the Tory rule, the party rebounded after successfully defeating Argentina in the Falklands War in 1982. As Smith notes, many media pundits and opposition party members argued that Thatcher would call an election soon thereafter to take advantage of the voting public's high opinion of the Conservative government. However, Thatcher did not call an election and in fact waited an entire year to go to the polls early, during the Conservative party's fourth year in government (Smith 2004: 45).

What was the difference? In 1982, Thatcher did not see a drastic decline in economic performance forthcoming. Instead, Smith argues that Thatcher saw an immediate economic downturn in the third quarter of 1983, which provided motivation for her decision in May of that year (Smith 2004: 6). In fact, as Smith points out, Thatcher responded to a charge of cutting and running by a Labour MP by noting that, [I]f I was going to cut and run I would have gone after the Falklands (*The Guardian* 1983)." The motivation to call an early election could not be justified by a surge in popularity.

According to the attributes and events thesis, Tory support would have been wiped away by a skeptical electorate. I argue, unlike Smith, that Thatcher considered how reliable her support really was before making a decision. The amount of disproportionality in the system, in addition to economic conditions, should have had

some effect on her decision.. This context would have given her more reason to call an early election in 1983 (Table 3.1).

In the United Kingdom, there is variation in the degree of disproportionality over the last four decades, but these levels are at consistently moderate or high levels. Mitchell (2005) notes: “The single member plurality system has no mechanisms . . . to ensure that there is a predictable relationship between votes cast and seats won across the country” (160). Certainly, there is not the same wide range in values as we see later in Australia. Because of this, there should be much more uncertainty in the timing decisions for British prime ministers. If they choose to dissolve parliament early, they are doing so with a much more tenuous assessment of their electoral fortunes than a leader in a more proportional system.

According to my theory, I should not expect as many early elections in the United Kingdom. A British prime minister would often face higher levels of disproportionality and be less certain of his potential for re-election. This has the potential, though, to subvert my theoretical argument. If disproportionality is consistently higher, and never reverts to a lower scale, then prime ministers might be less inclined to rely on it as an indicator in making their timing decision.

This appears to be borne out in the second election in 1974. The government elected in February lasted only a short time, just under 200 days. Yet, disproportionality was quite high. In this case, the election of a hung parliament in that February election trumped any concerns for future electoral outcomes. This election was more related to weakness of government than fears of uncertainty of victory at the polls.

Government strength should also matter, then, in the timing decision in the United Kingdom. More powerful governments have less to fear from backbench revolts. Additionally, governments with large majorities should have little incentive to call for an early election. The value of holding office for a strong government is high, given that there should be limited restrictions on the passage of legislation with a great majority. A prime minister would likely want to be sure of his government's re-election in deciding to dissolve a parliament where he had a great advantage. Otherwise, he might be inclined to hold off on dissolution as long as possible, close to the end of the constitutionally imposed term limit.

I argue that the unpredictability of disproportionality should be reflected in a prime minister's timing decision. The swings that occur in circumstances of high disproportionality, where the linkage of seats and votes is tenuous, creates enough uncertainty as to make the dissolution of parliament a risky decision. In instances of stronger government, prime ministers should be even less inclined to go to the polls. To further assess disproportionality and government strength, I turn to a discussion of Australia to determine if there are different influences on the timing decision than in the British case.

Australia

Australia has the highest number of parliaments under study in this analysis (13). This is because of its short maximum term length (three years) and the propensity for governments to call elections anywhere in the term. This makes for an interesting study in and of itself; elected officials are constantly facing re-election

The short term-length should force governments to be ever mindful of their performance, especially given the electoral system used. In essence, this is what my theory taps into: governments, fearful of being voted out of office, must maintain a degree of competence with regard to the economic health of the country or time elections to avoid being deemed incompetent. Australian governments cannot hope to weather an economic storm because there is not the time to recover afterward. They should be as mindful as any government of the penalties they will incur should they not perform to the voters' satisfaction. If not, they must heed the information they can glean from government attributes so as to best determine the optimal time to ensure re-election.

Despite the differences in electoral systems, I expect similar outcomes for the effects of events and attributes on the timing decision in Australia as I do in the United Kingdom. Both systems produce disproportional governments. Both systems favor large parties. While there is more variability in the degree of disproportionality in the Australian case, the predictions made above for the United Kingdom should hold for Australia, too.

Australia was modeled on the Westminster system and possesses a lower house of parliament from which the government is elected. There are differences, though, between these two cases that form the basis of this different system comparison. An Australian government serves no more than three years in office. Australia has traditionally used preferential voting systems to elect members of parliament; for the Senate, voters use single transferable vote (STV) while for the House of Representatives they use alternative vote (AV). These preferential systems are not widely used at the national level in parliamentary systems across the world; of advanced democracies, only

Ireland and Malta use preferential electoral systems for their national elections. Yet, one can see that they create incentives for voters to pay more attention to the electoral process. In both systems, voters are presented with a list of candidates in their district. The voter then ranks these candidates in order of preference, marking a 1 against his most preferred candidate, a 2 against the next most preferred, and so on. In Australia, the voter ranks all names on the list, until all candidates have a number next to their names (Farrell and McAllister 2005). Some lists can be as long as twenty-two individuals.

The main difference between STV and AV is district magnitude; STV is used when voters are selecting more than one representative from a district, while AV is used when one representative is selected i.e. a single-member district (SMD). In the case of AV, a candidate must secure a majority of votes in order to be elected. If, after counting all first-place votes, a candidate does not secure a majority, the candidates with the least amount of support are dropped from the race. Those voters who cast a first place vote for these candidates now have their second place choices added into the tally. This process of cutting candidates from the bottom, and adding their supporters' endorsement to their next preferred candidate, continues until one candidate gains a majority of votes. Consequently, voters should be induced to learn about more candidates given that their vote can count even if their most preferred candidate does not gain much broad support. Some scholars have argued that preferential voting systems do exactly this, and are much more fair for voters than FPTP systems (Farrell 2001).

As it pertains to a sub-system characteristic like disproportionality, the AV system is marked by a similar degree of deviation as in a FPTP system. Both formulae are designed to produce one-party government at the expense of smaller parties. In

Australia, we can see a great deal of variation in the levels of disproportionality over the last century. The Liberal party has generally benefited from this, often gaining more seats than the Labor party despite receiving fewer votes.

These two systems produce similar levels of disproportionality, though there is variation within each case over time. In Australia, for example, more counts are being held to generate a majority winner, a sign that more parties are running for office. At the same time, a glance over the disproportionality scores and count of effective parties from the last twenty years does not reveal any marked trends in any direction. Historically, there has been little support for the notion that a FPTP system and AV system are meaningfully different in this respect (Rae 1967).

While the difference in electoral systems does not produce major differences in disproportionality across cases, there is a feature of Australian government that poses a challenge to a comparison of these two cases: bicameralism. The presence of an upper house has the potential to affect the timing decision of a prime minister. Lower house elections may be timed to coincide with Senate elections; this could supersede the effects of a prospective assessment of the economy. At the same time, the pressures of calling an election because of an upcoming economic downturn might make a prime minister eager to call an early election. The Senate election could become a convenient excuse for the prime minister to call the election without it seeming like he is cutting running. Regardless, I am curious to see if bicameralism has an effect on the timing decision in negating the informational thesis.

Despite this institutional difference, the two electoral systems function similarly in the degree of disproportionality produced. I, thus, expect to find similar results in my

assessment of each case, even though the actual electoral systems are different. I proceed to the analysis to assess my theory in the United Kingdom and Australia, separately, but conclude with a discussion of the differences in institutional rules that govern each country's political system.

Analysis

I replicate Smith's work on the United Kingdom to further test the informational thesis, as well as to ascertain the application of my complementary attribute approach. I also assess Australia as a means of comparison with a country that utilizes a different electoral system. I first test each over time to assess the applicability of my theory. I then move to a general comparison of these two cases, most notably as it pertains to bicameralism.

I control for a number of factors in these analyses, echoing the analyses of King et al (1990), Warwick (1994) and Smith (2004). As noted in Chapter Two, I include a squared transformation of the time left in the term. I also include a control for the party in power over the period under study, which, in the United Kingdom, was either the Conservative or Labour party. In Australia, from 1973 until 2004, this was either the Australian Labour Party (ALP) or the Liberal-National Party coalition. I treat the Liberal-National Party coalition as one bloc because the Liberal Party, while popular among voters, has not held office without some form of National Party support for several decades.

I initially consider whether I should include a control for whether there was a leadership change at the top of the governing party within 100 days of an election. Prime ministers who take over prior to the end of a government's term may seek to

call an election to establish or solidify their control over their party. I do not include this control, however, for the United Kingdom and Australia. This transition would normally contribute to governmental instability because of a change of leadership at the top of the government. At the very least, it might be a sign of government instability. In these two cases, though, there have not been changes of leadership where a call for a new mandate was necessary during the period under study.

For both countries, I do not include a measure of voter preference for the parties in power. This is due, in part, to the difficulty in acquiring reliable data from weekly or monthly opinion polls during the 1970s and 1980s. Data from less frequent polls, occurring once or so a year, would have defeated the purpose of its inclusion; a government would be hypothesized to respond to the immediate mood of the country instead of the mood a year or two earlier.

Disproportionality in Australia since the early-1970s varies even more widely than disproportionality in the United Kingdom over the same period (Table 3.2). There have been measures of the Gallagher index as low as 5.96 in 1975 and as high as 14.93 in 1980. This should give a fairly good amount of higher and lower scores on the spectrum.

I first test a basic model of election timing that does not test my prospective decision-making hypothesis. I include inflation rate as my indicator of economic performance in order to test if the economy has an effect on the prime minister's calculus. I also include my control for disproportionality. Here, I seek to simply assess if there is any effect of economic conditions on the timing decision. In Table 3.3, I present the survival analysis results for a basic model of timing in the United

Kingdom and Australia that does not include retrospective or prospective measures of performance.

I find similar results for this basic model across these two countries. In both the United Kingdom and Australia, the hazard ratio for inflation rate is not significant, and not even in the predicted direction; the coefficient greater than one signifies that a higher inflation rate leads to a higher likelihood of an election being called. I expect this finding, as I argue for a more nuanced version of a timing decision where prime ministers consider conditions in the future.

I next turn to an analysis of the traditional explanation of election timing, using a retrospective measure of inflation, in the United Kingdom and Australia. Smith finds some support for this model in his work, specifically with regard to inflation. This appears to conflict with the tenets of a more prospective theory of election timing; a prime minister should not be simultaneously retrospective and prospective in his decision-making process. I do not expect to find support for a retrospective thesis; I introduce this as comparison to the prospective thesis that is investigated later. According to the reactionary theses assessed in the multitude of prior studies, when we see a decline in inflation, we should expect governments to take advantage of this and call an election early:

If this measure does appear to be significant, it would offer an interesting case for comparison with the prospective thesis. For the United Kingdom, I find that the retrospective measure of inflation is significant (Table 3.4). It is not, however, in the correct direction. A percentage point increase in inflation would lead to a 50% increase in the chances of an election being called. Additionally, while the

retrospective measure of inflation is not significant in Australia, it, too, is greater than one. In other words, a decrease in economic performance leads to a *higher* likelihood of an early election. This seemingly contradicts the manipulative and opportunistic hypotheses; prime ministers would be calling elections as conditions worsen over the previous six months.

As I note above, Smith also discovers this anomaly in his analysis. He attributes this finding to extreme circumstances, particularly in the 1970s, of economic conditions that fluctuated wildly because of crises, such as the OPEC oil embargo. It is for this reason he does not include a retrospective inflation measure in his further analysis (Smith 2003: 411). However, I argue that this anomalous finding might actually compliment the prospective theory of election timing. If economic conditions have declined in the past, they might continue to decline in the future. A significant finding for retrospective decision-making, then, could be a sign that as conditions worsened, prime ministers looked to the future and saw darker clouds on the horizon. Therefore, they call an election rather than weather an even worse downturn in the economy.

I subsequently turn to my theoretical explanation of early election timing: the prospective decision-making thesis. Here, I argue, as Smith does, that prime ministers look forward in assessing whether to call for an early election. They look at economic conditions as a sign of their performance. Specifically, a decline in economic competence, signified here as a rise in inflation over the subsequent half year, should lead to an increased likelihood of an early election. I, thus, restate my hypothesis from Chapter One as point of comparison for the United Kingdom and

Australia; I will also test this hypothesis with a comparison of Japan and New Zealand in Chapter Four:

Hypothesis 3.1: Informational Thesis: As the prospect that inflation will rise over the next six months increases, the likelihood a government will call an election early will also increase.

I find support for this hypothesis in both countries (Table 3.5). In the United Kingdom, the hazard ratio coefficient indicates that for every percentage point increase in inflation over the subsequent six months, the likelihood of an election being called increases two and a half times; this is significant at the .10 level. In Australia, this relationship is even stronger: a percentage point increase in inflation almost doubles the chances of an election being called on a given day, assuming one has not been called prior.

In short, I find support for Smith's initial contention across the United Kingdom and Australia. As economic conditions worsen in the future, governments should fail earlier. Prime ministers, having more knowledge of economic conditions on the horizon than most individuals, seek to go to the polls before these conditions set in. These leaders make this decision to maximize their chances for re-election. They stand a better chance of winning at the polls if they call an early election on the precipice of declining performance than they do in the midst of poor economic conditions.

But, I maintain that this is only part of the story. Prime ministers must not only weigh the shock of a decline in the economy but also assess their chances for victory. For this, they look to the attributes of their government to determine how

probably their electoral victory is. Of the many attributes, I argue that disproportionality is key to understanding the timing decision. Government leaders cannot rely as comfortably on voter support during periods of higher disproportionality. Therefore, they should be more hesitant to call for an early election. As a result, we should expect to see a hazard ratio below 1.

Hypothesis 3.2: Leaders of governments elected during period of higher disproportionality will be less likely to call an election early than those leaders elected during periods of lower disproportionality.

In the United Kingdom, I do not find support for my hypothesis (Table 3.5). While disproportionality is significant in the earlier models in Tables 3.3 and 3.4, it is not significant in the prospective decision-making model. Even when I recode disproportionality into an ordinal variable, I do not find support for this hypothesis.¹⁶ It seems that this government attribute is not relevant to the timing decisions, specifically when a prime minister is looking to the future when determining whether he should dissolve parliament.

This is a discouraging finding. While I manage to replicate Smith's results from his analysis of the United Kingdom, my addition of attributes, specifically disproportionality, does not seem to add much explanatory power to his story. Of course, this could be, in large part, the limited variability in disproportionality over the course of this study. The United Kingdom has rarely seen low levels of disproportionality; within the bounds of this study, only the parliament that dissolved

¹⁶ When I recode disproportionality into an ordinal scale of three values (high, medium, low) and insert it into Model 3, the prospective inflation measure loses significance. However, its p-value is just over .10 and it remains a similar sized coefficient to the one presented in Table 3.6.

in February 2007 scored in the single digits on the Gallagher index. This limited variation from high to low might limit the effectiveness of this explanation here.

However, in Australia, disproportionality is a significant predictor of early elections in the prospective decision-making model. A unit increase in disproportionality leads to a 34% decrease in the likelihood that an election will be called. Prime ministers in Australia appear to be fearful of calling elections during times of high disproportionality. While I do not find support for this attribute in a study of the United Kingdom, I find support for it in a similar, majoritarian system.

One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that, while average disproportionality in the United Kingdom and Australia is the same, the range of disproportionality is different in each country. In addition, as I illustrate in Tables 3.1 and 3.2, there are much wider swings in disproportionality in Australia. These differences in variation could affect the timing decision; prime ministers in the United Kingdom might be accustomed to calling elections in times of uncertainty. Prime ministers in Australia, however, might be less accustomed to this uncertainty and, subsequently, more sensitive to it.

I also assess the strength of government within the bounds of the prospective decision-making model. Governments that have more power, measured in terms of distance from the majority, should stay in government longer. They should not go to the polls because of threats of instability. Indeed, the value of holding office is higher because a stronger government can pass more of its preferred legislation; it should not want to chance giving up on the ability to exercise this power.

Hypothesis 3.3: As government strength increases, the likelihood an election is called decreases.

I find little support for government strength in the prospective decision-making model in either country. In the United Kingdom and Australia, government strength is not significant. This non-finding may be due to the unique way I code government strength, as described in Chapter Two. I attempt to operationalize government strength consistently across two-party and multi-party systems, which is why I code government strength as I do. In doing so, I might not be detecting the effects of strength on the timing decision. Still, while this attribute does not prove significant, the inclusion of disproportionality has proven a meaningful complement to the prospective thesis.¹⁷

In determining which models offer the most explanatory power, I calculate AIC statistics to determine which has the best model fit; the best specification will be the model with the smallest AIC statistic. I cannot compare AIC statistics across countries, but I can assess them for each model by country. In the United Kingdom, the prospective decision-making model possesses the smallest AIC statistic (82.5). Even though this model does not offer support for the disproportionality hypothesis, I

¹⁷ I include an interaction of disproportionality and government strength in a separate analysis. It is significant in both the United Kingdom and Australia. Interpretation of this variable is complicated, however; higher scores of this interaction should correspond to high disproportionality and increased government strength. Since these are two interval-level variables, there is the potential for similar values to represent different conditions; a government strength score of 10 multiplied by a disproportionality score of 2 would produce the same value in the interaction as when there is a government strength score of 2 and a disproportionality score of 10, even though the first interaction represents high disproportionality and low government strength and the second represents the opposite. Another wrinkle is the actual effect of this interaction; the interaction coefficients produce very small increases in the likelihood of elections being called. A unit increase in this interaction generates a 10% increase in the likelihood of an election in the United Kingdom and a 2% increase in Australia. So, while the interaction is significant, I find too many concerns to include it in any further analysis.

still find considerable support for the informational thesis, confirming Smith's analysis.

In assessing election timing in the United Kingdom, I find continued support for the prospective thesis. However, I do not find support for my consideration of attributes in the timing decision. This may be due to the lack of variability in the data, or simply because disproportionality does not matter in the British case. By comparison, the election timing decision in Australia does also appear to be a prospective judgment; the AIC statistic is smallest for the prospective model (75.02). When governments look at economic indicators, most notably inflation, they are more likely to call an early election if the economic performance worsens in the near future. Unlike the British case, though, governments in periods of higher disproportionality wait longer to call elections. They do not want to suffer from the electoral volatility of a disproportional system, falling into opposition with much less support than they would have in a more proportional system.

In comparing these two, different systems, I find limited support for my attributes and events theory. The prospective bent of the theory is consistently significant, but the attributes that should contribute to early elections seem to matter more in Australia than in the United Kingdom. As noted above, this may be a relic of the data. Further assessment of New Zealand and Japan in Chapter Four should help determine whether disproportionality only matters in Australia, or if this approach is generalizable.

I also must consider if one difference between these two cases, bicameralism, had an effect on the timing calculus of prime ministers. Since I find support for the

prospective economic thesis, it does not appear that the presence of a powerful player in the dissolution game, the Australian Senate, prevented prime ministers from calling elections in the face of declining economic conditions. In short, the presence of this additional actor did not seem to hamper my analysis. However, there is support for the role of these institutional constraints in the timing literature (Strom and Swindle 2002). I turn, then, to a brief review of the literature on bicameralism to determine under what conditions the presence of an upper house might affect a prime minister's timing calculus.

Bicameralism

The emergence, and continued use, of bicameral legislatures is chiefly motivated by the desire to protect against the concentration of power in the hands of a few (Tsebelis and Money 1997). First, legislatures with two chambers are designed to prevent both the tyranny of the majority and the tyranny of the minority. In the former case, a unicameral legislature allows for one group to dominate the government if it holds at least a bare majority of seats. In the latter case, a unicameral body could have half of its members representing half of their constituents, meaning that the interests of a smaller segment of society could dominate the government's agenda (Buchanan and Tullock 1962).

Additionally, the presence of an upper house constrains the actions of the leader of the lower house, who is often the leader of the government (Levmore 1992; Lijphart 1994).

Second, there are a number of efficiency-based purposes of having a bicameral legislature. Legislation is considered by two sets of eyes instead of one, leading to laws of higher quality and consideration. The separation of power within the legislature

should also reduce corruption, as it would be harder to coordinate illicit activities across two chambers.

We can begin to see how this would affect the timing decision. Upper houses are designed to be checks on the power of lower houses. While governments are typically formed from the lower house, the upper house can slow legislation or sometimes even veto it altogether. In this way, a bicameral legislature promotes a more deliberative democratic process and encourages negotiation across the two chambers. Election timing may be one decision that could be bargained over.

Of course, many of these effects are reflective of a symmetrical, bipolar system. In countries like the United Kingdom, the upper house could not be expected to constrain behavior the way many scholars argue it should. The upper house must have a great deal of power for these purposes to be fully realized, as is the case in the United States or Australia. Yet, the mere presence of an upper house can have a constraining effect, by influencing government leaders through the payoffs for their actions (Tsebelis and Money 1997). In other words, the upper house might not often act as a veto player, but is certainly capable of behaving as a powerful player (Strom 1995; Strom and Swindle 2002).

The presence of an upper house, then, should constrain many of the activities of the prime minister, including the timing of elections. An upper house controlled by one party might try to influence the lower house controlled by another to dissolve early. Or, this might work the opposite way, where the upper house might have an interest in keeping the government from going to the polls, i.e. if the party in control of the upper house stands to lose seats from an election at that time.

In the United Kingdom, the House of Lords does have the power to delay legislation passed by the House of Commons. However, this delay tactic is not used very often and, when it is, is overruled by the lower house passage of the same bill in consecutive sessions. While some scholars maintain that the upper house in the United Kingdom has a constructive role to play in the future, it does not constrain the actions of the lower house to the degree of more symmetrically powerful bicameral institution.

The Australian Senate, in contrast, has considerably more power; senators are directly elected by proportional representation and can initiate a wide array of legislation. Additionally, elections for both bodies have sometimes been timed to occur at the same time to take advantage of waves of popularity for the incumbent government, and to make voting procedures easier for the electorate. This might introduce another influence that could inhibit the timing decision.

It is outside of the scope of this study to fully address the specific effects of bicameralism on the timing decision of prime ministers in the lower house. Certainly, much can be written on the activities of the House of Lords and how its power is significantly weaker than the Australian Senate. The most effective means of comparison would be a large, cross-national study, which would allow trends to appear more generally.

To determine whether this would be a worthwhile enterprise, we can first see how prime ministers are unconstrained by the upper house in the United Kingdom. The upper house can only delay legislation, which allows the lower house to enjoy a position of supremacy. In the lower house in Australia, too, formal rules for dissolution grant the prime minister a great deal of power. However, the Senate acts as a powerful player that

can influence the timing decision. The potential for this is best illustrated from the 1975 constitutional crisis, where opposition in the Senate to the budget passed by the lower house contributed to the government's downfall.

The Liberal party, having gained control of the Senate after the 1974 election, continually blocked passage of many pieces of legislation approved by the House of Representatives. This culminated with the Senate's refusal to pass the House's budget. Prime Minister Whitlam, the leader of the Labor party, resisted calls to dissolve parliament, arguing that the failure of the budget was not a defeat of a supply measure, but rather a constitutional challenge of the lower house's supremacy. The subsequent stalemate drew Australia's Governor-General, John Kerr, into the fray and he charged Whitlam to settle the dispute. When Whitlam did end the stalemate with the upper house, Kerr relieve him of his duties and appointed a Liberal minister, Malcolm Fraser, to head a caretaker government. Fraser then called elections, which returned a majority for the Liberal-National coalition (Kelly 1995).

While this might not be an explicit example of election timing, it demonstrates the power of the upper house in the Australian case. As Strom and Swindle (2002) note, powerful players can influence outcomes. The Senate could not call an early election, but it could influence the lower house by blocking supply measures. This brought an end to the Whitlam government and established the importance of the Senate in affecting the decision to dissolve early.

A quick glance at the raw numbers suggest there is some relationship between the presence of an upper house and the frequency of elections (Tables 3.6 and 3.7). Of the six shortest parliaments in Australia, four occurred as double dissolutions, where the

Senate and the House of Representatives went up for election simultaneously. While there is a need for further theoretical discussion before I can define causal relationship, the incidence of double dissolution during shorter terms is preliminary evidence of the influence of bicameral structures on the frequency of elections.

These double dissolutions did occur early in the study, during a period of high conflict between the two chambers. Yet, there is justification for a future investigation, following from Tsebelis and Money (1997) and Strom and Swindle (2002). Without an exhaustive theoretical overview, it is difficult to make general assessments of the relationship of bicameralism to election timing. It does, however, pose an interesting line of study; the presence of more players in a system should limit deviation from the status quo, and lead to the types of deadlocks between the two chambers that result in double dissolutions earlier than expected. A survey of bicameral systems beyond Australia would expose the similarity and differences of institutional rules across cases, and which of these rules significantly impact the timing calculus of prime ministers.

Discussion

I began this chapter outlining how the electoral systems for the United Kingdom and Australia condition the attributes that, when taken with economic shocks, motivate a prime minister to call an early election. Disproportionality and government strength vary over time and influence the decision calculus of these leaders in different ways. However, at least in the assessment of the United Kingdom and Australia, these attributes do not consistently affect prime ministers across cases in the same way. While I find general support for a prospective decision-making thesis, I do not find evidence of disproportionality and government strength as significant predictors of early elections in

the United Kingdom. While this may be because of the limits on data, there is also the real possibility that Smith's original model, incorporating public opinion shocks instead of government attributes, is a better and more reliable predictor of election timing in the United Kingdom, given that his indicators were almost universally significant.

I find more support for the importance of disproportionality in Australia. Prime ministers call elections during instances of lower disproportionality. Furthermore, they do this as they judge the prospects of economic conditions in the future. While government strength is not significant by itself, it does prove significant in an interaction with disproportionality. This is by no means a complete endorsement of my theory, but there is evidence that attributes and events work together to influence the timing decision of a prime minister.

I have some support, then, for the further application of this theory. In many ways, Australia proves an ideal case because of the variability of disproportionality and the subsequent variability in the duration of governments. Many questions remain unanswered, though, and the study of how the presence of more actors in the system should yield interesting lines of investigation in future iterations of this analysis, especially as it pertains to bicameralism. The application and validation of a prospective model of decision-making in Australia demonstrates the importance of Smith's findings, and the need for continued application of this model to other cases.

Table 3.1 Indicators of Disproportionality and Economic Competence in the United Kingdom, 1974 – 2005

Date of Election Call	Disproportionality	Inflation Change over previous 6 months	Present Day	Change over next 6 months	Duration
19740207	6.59 (Low)	4.3	13.2	3.7	1320
19740918	15.47 (High)	3.6	17.1	4.1	197
19790329	14.96 (Medium)	2	9.8	6.7	1620
19830509	11.58 (Medium)	-2.6	3.7	1.1	1462
19870511	17.45 (High)	0.60	4.1	0	1427
19920311	14.95 (Medium)	-0.10	4	-0.40	1730
19970317	13.55 (Medium)	0.5	2.6	1	1756
20010508	16.51 (High)	-1.1	2.1		1456
20050405	17.77 (High)				

Source: Alastair Smith's election timing data archive:
<http://politics.as.nyu.edu/object/politics.facultyData.electiontiming>

Michael Gallagher elections website:
http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php

SourceOECD: <http://www.sourceoecd.org>

Table 3.2 Indicators of Disproportionality and Economic Competence in Australia, 1974 – 2004.

Date of Election Call	Disproportionality	Inflation		Duration
		Present Day	Change over next 6 months	
19740411	6.9 (Low)	17.6	-5.4	409
19751111	5.96 (Low)	14	-0.1	491
19771110	13.93 (High)	7.9	0.2	633
19800919	14.94 (High)	9	1.6	942
19830204	8.25 (Low)	8.6	-4.6	802
19841026	10.31 (Medium)	7.7	1.6	555
19870605	7.95 (Low)	7.1	0.5	835
19900219	10.42 (Medium)	6.9	-3.5	890
19930208	12.48 (High)	1.9	-0.2	1008
19960129	8.12 (Low)	1.5	-1.2	1001
19980831	10.97 (Medium)	1.1	0.8	854
20011008	10.87 (Medium)	3.2	0.2	1064
20040831	9.37 (Low)	2.5	0.5	932

Source: Alastair Smith's election timing data archive:
http://politics.as.nyu.edu/object/politics_facultyData.electiontiming

Michael Gallagher elections website:
http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php,

SourceOECD: <http://www.sourceoecd.org>

Table 3.3: Survival Analysis of Election Timing in the United Kingdom and Australia using Inflation Rate, 1972 - 2005

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>Australia</i>
Time Left	1.000*** 0.000	1.000*** (0.000)
Party	0.389 (0.374)	4.949 (7.316)
Inflation Rate	1.133 (0.140)	1.134 (0.139)
Government Strength	1.015 (0.018)	0.876** (0.058)
Inflation change previous half year		
Inflation change next half year		
Disproportionality	0.860 (0.153)	0.668 (0.183)
Ln_p	3.387*** (0.275)	4.056*** (0.175)
LogLikelihood	-38.806	-31.084
AIC	93.612	78.19
Observations	10808	10416
Parliaments	9	13

Hazard analysis assuming a Weibull distribution. Hazard ratios are reported, followed, in parentheses, by standard errors.

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Table 3.4: Survival Analysis of Election Timing in the United Kingdom and Australia using Retrospective Measure of Inflation, 1972 - 2005

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>Australia</i>
Time Left	1.000*** 0.000	1.000*** (0.000)
Party	0.437 (0.385)	3.534** (5.911)
Inflation Rate		
Government Strength	1.011 (0.015)	0.804** (0.050)
Inflation change previous half year	1.809** (0.544)	1.636 (0.603)
Inflation change next half year		
Disproportionality	0.890 (0.142)	0.497** (0.119)
Ln_p	3.341*** (0.282)	4.056** (0.175)
LogLikelihood	-36.628	-30.620
AIC	89.256	77.24
Observations	10808	10416
Parliaments	9	13

Hazard analysis assuming a Weibull distribution. Hazard ratios are reported, followed, in parentheses, by standard errors.

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Table 3.5: Prospective Model of Election Timing in the United Kingdom and Australia using Survival Analysis, 1972 - 2005

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>Australia</i>
Time Left	1.000*** 0.000	1.000*** (0.000)
Party	3.151 (4.780)	6.622** (9.486)
Inflation Rate		
Government Strength	0.996 (0.021)	0.873 (0.034)
Inflation change previous half year		
Inflation change next half year	1.643** (0.370)	1.244* (0.145)
Disproportionality	1.070 (0.195)	0.612** (0.145)
Ln_p	3.225*** (0.315)	4.005*** (0.175)
LogLikelihood	-33.248	-29.511
AIC	82.496	75.02
Observations	10808	10416
Parliaments	9	13

Hazard analysis assuming a Weibull distribution. Hazard ratios are reported, followed, in parentheses, by standard errors.

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Table 3.6: Government Duration and the Prevalence of Double Dissolutions in Australia, 1974 - 2004

Election	Duration (days)	Concurrent Election with Senate?
May 18, 1974	409	yes
December 13, 1975	491	yes
December 10, 1977	633	no
October 18, 1980	942	no
March 5, 1983	802	yes
December 1, 1984	555	no
July 11, 1987	835	yes
March 20, 1990	890	no
March 13, 1993	1008	no
March 2, 1996	1001	no
October 3, 1998	854	no
November 10, 2001	1064	no
October 9, 2004	932	no

Data collected from Adam Carr's election website: <http://psephos.adam-carr.net/>

Table 3.7: Comparison of Disproportionality and Government Duration in the United Kingdom and Australia.

Election Call	Disproportionality	Duration (days)	Percent of Term Complete
United Kingdom			
June 29, 1970	6.59 (Low)	1320	72
October 22, 1974	15.47 (High)	197	10
May 9, 1979	14.96 (Medium)	1620	89
June 15, 1983	11.58 (Medium)	1462	80
June 17, 1987	17.45 (High)	1427	78
May 27, 1992	14.95 (Medium)	1730	95
May 14, 1997	13.55 (Medium)	1756	96
May 8, 2001	16.51 (High)	1456	80
April 5, 2005	17.77 (High)	1385	76
Australia			
April 11, 1974	6.9 (Low)	409	37
November 11, 1975	5.96 (Low)	491	45
November 10, 1977	13.93 (High)	633	58
September 19, 1980	14.94 (High)	942	86
February 4, 1983	8.25 (Low)	802	73
October 26, 1984	10.31 (Medium)	555	51
June 5, 1987	7.95 (Low)	835	76
February 19, 1990	10.42 (Medium)	890	81
February 8, 1993	12.48 (High)	1008	92
January 29, 1996	8.12 (Low)	1001	91
August 31, 1998	10.97 (Medium)	854	78
October 8, 2001	10.87 (Medium)	1064	97
August 31, 2004	9.37 (Low)	932	85

Source:

Michael Gallagher elections website:

http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php

CHAPTER IV
ELECTION TIMING IN CONTRASTING CONDITIONS OF
DISPROPORTIONALITY

Introduction

I turn to a discussion of similar systems to further test my attributes and events theory. Both Japan and New Zealand utilized similar mixed-member systems since electoral reform, but have faced very different conditions of disproportionality over the last four decades. As noted in Chapter Two, Japan did not typically experience a great deal of disconnect between vote share and seat share during this period. Comparatively, in New Zealand, the deviation of seat share from vote share was so great that, on two occasions, a party was elected into government despite another party gaining more votes. Why did these opposing conditions of disproportionality arise, and what did this mean for the timing decision?

In this chapter, I initially focus on these two cases separately to test my events and attributes theory. I first assess Japan over time, noting the change in electoral system and its effect on disproportionality in the mid-nineties. Additionally, I note a simultaneous change in New Zealand, albeit it with different results. After considering these cases individually, I compare them to one another. While the two countries switched to mixed systems, they generated very different outcomes in relation to disproportionality. I seek to determine whether this has had a subsequent effect on the frequency of early elections.

Japan

Japan proves a unique case of study because it has been explained as both an example of manipulative and opportunistic decision-making. Cargill and Hutchinson (1988) maintain that governments in Japan manipulate the economy to garner electoral support in a forthcoming election. Sometimes, the priming of the economy has unintended consequences and the government must react to conditions in the system, creating a contradiction. If governments must react to unplanned economic shocks, or if a positive swing in the economy gives incentive to governments to rush to the polls, then Cargill and Hutchinson could very well be detecting opportunism, instead of manipulation.

In short, this is a microcosm of the debate that exists among scholars assessing timing in Japan. I propose that my theory, based on the prospective decision-making thesis, would render these approaches moot. First, I offer my theory as a means to change the direction of focus from retrospective to prospective. Second, I would greatly expand the explanation of the timing decision to one beyond just exogenous shocks to the system.

In Japan, government leaders should dissolve the House of Representatives frequently because of the low degree of disproportionality that existed until electoral system change in 1994. Prime ministers should feel more comfortable calling for early elections because they can be more accurate in forecasting their chances for victory. If they know that their seat share is closely tied to vote share, then there should be a measure of predictability in the outcomes.

However, after electoral system change, we should expect prime ministers to be less likely to go to the polls. The new mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) system introduced the over-representation of larger parties. While this benefited stalwarts like the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), this could also make the assessment of the vote and seat share connection much more difficult. Therefore, we should expect a decreased likelihood of early elections post-reform.

There is much that complicates the assessment of Japan's system. As noted in Chapter Two, the prime minister holds tremendous sway over the dissolution process. However, calling an early election is a cabinet decision that must be counter-signed by the prime minister. He does not have unilateral power to call for an election as the prime minister of New Zealand does. Nor, does he have to only ask for the consent of a non-partisan, unelected head of state as in Australia and the United Kingdom. Even more difficult to assess is the effect of factions within the main party of government, the LDP. These groups emerged in response to the electoral system

Prior to reform, MPs were elected to the Diet in "medium-sized" districts with plurality rules, known as single non-transferable vote (SNTV). Candidates competed for three to five seats per district, with those candidates who received the most votes elected to office. There were no quotas for election, i.e. a minimum number of votes required for election a la single transferable vote (STV). In a district with a magnitude of three, the difference in vote share between the first and third place finishers could be dramatic. Likewise, the difference in vote share between the third and fourth place finishers could be slight. Regardless, the first three finishers would be elected to office.

SNTV produced a number of major side effects. First, if a party had any aspirations of forming a one-party government it would have to run multiple candidates on the same ballot in several districts; in 1993, for example, there were 511 seats in the lower house elected from 129 districts (Reed and Thies 2002). This led to intense, intra-party competition among LDP members and inhibited the development of party unity.

Second, and related to the first point, the competition among party members placed the focus of campaigning not on policies, but on personalistic relationships with constituents. Dietmen were motivated to provide favors to their supporters, which put pressure on their organizations to raise money. This led to a great number of corruption scandals that ultimately led to the electoral reform of 1994 (Reed 2005).

The LDP, soon after its ascension to power in the 1950s, took advantage of the nuances of this system. Factions formed and dominated the party structure, contributing to a lack of cohesion. Subsequently, it became difficult to agree on a specific ideology to appeal to voters. Instead, the LDP relied on vote maximization efforts, to keep itself in power.

Other parties were slow to follow the LDP's lead and this prevented a meaningful opposition from forming to challenge the government. The LDP's lack of an ideological platform allowed it to adapt to changing conditions. The opposition, notably the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP), chose to haggle over issues that were deemed no longer relevant by the voting public. Even on the issues that did strike a chord, the LDP's flexible platform allowed it to co-opt the positions of the opposition (Thies 2002).

A third, and final, byproduct of the SNTV system was the incentives created for small parties to run. Since votes were not redistributed once a candidate reached a

threshold, as in single non-transferable vote, it became easier for a party to gain a seat in the Diet; a smaller party could gain representation with, perhaps, only 15 to 20% of the vote (Reed and Thies 2002). However, the LDP often gained the greatest number of seats in a district because it could run several candidates on the ballot.

To give an idea of how much the LDP dominated the system, disproportionality levels rarely rose above 7 (compared to the high teens and low twenties of highly disproportional systems in the United Kingdom and New Zealand). The effective number of parties in the Diet, though, rarely rose above 3. Smaller parties could be elected to office, but not in large enough numbers to assist the JSP in removing the LDP from power.

The LDP has dominated the electoral landscape in Japan for over fifty years. Some authors point to the fact that LDP positioned itself as pro-growth party, during a time when Japan was an emerging economic power. The LDP's popularity, then, was as much about its ability to choose its policies without the constraints of ideology, and to organize effective seat-winning strategies, as it was about the large number of seats awarded in multi-member districts by the plurality voting formula (Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993). Still, much of the LDP's power was solidified through the use of the SNTV electoral system

The SNTV system had a dramatic effect on the behavior of Diet members. These representatives sought to forge a particular, personalistic relationship with their constituents in order to ensure re-election. This was in response to the way Diet members were selected from the multi-member districts; a candidate often needed to acquire the support of only fifteen to twenty percent of voters in a district to get elected. The policies

of the party were less important than the services and connections provided by that particular candidate. These candidates had incentive to build these relationships, and so a system of personal support organizations (*koenkai*) emerged to ensure electoral success.

While disproportionality remained low throughout this period prior to reform, it was largely because of the LDP's ability to franchise its brand. Diet members forged close relationships to voters and could use the familiarity of the LDP name to augment their popularity. Thus, vote share and seat share were tied closely together because many candidates despite, their different backgrounds, received support from the LDP.

New Zealand

In 1984, New Zealand Prime Minister Robert Muldoon called an election several months earlier than most political observers had expected. He used his discretion, as permitted by law, to go to the polls well before his government's three year term limit on had expired. Because of widespread unpopularity, Muldoon and his National party lost the election; National remained out of power until 1990 (Table 4.2).

New Zealand provides a intriguing case study for several reasons. It has one of the shortest maximum terms in the world: three years. Of the OECD countries that allow endogenous election timing, only Australia has as short a constitutionally imposed limit on government duration. By contrast, the United Kingdom has a maximum term of five years. Of other countries that use a form of MMP, Japan and Germany, notably, have a maximum term of four years.

It should come as no surprise, then, that governments in New Zealand have historically lasted the entirety of the three-year term. From 1954 until 1981, elections

were held every third year during the last week in November. There were no complete collapses of governments and changes in leadership did not lead to calls for a new election. There was simply very little to be gained in calling an election early. An election called two years into the term would only, at best, gain the government an extra two years in power. In Britain, a similarly timed election could gain a government almost twice that much more time in power. For leaders in Britain, this could make the risk of losing much more palatable. For those in New Zealand, an early election did not seem to be worth the chance of losing power. In a system where elections could be called early, there seemed little reason or opportunity to do so.

This regular election cycle ended with the 1984 election. The National government became the first in three decades not to serve until the end of the term; the government failed after only 827 days. From this point on, there was much more variation in length of governments. In Table 4.3, we can see that each of the governments since 1981 has made it into its third year. Some, however, have ended many months earlier than others.

There does not appear to be a marked difference in term lengths; all governments entered their third year. The fact that some of these governments did not last over one thousand days, however, should be a sign of some pressure on leaders that had not been present over the previous three decades. I focus the analysis of the paper on this period of previously unseen variation in government terms, from 1982 until 2005.

In New Zealand, my theory predicts that before electoral system change, there should be fewer early elections. The FPTP system produced high levels of disproportionality. This should make a government, inclined to call an election on the eve of an economic downturn, more hesitant to go to the polls. The great deviation of seat share from vote share will make a prime minister's assessment of his chances for election much more difficult. After the switch to the mixed-member system, though, the theory predicts that the prime minister should have an easier time assessing his chances for victory at the ballot box, given the decreased in disproportionality.

Unfortunately, preliminary analyses demonstrate that the opposite is the case. Of the three parliaments that dissolved early, two occurred before system change, during periods of higher disproportionality. This works in complete opposition to my theory. While I spend more time assessing this during the analysis section of this chapter, this raises a number of questions. Is it too soon after the system change to evaluate disproportionality as a government attribute with an effect on the timing decision? Ultimately, I must consider whether disproportionality factors into the timing calculus differently in New Zealand than in other countries.

There has been dramatic volatility in the degree of disproportionality produced by New Zealand's electoral systems. In the late 1970s, overall voter support was split between the two parties but seat share was not distributed equitably. This manifested itself as high levels of disproportionality, as illustrated in Table 4.3. There were great fluctuations in government as voters switched back and forth from National to Labour. This resulted in a change in electoral system. Until 1996, MPs

were elected in single member districts (SMD) by a first past the post (FPTP) system, where the candidate with the most votes in that district was elected to office. This led to a strong two-party system, which became the prototypical Westminster form of government (Duverger 1954; Lijphart 1999).

Why were there such high levels of disproportionality in New Zealand for so long a period of time? This was chiefly due to the FPTP electoral system that was used until the 1996 election. As is demonstrated by Duverger's Law, a SMD will produce two-party competition at the district level. Competition was limited, then, and small parties could gain some vote support but few, if any, seats in Parliament.

The one-party governments in New Zealand were long considered accountable to the people because they could react swiftly to issues as they arose. A mandate norm developed, as the one party that gained a majority of seats would feel free to implement its program because of its support in the previous election (Nagel 1998). However, given the lack of institutional veto players in the system, the people were the only real check on government, and only during elections (Denemark 2002). While this system would be considered accountable, it was not considered responsive (Blais and Massicotte 2002). In fact, the FPTP system, combined with the limited number of actors, increasingly allowed the majority party to pass through legislation that was very unpopular (Vowles 1995).

To illustrate this, I explain the evolution of electoral reform in New Zealand. In 1975, the conservative National party won majority-control of the lower house, capturing eight percent more votes than Labour. Robert Muldoon was selected as prime minister, a position he would go on to hold for nine years. During this time, his

combative nature and deviation from traditional party ideals drove a wedge between him and the average National voter.

Muldoon advocated a “Think Big” policy, which called for an increase of state intervention in the economy. This policy did not sit well with many of the traditional members of the National party’s base and ran counter to the actions of many conservative parties around the world (Pierson 1994, Boix 1998). While Muldoon supported state control, many members of his National party still advocated economically liberal strategies. Nevertheless, Muldoon managed to pass his policies through Parliament (Vowles 1995; Denmark 2001).

The public gradually withdrew support from the government and, by 1978, there was growing support for the removal of National from power. In that year’s election, Labour gained roughly eleven thousand more votes than National. However, because of the distribution of votes among districts, National still won fifty seats. It kept its position in government despite more popular support for Labour overall. In addition, the Social Credit party gained over sixteen percent of the popular vote but won only one seat (Elections New Zealand).

Despite this controversy, National managed to serve out the entirety of its subsequent term. In 1981, voters turned out in much greater numbers than before. Nevertheless, the result was still the same. National maintained control of Parliament with a majority of seats (four) while Labour again won more total votes overall. The Social Credit party won two seats even though it received more than a fifth of the votes cast.

The 1984 election did not bring an end to the controversy. Labour won almost sixty percent of the seats in the legislature, but did so with only forty-three percent of the vote. Even though it had campaigned to respond to voter complaints about the electoral system, Labour leaders begrudgingly agreed to create a reform commission. When the Royal Commission recommended the implementation of an MMP system, Labour was slow to respond and attempted to halt the move toward a new electoral formula (Nagel 2004).

By the late 1980s, voters again became dissatisfied with the economic path set by the government. David Lange, the Labour prime minister, installed a number of retrenchment policies that mirrored those of the conservative parties in Europe and America. These conservative elements were too far removed the more than traditional preferences of Labour supporters. In 1990, National won back a majority of the legislature. National campaigned to reform the electoral system, as Labour once did. It also benefited from a great number of traditional Labour voters deserting their party.

Comparison of Japan and New Zealand

I turn to a discussion of the points of comparison between Japan and New Zealand. Leaders in both countries implemented electoral reform in the 1990s in order to appease unhappy voters who had become upset by their government's lack of accountability. The change to mixed-member systems should appear, at first, to provide similar incentives to leaders in each country. However, the different linking mechanisms used by each country actually provide very different incentives for the leaders in each country. A Japanese prime minister, elected in a system using a more

majoritarian mixed system, should be less likely to call elections than a New Zealand prime minister, who would be elected from a more proportional mixed-member system.

In general, mixed-member electoral systems are a type of multi-tiered system, where representatives are elected from overlapping districts. In the case of the mixed-member system, legislators are all elected to the same body. A lower house can have representatives that are elected from these different districts, which gives them different motivations and incentives.

These two tiers can be classified as nominal and list-based, respectively. Citizens voting in the nominal tier choose from candidates that might or might not have party affiliation. This tier is often defended as maintaining the “electoral connection” between voters and representatives (Mayhew 1974). Most of the time, voters elect one representative from each district in this tier, akin to FPTP in the United Kingdom. This is not an absolute, however, as there is no reason why voters might not choose representatives from a multi-member district with plurality rules, a la SNTV. Still, in practice, members of parliament elected from the nominal tier are typically from single-member districts (Shugart and Wattenberg 2001).

Voters casting a ballot in the list tier select parties instead of individual candidates. In contrast to the typical nominal tier district, the seats filled in the list tier are selected in multi-member districts. Parties are awarded seats in these districts in proportion to their vote share. This tier is included to create incentives for small parties to form. The presence of more parties, representing a wider range of views, increases the responsiveness and fairness of the government (Blais and Massicotte 2002). The actual

members of parliament chosen to represent the parties from this tier are selected from lists. In theory, these lists can be open, where voters can choose the order in which representatives are selected from the list, or closed, where voters have no such option. In practice, countries that use mixed-member systems typically employ closed list procedures for the list tier.

Generally speaking, mixed-member systems are more proportional than straight majoritarian systems. The list tier limits disproportionality with the use of multi-member districts and a list-based electoral system. However, there is a further distinction among the types of mixed-member systems that also increases proportionality: some mixed systems have nominal tiers that are linked to their list tiers, as in New Zealand, while others do not link the two tiers, as in Japan (Reed 2005; Vowles 2005).

The system used in New Zealand, where the nominal and list tiers are linked, is called a compensatory system. Here, voters cast their ballots in the nominal tier for individual candidates. They also choose a party in the list tier. When the votes are tallied, electoral officials compare the percentage of votes received by a party in the nominal tier with the votes that party receives in the list tier. That party is then awarded seats from the list tier to bring its overall representation in line with its vote support from the list tier. As an example, suppose in a 200-person legislature, where 100 seats are elected from each of the nominal list tiers, that Party A receives 60 of the 100 seats in the nominal tier elections. In the list tier, Party A also receives 50% of the vote. The remaining 100 seats are then assigned as compensation; for Party A, it would most likely receive another 40 seats to bring its total to 100, which is 50% of the 200-seat legislature.

Compensatory systems are designed, then, to be as proportional as possible. They are, not surprisingly, also referred to as mixed-member proportional, or MMP, systems.

In contrast, the system in Japan, where the nominal and list tiers are not linked, is called a parallel system. Representatives are elected from each tier with no consideration for the other tier. As in a compensatory system, votes are tallied for both the nominal and list tiers, and representatives from the nominal tier are elected in the same manner. However, the list tier seats are awarded separately from the nominal tier. A party is awarded a percentage of the list tier seats based on its vote share, but the allotment does not reflect a party's performance in the nominal tier.

Consider again the example from before. Party A still receives its 60 seats in the 100-seat nominal tier. When awarded seats from the list tier, though, it receives 50% of the 100 list tier seats, or 50 seats. That puts its total seat representation to 110 seats in the 200-seat legislature. While the list tier seats were distributed proportionally, the overall representation of Party A is not quite as proportional as in the case of the MMP system described above. This parallel system favors larger parties and invites more disproportionality than its compensatory counterpart; it is often referred to as a mixed-member majoritarian, or MMM, system as a result (Shugart and Wattenberg 2001)

In one sense, the difference between the system used in New Zealand and that used in Japan is subtle; both employ both majoritarian and proportional electoral formulas simultaneously. However, the linkage of seats creates different results as far as disproportionality is concerned. The MMM system in Japan allows for larger parties that could be over-represented. The MMP system in New Zealand is biased in favor of smaller parties that better represent the views of the population. In terms of my theory,

the MMM system in Japan allows for more disproportionality, while the MMP system in New Zealand allows for less (Barker et al 2002; Reed and Thies 2002).

In terms of my attributes and events theory, I should expect more frequent elections in the time following system change in New Zealand than in Japan during periods preceding an economic downturn. I assess this more in detail later in the chapter, but the production of different levels of disproportionality than what had existed prior to reform should change the timing decision calculus of the prime minister. A prime minister serving in the Diet in Japan with the MMM system should be much less certain of his support in assessing future election chances, and less likely to call an election than his post-reform counterpart in New Zealand. There, with less of a disconnect between votes and seats, a prime minister can more accurately assess his chances for victory in a future election.

This assessment should prove vital given the assumptions of the informational thesis. Prime ministers choose an early election when they foresee poor economic conditions on the horizons. Voters, sense this, or take cues from other sophisticated voters, and seek to punish a prime minister who chooses to dissolve parliament before he must. The prime minister must assess whether he stands more of a chance for re-election now, in the face of this backlash, or in the future. The amount of disproportionality in the system, then, is an important piece in the calculation of his chances to win an election.

The mixed-systems used in Japan and New Zealand, then, prove to be interesting tests of this theory. Each system produces different levels of disproportionality, which should affect a prime minister's timing calculus, according to my theory. These different distributions of seats and votes are, in many ways, by design. To illustrate why Japan

and New Zealand picked the systems they did, I discuss the motivations of actors in each country that called for reform.

Electoral Reform in Japan: The Switch to MMM

The SNTV system in use prior to reform, and the pressures placed on members to forge personal relationships with voters, necessitated the spending of great deals of money. That, combined with the LDP's uninterrupted stay in power, led to a number of corruption scandals. This culminated in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the Recruit scandal, where several Diet members profited from insider trading information during the initial public offering of a Recruit subsidiary company, and the Sagawa Kyubin scandal (Curtis 1999).

Many voters, and most politicians, pointed specifically to the SNTV electoral system as the problem. This electoral system produced conditions that fostered the growth of money politics and created incentives for Diet members to seek large influxes of campaign support to ensure re-election. This was a commonly noted concern by the time of the Recruit scandal. Yet, the decision to change an electoral system that had profited the LDP for so long developed slowly over time (Thies 2002). It was not until the LDP and JSP lost a combined one hundred and eighteen seats in the Diet that the calls for reform finally became too loud to ignore (Reed and Thies 2002).¹⁸

The LDP lost its majority control of the Diet in 1993. However, it still possessed the plurality of seats in the Diet, and by a large margin. The LDP held 223 (37%) of the seats in the legislature; the JSP was the closest in representation with 70. It was believed,

¹⁸ For the LDP, many of the seats it lost were from a split in the party because of the scandal. For the JSP, these lost seats were actually the result of voter defection in the 1993 general election.

then, that despite the LDP's poor showing in the general election, it would still form a government and remain in power.

Unfortunately for the LDP, the many small parties present in the Diet were sensitive to popular sentiment. While it might have only taken the addition of one or two parties to join with the LDP in coalition, all of the parties were fearful of appearing complicit in the LDP's questionable activities. No party leaders saw fit to enter into meaningful discussions with the LDP leadership throughout the Fall of 1993 (Curtis 1999).

Additionally, these smaller parties wanted to use this opportunity to position themselves in contrast to the LDP. A change in the electoral system, then, appeared to be a legitimate means to prove that this shift in electoral support would also instigate a break from politics as usual. If SNTV had caused many of these problems, then a new electoral system could, perhaps, limit the chances for abuse in the future. Thus, the parties had to figure out a means to gain power to change the system without including the LDP (Reed and Thies 2002; Reed 2005).

The solution for these smaller parties was to form into a broad coalition. In the end, seven parties joined together to take control of the government; this coalition consisted of all parliamentary parties save for some independents, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and the LDP. These parties could not agree on much, other than to collectively acknowledge that electoral system reform was needed. Many former members of the LDP had staked their reputations on a change in system (Reed 2005).

Some scholars argue that this push for reform was misguided. Over the previous decade, there had been calls for a majoritarian electoral system that would produce large

parties that alternated in power (Stockwin 1999; Curtis 1999; Reed and Thies 2002). There had even been talks in the 1950s among LDP members of switching to a SMD system as to consolidate the LDP's power and eliminate the potential for competition. Prime Minister Hosokawa, the coalition leader, argued that the SNTV system had led to intra-party squabbling and widespread corruption, most notably through the system of *koenaki* (Curtis 1999). What Hosokawa did not seem to understand, given the eventual choice of a MMM system, was that a new system would actually strengthen the LDP's position, by removing the incentives for factions to form and emboldening the party leadership.

In Japan, while many remnants of the old system remain, there is more disproportionality and control by larger parties than before. Prior to 1996, when the single non-transferable vote was in place, the highest disproportionality score was 7.44 (Table 4.1). After the switch to the mixed-member system, the *lowest* disproportionality score was 8.52. Although it is not included in this study, the current parliament has an all-time high disproportionality score of 15.63. This should lead to a shift in the frequency of elections over this period. Given the switch to a similar electoral system, we should also expect a shift in the calculus of prime ministers in New Zealand. I turn, then, to a discussion of New Zealand's electoral system to anticipate a subsequent comparison to Japan.

Electoral Reform in New Zealand: The Switch to MMP

In New Zealand, ministers were elected by a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system from 1996 on. Voters cast two ballots: one for an individual candidate as before and the other for a party. The party vote was used to correct any

disproportionality in the system, much like the MMP system used in Germany. Additional seats awarded to parties were filled by members on party lists. Parties gained seats so long as they achieved the five percent of the party votes cast. If not, parties could acquire seats from the party vote if they had at least one member elected from the SMDs. This was a drastic switch in electoral systems, from a pure plurality to a proportional hybrid. As a result, New Zealand went from having only two dominant parties, one in government and the other in opposition, to having coalition governments.

As the ramifications of disproportionality became apparent, each party promised a review of the electoral system in place. Labour (1984) and National (1990) campaigned on the promise of investigating fairer systems for future implementation. Of course, once in power, these parties benefited from disproportionality and saw little need to change the system. National finally held a nonbinding referendum in 1992 where a large number of voters supported change. A binding poll followed in 1993, which coincided with the parliamentary elections of that year. A majority of voters selected to scrap the plurality rules for a corrective MMP system, which has been used since the 1996 election (Nagel 2004).

Proponents of electoral system reform succeeded in their push for a new ballot structure for two reasons. First, party elites badly miscalculated their control over the movement for reform. Initially, it was a tool for the Labour party to engender support to remove National from power prior to the 1984 election. National, in turn, made it an issue prior to the 1990 election, when it wrestled power back from Labour. Each time, it became clear that the push for change was more campaign propaganda than

meaningful policy promise. Voters, however, were serious about change and eventually forced the parties to offer a referendum on system change (Jackson and McRobie 1998).

Second, the politicization of the electoral system debate created a deep anti-National and anti-Labour sentiment. Whereas, at first, voters had become upset with the policies instituted by National and Labour, they subsequently viewed system change as an issue in and of itself. Specifically, the growing unhappiness with the economic policies of both parties manifested itself in the support for a new system. This can be seen in the number of votes cast for parties like Social Credit, especially in the 1993 election. The high disproportionality in the system had led to severe disconnect between voters and the parties. The surest way to bring this back in to line would be through the implementation of new electoral rules, per the recommendation of the Royal Commission (Hunt 1998).

As a result, there have been more parties present at both the electoral and parliamentary level since the system change. More women and minorities have been elected to parliament under MMP than under plurality rules. Indeed, two of the three prime ministers that have served since the introduction of the new electoral system, Jenny Shipley and Helen Clark, were also the first two female prime ministers in New Zealand's history (Vowles 2002).

Additionally, parties have formed coalitions to serve in government, in contrast to the one-party governments that had existed under plurality rules. This has been a source of great consternation to voters, as they have been frustrated by the types of coalitions formed. After the 1996 election, many voters expected Labour to

take power. Instead, the National party stayed in government by allying with the centrist New Zealand First (NZ First) party.

The coalition was highly unpopular. Winston Peters, NZ First's leader and a former National minister, was widely viewed as turning his back on campaign promises. He had soundly criticized National over the course of the campaign and surprised voters with his decision to form a government with his apparent enemy. After a party room revolt in 1998, where Jim Bolger was replaced as prime minister by Jenny Shipley, Peters pulled NZ First out of the coalition. National continued on as a minority government, with the support of some former NZ First ministers that had left the party, until 1999.

Voters punished National and NZ First in the 1999 general election. The National party lost five seats. NZ First lost twelve. Had Peters' not been re-elected to his electorate seat, NZ First would have been shut out altogether; representation in the legislature is only guaranteed when either a member of a party is elected from an electorate seat or the party itself receives at least five percent of the votes cast in the party vote. NZ First did not reach this threshold on its own, as voters cited a desire to punish NZ First for its questionable tactics in allying with National (Karp and Bowler 2001).

Labour formed a minority government with the Alliance, with confidence and supply support from the Green party. In 2002, Helen Clark, the Labour prime minister, called an early election to take advantage of her government's popularity and the lack of a unified opposition. Labour won more seats but could still only form a minority government with the Progressive Coalition, a faction of the Alliance. This

coalition relied on the United Front for confidence and supply measures and went on to serve the full three years of its term.

Ultimately, I use a comparison of Japan and New Zealand to assess whether the different levels of disproportionality produced by the two mixed-member systems affect a prime minister's timing decision. Leaders in each country chose a distinct variation of the mixed-member electoral system, and did so at roughly the same point in the mid-nineties. While reformers made system change a political issue, they did so for different reasons. Japanese reformers sought a means to reduce corruption and strengthen parties. Reformers in New Zealand desired a more responsive system that better linked vote share to seat share. These differences contributed to a difference in the linking mechanism of the two ballots, which produced dramatically different levels of disproportionality.

Analysis

In my analysis, I should expect to find more frequent elections when there are lower values of disproportionality, based on my attributes and events theory. Prime ministers have to make a decision about their chances for re-election based on both economic context and government attributes. If they are motivated to call an election early, having forecast a downturn in the economy, they must assess the chances to win at the voting booth. The degree of disproportionality is key to understanding whether a prime minister continues with the decision to go early or stays in office longer.

Japan has not experienced the same degree of disproportionality in its system that New Zealand has, both before and after electoral system change. This is chiefly because of the systems themselves. Prior to reform, Japan used a system that

produced relatively low to moderate disproportionality. I would expect, then, that prime ministers would be more likely to call early elections during the period before system change. The switch to a mixed-member system produced higher levels of disproportionality and decreased reliability of linking vote support to seat support. Prime ministers and their cabinets should be fearful of going to the polls because of the increased disconnect between what voters wanted and the representation of parties in the Diet.

Additionally, mixed-member systems often create incentives for smaller parties to gain votes when they might otherwise not have received support. As detailed later, the fact that a number of smaller parties received votes, but did not receive seats, has contributed to higher disproportionality scores in Japan after the system change. In this way, disproportionality serves not only as indicator of predictability, but also as a sign that voters are willing to defect to other parties. This could possibly jeopardize a government's chance for re-election.

In Japan, then, I expect more frequent early elections before the system change and fewer after the change. This is partly dependent upon economic conditions and whether there are downturns on the horizon. But, the increase in the level of disproportionality as a result of the mixed-member system should make predicting future outcomes much more difficult, discouraging early elections.

By contrast, New Zealand should face more frequent elections after the system change than before, at least according to the theory. I should expect to find prime ministers going to the polls much more often post reform because of the lower degree of disproportionality in the system caused by the mixed-member system, a

different variation of the one used in Japan. This would make predicting the results of a hypothetical future election easier for a prime minister to anticipate.

At first blush, the fact that there are few early elections in New Zealand makes this point seemingly moot; the tradition of going the full term might simply trump any influence of economic conditions or government attributes. However, there have been a handful of early elections in the last thirty years. Assessing the determinants of these decisions to dissolve parliament sooner than required should prove useful in assessing the applicability of my theory.

Additionally, I would initially expect early elections in New Zealand because of the ability of the prime minister to unilaterally call for an election. He should be free of the influence of powerful players on his decision. This makes the paucity of early elections all the more surprising, and suggests that other factors must be constraining his largely unfettered ability to time an election precisely when he wants.

Yet, as the analysis will demonstrate, New Zealand does not entirely conform to expectations. In large part, this is because disproportionality was a political issue in and of itself in New Zealand from the 1970s on. While the theory states that prime ministers will be less likely to call elections when uncertainty of the results is high, I will address another potential explanation for how disproportionality affects the timing calculus.

The switch to mixed-member systems offers a further means to assess this theory through a comparison of Japan and New Zealand post-reform. Both systems offered voters two ballots: one for a party and the other for a representative. The resulting allocation of seats, though, was markedly different by system. The system

used in Japan led to an increase in deviation of seats from votes, while the system in New Zealand contributed to a tight connection of vote share to seat share. The use of these two systems should affect the timing decision differently. The Japanese MMM system should produce more disproportionality and higher uncertainty about conditions for electoral success. The New Zealand MMP system should produce less disproportionality and lower uncertainty. Thus, we should expect to find fewer early elections under the mixed system in Japan than under the mixed system in New Zealand.

I turn to a survival analysis of these cases to assess the applicability of my theory. As in Chapter Three, I present these cases simultaneously to determine the generalizability of my findings. I include similar controls as used in my investigation of the United Kingdom and Australia. For both countries, I follow previous government termination and election timing scholars in including controls in my analysis (King et al 1990; Warwick 1994; Smith 2003; 2004). I insert a measure for the time left in the term, which should exert pressure on prime ministers to call elections sooner as the time limit appears on the horizon. Also, in New Zealand, I control for the dominant party in power. For the period from 1982 until 1996, this was either National or Labour. The introduction of MMP, however, allowed more parties into government. Since National and Labour remained the two major parties in the three post-MMP governments, I continue to code for their presence in government. This is not a precise measure, given the electoral change, but it should be a fair means to account for any variation in government behavior based on party allegiance. I do not control for the party in power in Japan, however, since the LDP

has been a part of the government for all but a few months in 1993 and 1994. There is not enough variability in party alternation to warrant its inclusion.

I do include a measure for whether there has been a change in prime minister over the previous one hundred days in Japan. A new prime minister may desire to establish a mandate for her leadership. From 1972 through 2005, there were a total of 17 prime ministers who held office, from Kakuei Tanaka through Junichiro Koizumi. This is often a result of factional politics, with different groups constantly battling for control of the LDP. Factions are an important part of Japanese politics and this variable serves as a proxy for the intensity of these struggles (Cox et al 1999; Park 2001).

In New Zealand, however, I have omitted whether there has been a leadership change by the party in power over the previous one hundred days. This transition would normally contribute to governmental instability. In New Zealand, however, parties have not changed leaders close to the time of a general election, with the ascendancy of Mike Moore the lone exception.¹⁹ There have been two notable leadership changes by the party in power between 1981 and 2005. David Lange resigned more than a year before the 1990 general election after the unpopular implementation of neo-liberal policies not normally associated with the Labour party. He was replaced by Geoffrey Palmer. Also, Jim Bolger was replaced by Jenny Shipley during a National Party caucus revolt two years before the 1999 election. In short, there have not been any

¹⁹ Mike Moore took over from Geoffrey Palmer in September of 1990, after the government had already called for an election in late October.

Another consideration is that there is one parliament that is noticeably much shorter than the others in Japan. The government from Fall 1979 until late Spring 1980 lasted four hundred days fewer than the next shortest government. This was in large part due to a behind-the-scenes-power struggle that gained steam after the LDP's disappointing showing in the November 1979 election. Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira was defeated on a confidence measure when a number of LDP members defected and voted with the opposition Socialist Party (JSP) (Stokes 1980). While Ohira was visibly shaken and often appeared frail during the dissolution announcement, the country was still shocked when he passed away of a heart ailment only a few weeks before the election.

The LDP made considerable gains in the June 1980 election; whether this was a result of Ohira's death, or a commentary of the unpopularity of the opposition is uncertain. However, the circumstances surrounding the 1980 election are unlike those encountered in any other election cycle. While I do not control for parliament until my final analysis, this is an important contextual issue that could affect the analysis.

I do not include a measure of voter preference for the parties in power. This is due, in part, to the difficulty in acquiring reliable data from polls about the Japanese and New Zealand governments. In addition, the public held a generally unfavorable view of the parties in power during this period. In Japan, voter anger over the various corruption scandals motivated leaders to change the electoral system to placate their constituents. In New Zealand, the 1978 and 1981 elections damaged the credibility of the system as voters were consistently stymied in their attempts to punish National or

Labour for poor performance. Minor parties received more votes than they had in years past, a sign of popular discontent. Voters overwhelmingly favored the parties most amenable to system change, as evidenced by the support for Labour in 1984 and National in 1990. They desired more than just a choice of “the lesser of two evils” (Jackson 1993; Vowles 1995; Jackson and McRobbie 1998).

I present my results for a basic analysis of the timing decision in Table 4.4. As before, I start with an assessment of the inflation rate, to determine if economic performance has any effect on the chances for an early election. In both countries, the inflation rate variable is significant; in both cases, a percentage point increase in the inflation rate on a given day reduces the chances of an election, given that one has not been called. In Japan, the likelihood of an election decreases by almost thirty percent. In New Zealand, the chances of an election fall by twenty percent. In other words, it appears that governments are less likely to be dissolved in times of weaker economic performance. This significant finding is an important challenge to my hypothesized, prospective theory, and I will consider it toward the end of this analysis when I assess goodness-of-fit statistics for each of these specifications.

The main contention of the election timing literature is that governments judge present conditions in relation to past conditions. I test the notion that governments call elections when economic conditions have gotten better over time. Regardless of whether this upturn is manipulated through public spending or whether the government is taking advantage of better conditions, governments should be more likely to call elections when economic performance has increased over time. I

include a variable to measure the difference in the inflation rate over the six months before the day the election is called.

The hazard ratio coefficients for the retrospective measures of inflation in each country are not significant (Table 4.5). There does not seem to be the support for the retrospective model that there is for the base model. This is surprising, to an extent, as much work has been done in support of retrospective models. However, as I discovered in Chapter Three, I only find support for the retrospective thesis in the United Kingdom and, even then, in a contradictory direction that what should be expected.

I turn, then, to an assessment of a more prospective theory of election timing including both attributes and events. Following Smith, I hypothesize prime ministers are more likely to call elections sooner when economics conditions appear that they will get worse in the near future. Government leaders should have more foresight into future economic performance and will be more likely to call an election when a downturn is expected:

Hypothesis 4.1: Informational Thesis: As the prospect that inflation will rise over the next six months increases, the likelihood a prime minister will call an election early will also increase.

I find limited support for the prospective economic measure in Table 4.6. In Japan, the coefficient produced for this indicator is both significant and greater than one, which follows from my hypothesis. A percentage point increase in inflation over six months leads to a fifty percent increase in the likelihood of an election. Thus, in

Japan, it appears that the Diet is dissolved in the face of declining economic conditions.

In New Zealand, the coefficient for this prospective measure of economic performance is in the hypothesized direction but it is not significant. This is a bit of a surprise, as it is the only case in this study where the indicator for change in inflation rate over the following six months is not significant. Given that the hazard ratio is greater than one, which follows from my hypothesis, I suspect that the lack of significance is because of model specification issues, and the limited number of parliaments from New Zealand. In fact, when I drop disproportionality from the model, this measure does become significant.

I keep disproportionality in my model, though, because I argue it is important as an attribute that affects the decision-making calculus of a prime minister. As I found in Chapter Three, there is some support for this contention in Australia. I hold the same expectation for its effects in Japan and New Zealand in Table 4.6:

Hypothesis 4.2: Leaders of governments elected during periods of higher disproportionality will be less likely to call an election early than those leaders elected during periods of lower disproportionality.

In both cases, unfortunately, I do not find support for this hypothesis. In Japan, the disproportionality measure is simply not significant, though it is in the hypothesized direction. By contrast, in New Zealand, the disproportionality measure is significant; however, but the hazard ratio is opposite of the hypothesized direction! Higher levels of disproportionality correspond to more frequent election calls.

Before I address this contrary finding, I assess my other attribute hypothesis, that government strength effects a prime minister's decision to call an election. A stronger government can accomplish more tasks in office, and has more to lose from an election than a weaker government. I expect to find similar results in Japan and New Zealand to what I expected from my assessment of the United Kingdom and Australia in Chapter Three:

Hypothesis 4.3: As government strength increases, the likelihood an election is called decreases.

In both countries, government strength is significant and in the hypothesized direction. While I had difficulty detecting the effects of government strength in the United Kingdom and Australia, I find support for this attribute as a component of a prime minister's timing decision. For every unit increase in government strength, the likelihood of election decreases by twenty-three percent in Japan and thirty-two percent in New Zealand.²⁰

Next, I turn to a comparison of mixed-member systems post-reform. While this appeared, at first, to be a comparison of similar systems, I have demonstrated that the linking mechanism used in New Zealand produces different allocations of seats than what occurs in Japan. New Zealand switched to a more proportional mixed-member system, which generated low levels of disproportionality. Japan's mixed-member system ensured a more majoritarian outcome, leading to a rise in disproportionality. If the attributes and events theory is correct, I expect more

²⁰ As in footnote 17 of Chapter Three, I run a separate analysis with an interaction of disproportionality and government strength. This is significant for Japan, with a hazard ratio just below 1. However, for the reasons mentioned before, I do not include this in the presentation of my findings.

frequent elections in New Zealand after reform than in Japan. Prime ministers should be more confident of future results in a system with lower levels of disproportionality.

I do not have enough cases to collapse post-reform Japan and New Zealand into one dataset. Instead, I scan the duration of terms post-reform for both countries as rudimentary test to see if there are fewer elections under the MMM system than under the MMP system. Unfortunately, I do not find support for this contention (Table 4.7).²¹ As has been noted before, New Zealand's governments do not fail early very often and this has been true post-reform. Two of the three governments essentially go the full length of their terms. In Japan, by contrast, governments do not seem to be discouraged from going to the polls early despite higher levels of disproportionality.

From these longitudinal studies and this cross-case comparison, I must concede the limited use of disproportionality in explaining election timing in Japan and New Zealand. Certainly, this post-reform comparison is limited in its scale; much more time needs to pass to be able to make any general assessments can be made at all. Also, the behaviors under the prior electoral systems might not yet have been properly re-adjusted for the new electoral rules and subsequent party system. Unfortunately, this is not the only evidence of the deficiencies of this approach and forces me to seriously question its usefulness.

²¹ I also run a survival analysis including a dummy variable for the MMM and MMP systems in Japan and New Zealand, respectively. To avoid serious issues of multi-collinearity, I drop the measure of disproportionality from these models. For Japan, the hazard ratio for the MMM dummy is not significant. For New Zealand, the hazard ratio for the MMP dummy is below 1 and is significant at the .10 level. This suggests that elections are much less likely to be called under MMP, which reinforces the findings from Table 4.6 that elections are less likely under conditions of lower disproportionality in New Zealand.

If I am to continue an argument in favor of the importance of disproportionality, I must account for the non-finding in Japan and the contrary finding in New Zealand from the Prospective Model of election timing. In the case of Japan, I may simply not be accounting for enough contextual variables prevalent in Japanese history. These things may differ from decade to decade or even from House session to House session. In Table 4.8, I include a variable that is an indicator for each of the eleven Japanese governments in the dataset to control for these contextual factors. This indicator is a crude means to assess these contextual factors, but will hopefully allow for a better representation of the actual effects of disproportionality on the prime minister's decision to dissolve the Diet.

When I control for each period, I find that a percentage point increase in the inflation rate over the upcoming six months leads to a ninety-eight percent increase in the likelihood that an election will be called, confirming the finding above from the prospective model (Table 4.6). Additionally, the indicator for disproportionality is significant and in the correct direction. A point increase in the disproportionality index cuts the likelihood of an election being called by about forty percent.

This result is largely unsatisfying, though. While controlling for each House of Representatives under the study generates support for my main hypotheses, it leaves unanswered the question of what exactly is different across each House. The House variable may be significant, but it raises more questions than it answers.

In short, it appears that economics do play a role in the timing of elections in Japan. However, it is not until I control for parliament that the main attribute I offer to explain the timing decision proves significant. In fact, both the Base Model in Table 4.3

and the model controlling for parliament in Table 4.8 offer roughly the same model fit (99.57 to 99.09). Given the better fit of the Base Model, it appears at first blush that Japanese governments are not as retrospective or prospective in their election timing decisions as their counterparts in other parliamentary systems. However, before abandoning this approach in the Japanese case, there should be much more time spent assessing the differences from election to election. We may then, perhaps, tease out a general explanation of the temporal and contextual factors of the election timing decision.

In New Zealand, I possess an even more difficult challenge: why do I find a hazard ratio for disproportionality that runs contrary to my hypothesis? I argue this is due in part to the fact that disproportionality became a major political issue, itself, and contributed to instability, as evidenced by the electoral system reform. Governments failed more often because individual members of parliament faced penalties from their constituents. This was made all the more relevant as the National party moved toward a traditionally left-leaning economic platform and Labour practiced retrenchment, a more right-leaning policy. One could also argue that a prime minister or cabinet, elected in a highly disproportional system to a slim majority or minority has little room for error. Disproportionality might breed resentment in the public while a minimal seat advantage threatens government stability.

Coming back to the topic at hand, I offer the 1984 election as an example. During that year, Prime Minister Muldoon had faced increased hostility from the public. The National party had been in office nine years and had increasingly fallen out of favor with voters, as evidence by the election results of 1978 and 1981.

The Labour party supported an anti-nuclear policy and sought to push legislation through parliament, needing only a handful of defections from National to pass the bill. Marilyn Waring, a National MP, agreed to support Labour on this issue. An infuriated Muldoon immediately called a snap election, which his National party lost.

While stories of Muldoon over-reacting to a single-issue defection are passed on anecdotally now and again, his decision to call a snap election proves a larger point. With little room to spare, Muldoon saw any type of defection as a threat to his party's position in government. One would think that he would not have called an election with a larger majority to act as a cushion (Barber 1984; Hayward 1984).

This leads back to disproportionality. Muldoon was not often popular with voters yet remained in power for roughly a decade. National had not won more votes than Labour since 1975. Not only was its credibility damaged, but its presence in the legislature was not supported by an appropriate mandate from the voters. Had the vote share and seat share lined up, as has been the case post-1996, there might not have been the chance for National to stay in power and enact the policies it did. Instead, the deviation from votes to seats arguably led to a deviation in policy from electoral support; the conservative National party had implemented a number of "Thing Big" government projects under Muldoon while Lange's Labour government uncharacteristically supported retrenchment policies. While governments supported these policies across the world during the 1970s and 1980s (Pierson 1994), the New Zealand governments seemed to support fiscal measures that were dissonant to their party platforms (Vowles 1995). This could be the result of an unforeseen effect of

disproportionality on the timing decision. Instead of disproportionality contributing to uncertainty, it could force government leaders to implement policies far away from its preferences. These leaders may know that their seat share is not supported by a similar vote share in the electorate. Therefore, to ensure re-election, government officials must attempt to support policies that appeal to those voters on the other side of the political spectrum. If elections occur more often under conditions of high disproportionality, which is opposite to the predictions of my theory, it may be due to the instability created from a government sending mixed policy signals to the electorate.

In the end, the case of New Zealand raises the need for further exploration of disproportionality. While I can attempt to explain the anomalous result with anecdotes from the last thirty years, it stands that New Zealand cannot be easily described as falling into step with other countries as it pertains to disproportionality. Perhaps, this is because disproportionality's effects were so acute, to the point of requiring a major overhaul of the country's electoral system. While in other systems, disproportionality constrains the decisions of government leaders, in New Zealand it might have been the driving force behind government failure. The disconnect between vote and seat share engendered so much hostility among the voting public and misdirected the policies of both major parties to the point that party politics have never been the same.

Discussion

The findings in this chapter raise many questions in how effective my events and attributes theory can be in explaining the timing decision. While there is support

for prime ministers looking to future economic conditions in making the timing decision, there is limited evidence of the use of disproportionality and government strength as attributes that condition the likelihood of elections. While government strength is significant, disproportionality is either not significant at all (Japan) or significant in a direction opposite than what I hypothesize (New Zealand).

In Japan, I only find support for disproportionality as a significant predictor when I control for parliament. This finding suggests I need to further delve into the contextual factors for each term of the House of Representatives in the Japanese Diet. I largely attribute the contrary finding in New Zealand to the fact that disproportionality, itself, became a political issue, culminating in the electoral reform of 1996. Both parties in New Zealand veered from their traditional platforms because of the disconnect between votes and seats. This led to great dissatisfaction and, ultimately, a complete change in the way voters interacted with their government.

Even when comparing across cases post-electoral reform, I do not find compelling evidence in support of my disproportionality hypothesis. On the one hand, I may simply need more time to pass and collect more data to better assess this aspect of the theory. In Australia, I find support for this hypothesis, perhaps a sign that further testing is necessary. On the other hand, three of the four cases I study do not conform to my expectations with regard to this indicator. That is not to say that my theory is completely devoid of value; the prospective economic variables are consistently significant, and there is some support of the effects of government strength on the timing decision. It is left to future work, then, to determine whether

the difference in vote share and seat share is simply not relevant or needs further refinement if it is to serve as an effective predictor of early elections.

Table 4.1 Indicators of Disproportionality and Economic Competence in Japan

Date of Election Call	Disproportionality	Inflation Change over previous 6 months	Present Day	Change over next 6 months	Duration
19761115	7 (Medium)	0	9.2	-0.6	1425
19790907	7.44 (Medium)	0.5	3.2	4.8	988
19800519	4 (Low)	3	8	-0.8	193
19831128	6.59 (Medium)	-0.8	1.9	0	1230
19860602	4.27 (Low)	-1.3	0.6	-1.7	889
19900124	7.22 (Medium)	0	3	-0.9	1283
19930618	6.73 (Medium)	-0.3	0.9	0.2	1207
19960927	6.36 (Medium)	0.1	0	1.9	1146
20000602	10.67 (High)	0.4	-0.7	0.4	1304
20031010	11.49 (High)	0.1	0	-0.5	1194
20050808	8.52 (High)	0	-0.3	0.4	629

Source: Michael Gallagher elections website:

http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php

SourceOECD: <http://www.sourceoecd.org>

Table 4.2 Vote Share and Seat Share at the time of Election Call in New Zealand, 1984 – 2005.

End Date	National Vote Percent	National Seat Share	Labour Vote Percent	Labour Seat Share
June 14, 1984	38.8	51.1	39	46.7
June 30, 1987	35.9	38.9	43	58.9
August 9, 1990	44	41.2	48	58.8
September 14, 1993	47.8	69.1	35.1	29.9
May 21, 1996	35.1	50.5	34.7	45.5
September 26, 1999	33.8	36.7	28.2	30.8
June 11, 2002	30.5	32.5	38.7	40.8
July 25, 2005	20.9	22.5	41.3	43.3

Source: New Zealand government elections website: <http://www.elections.org.nz>.

Table 4.3: Indicators of Disproportionality and Economic Competence in New Zealand

Date of Election Call	Disproportionality	Inflation Change over previous 6 months	Present Day	Change over next 6 months	Duration
19840614	16.65 (High)	2.8	4.7	6.4	827
19870630	14.92 (Medium)	5.7	18.9	3.75	1050
19900809	8.83 (Medium)	2.7	7.6	-0.8	1059
19930914	16.48 (High)	1.1	1.5	0	1022
19960521	18.1 (High)	1.0	2.2	-1.7	883
19990926	2.86 (Low)	0.6	-0.5	-0.9	1019
20020611	2.2 (Low)	1.6	2.8	0.2	905
20050725	1.91 (Low)	1.3	2.8	1.9	1065

Source:

Michael Gallagher elections website:

http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php

SourceOECD: <http://www.sourceoecd.org>

New Zealand government elections website: <http://www.elections.org.nz>.

Table 4.4: Survival Analysis of Election Timing in Japan and New Zealand using Inflation Rate, 1972 - 2005

	<i>Japan</i>	<i>New Zealand</i>
Time Left	1.000*** 0.000	1.000*** 0.000
Party		0.477 (0.746)
Inflation Rate	0.698** (0.115)	0.804** (0.094)
New Leader	0.542 (0.625)	
Government Strength	0.953 (0.069)	0.696*** (0.075)
Inflation change previous half year		
Inflation change next half year		
Disproportionality	0.699* (0.136)	2.040*** (0.434)
Ln_p	3.934*** (0.227)	4.652*** (0.238)
LogLikelihood	-41.787	-6.803
AIC	99.574	33.61
Observations	11488	7830
Parliaments	11	8

Hazard analysis assuming a Weibull distribution. Hazard ratios are reported, followed, in parentheses, by standard errors.

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Table 4.5: Survival Analysis of Election Timing in Japan and New Zealand using Retrospective Measure of Inflation, 1972 - 2005

	<i>Japan</i>	<i>New Zealand</i>
Time Left	1.000*** 0.000	1.000*** 0.000
Party		0.227 (0.320)
Inflation Rate		
New Leader	0.880 (0.978)	
Government Strength	0.856** (0.065)	0.722*** (0.078)
Inflation change previous half year	1.191 (0.225)	0.626 (0.235)
Inflation change next half year		
Disproportionality	0.839 (0.136)	1.825*** (0.365)
Ln_p	3.493*** (0.204)	4.587*** (0.325)
LogLikelihood	-44.480	-7.666
AIC	104.96	35.33
Observations	11488	7830
Parliaments	11	8

Hazard analysis assuming a Weibull distribution. Hazard ratios are reported, followed, in parentheses, by standard errors.

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Table 4.6: Prospective Model of Election Timing in Japan and New Zealand using Survival Analysis, 1972 - 2005

	<i>Japan</i>	<i>New Zealand</i>
Time Left	1.000*** 0.000	1.000*** 0.000
Party		0.032** (0.050)
Inflation Rate		
New Leader	0.894 (0.997)	
Government Strength	0.872* (0.065)	0.783** (0.093)
Inflation change previous half year		
Inflation change next half year	1.503* (0.346)	1.340 (0.650)
Disproportionality	0.832 (0.163)	1.465** (0.279)
Ln_p	3.551*** (0.199)	4.494** (0.222)
LogLikelihood	-43.620	-8.529
AIC	105.24	37.06
Observations	11488	7830
Parliaments	11	8

Hazard analysis assuming a Weibull distribution. Hazard ratios are reported, followed, in parentheses, by standard errors.

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Table 4.7: Comparison of Disproportionality and Government Duration in post-reform Japan and New Zealand.

Election Call	Disproportionality	Duration (days)	Percent of Term Complete
Japan			
September 27, 1996	6.36 (Medium)	1146	78
June 2, 2000	10.67 (High)	1304	89
October 10, 2003	11.49 (High)	1194	81
August 8, 2005	8.52 (High)	629	43
New Zealand			
September 26, 1999	2.86 (Low)	1019	93
June 11, 2002	2.2 (Low)	905	82
July 25, 2005	1.91 (Low)	1065	97

Source:

Michael Gallagher elections website:

http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php

Table 4.8 Survival Analysis of Election Timing in Japan with Further Controls, 1972-2005

<i>Japan</i>	
Time Left	1.001*** (0.001)
Government Strength	0.985 (0.072)
Prime Minister Change	0.701 (0.789)
Disproportionality	0.597** (0.146)
House	1.532** (0.277)
Inflation: change over next half year	1.975** (0.615)
ln_p	3.816*** (0.206)
Log Likelihood	-40.543
AIC	99.086
Observations	1148
Parliaments	11

Hazard analysis assuming a Weibull distribution.

Hazard ratios are reported, followed, in parentheses, by standard errors.

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Introduction

I began this thesis with an overview of the multitude of explanations for why and when elections are called. Prior to the last decade, this discussion was rife with disagreements over the motivations of government actors. It was not until Lupia and Strom (1995) and Smith (2003; 2004) that some measure of theoretical unanimity was reached. While there is certainly room for further debate, there is now a sufficient framework upon which to build further applications.

I sought, in this study, to fill a hole in the literature linking government duration analyses to election timing analyses. Much of the work in the former has focused on the attributes of government and the subsequent stability of the cabinet's lifespan. Much of the work in the latter has been conditioned by shocks to the government. Prime ministers, generally, respond to changing economic conditions when making their decision to call an election. In the government duration literature, the battles between the attributes and events supporters became heated until Lupia and Strom essentially unified the two theoretical strands. This has not yet occurred in the election timing literature and was, ultimately, my motivation for conducting this analysis.

In Chapter One, I outlined my attributes and events theory and what my expectations were as to the frequency of elections. I made a number of arguments based on this theory; I maintained that changing economic conditions, viewed from a prospective lens, were vital in creating the conditions for an election. Yet, I argued that the stability of the government, and the prospects for re-election, also influenced

government leaders' timing decisions. Specifically, disproportionality and government strength were attributes that weighed heavily on the minds of leaders. A highly disproportional distribution of seats in parliament would make an election less likely, given the uncertainty of election results. A stronger government should make an election less likely, as well, since the value of holding office is too great to jeopardize, as leaders have a strong incentive to push more of their legislation through with a greater majority.

After discussing the case selection, data and methods used in this study in Chapter Two, I turned to a discussion of the above three hypotheses. In Chapter Three, I assessed the attributes and events theory in two, different majoritarian systems: the United Kingdom and Australia. In Chapter Four, I investigated the timing decision in two systems that experienced a similar shift in their electoral systems. In all of the cases, I sought to assess if my theory held over time in each case before moving on to a brief comparison of these cases.

For all cases, I found at least some support for a prospective model of decision-making. It appears that government leaders look to future economic conditions except for Japan. Even in Japan, this measure was significant, although the basic model only including inflation rate scored better. In New Zealand, this measure is not significant when disproportionality was included in the model, but turned significant when disproportionality was dropped. This is specific to New Zealand; I find clear support for the prospective assessments of the economy in the other three cases. I can only conclude that disproportionality factors in to a prime minister's timing calculus differently in New Zealand than in the other three parliamentary democracies. Still, I find robust support across all cases for the prospective economic model.

As far as attributes explanations, I found only mixed support. Government strength was significant in New Zealand and Japan; here stronger governments were less likely to call an election. This measure was not significant in Australia, which was surprising. If government strength is related to the value of holding office, this should be much more acute in a system with three year time limits. In the United Kingdom, this measure was significant though the effect was virtually nil; a strong government in power for, potentially, a longer period of time, should value its time in office that much higher.

Disproportionality also was not consistently supported as an attribute that influences election timing across these studies. This measure was not significant in Japan or the United Kingdom. In Australia and New Zealand, it did prove significant; however, it had the opposite effect on the timing decision in New Zealand than I anticipated. I attribute this largely to the high issue salience disproportionality had among the electorate. Higher disproportionality in this case became a detriment to the government and a source of instability.

I also briefly compared each pair of cases to determine if there were any other conditioning factors for the timing decision. I found preliminary support for the further study of bicameral institutions based on the frequency of elections during double dissolutions in Australia. I cannot generalize a great deal because this finding is based on a handful of elections in one country, but there is now a basis for further studies of how powerful players in a system might influence the payoffs for veto players involved in the timing decision.

I also found evidence of a similar timing calculus across these two, different systems. In both the United Kingdom and Australia, prime ministers may be affected by

disproportionality and government strength to differing degrees. There is consistent support, though, for a prospective economic model that contributes to the likelihood of election. In terms of the most different systems design, the system-level variables appear to have little effect on the timing decision. Instead, indicators below the system-level seem to provide the best explanation for why prime ministers call elections when they do.

Based on the description of mixed-member systems and the different linking mechanisms, I expected fewer early elections in a more disproportional, MMM system. I find the opposite, however. While this further reinforces the weakness of disproportionality as an independent variable, there may be the potential for comparisons based on the electoral system change, itself, and whether a switch in systems impacts the timing decisions calculus. I do not find support for this from my models, as there does not seem to be a marked difference in timing after reform, but I may re-consider this comparison again using a different theoretical framework.

In sum, I have demonstrated that the informational thesis is an effective tool for explaining the timing decision. I find less support for the addition of attributes to explain early elections. This conflicts with my stated purpose at the beginning of this thesis: to bridge the various explanations of election timing into one, coherent theory. This attempt to advocate for government characteristics as more than simple control variables, and subsequently unify the attributes and events literature, illustrates the need for election timing scholars to consider more than just economic shocks in explaining the prime minister's decision calculus. I do not find much support for disproportionality in this argument; I find slightly more evidence of government strength as a significant indicator. These attributes, however, should not be ruled out completely. Instead, future research

should focus on other government characteristics, as well as alternative operationalizations of the disproportionality and strength indicators. I turn to a discussion of these refinements to both further test this theory and craft a more general approach to its application to larger datasets with many cases.

Institutions

The necessary extension to prior work in this field would be an investigation of all cases of election timing in a large-n study. This would allow me to clearly identify trends across cases that would be much more generalizable than a four-case comparison. One major difficulty with this approach, as noted in Chapter Two, is that the institutional constraints on the timing decision vary across countries. There are a number of different ways to dissolve a government, so a clear typology of dissolution rules is important to identify and guide any of these large studies.

A study of these institutional rules may further help to bridge the divide between the government termination and election timing literatures. Work on government termination focuses on the pressures to dissolve parliament on a number of different actors. The election timing literature places more emphasis on the decision-making power of the prime minister to call an election when it is advantageous. More recent work, though, has the potential to recast these two approaches as matters of degree. Instead of only investigating the factors that affect the prime minister's calculus, or the events that lead to coalitions falling apart, scholars can assess the constraints on actors within systems (Strom and Swindle 2002). A "veto players" framework would make the unification of the termination and timing literatures much more logical, as described below.

In their base model on dissolution powers, Strom and Swindle (2002) consider the dissolution game as involving three actors: the prime minister, the coalition partner, and the head of state. The prime minister is an *ex ante* veto player, who, alone, has the power to propose dissolution. If she chooses not to call an early election, the game ends and the status quo is maintained. However, if the prime minister does call an early election, then the coalition partner can acquiesce to the decision or offer dissent. Finally, the head of state possesses an *ex post* veto; she can either approve or deny the request for dissolution.

Important to this is a distinction between the powers of the coalition partner and head of state in this game. The authors classify a coalition partner, in the base model, as a powerful player but not a veto player. In other words, while the coalition partner can affect the payoffs, it is neither necessary nor sufficient to cause dissolution. The head of state, though, can turn down the prime minister's request, making her a veto player.

While the authors note five possible outcomes, they prove that only two solutions exist: either the prime minister will propose dissolution and the head of state will approve or the prime minister will not propose dissolution. They demonstrate that a prime minister, anticipating an *ex post* veto, will not propose dissolution if the head of state will not approve it. Likewise, since the coalition partner affects the payoffs but does not exert control over which outcome will emerge, the coalition partner should never dissent. The authors assume that a coalition partner who does not acquiesce to a request for dissolution will pay a dissent cost, due to frustrating voters with the appearance of intra-coalition squabbling. This cost is unnecessary for two reasons. First, if the head of state vetoes the prime minister's request, the coalition partner can simply acquiesce and let the head of state pay a penalty, a veto cost. Second, if the head of state approves the

dissolution, there is nothing the coalition partner can do to prevent an election from occurring. In this case, it is best to acquiesce rather than pay a dissent cost in the subsequent election.

As this is just a basic model, Strom and Swindle account for a number of other “special” circumstances. In one case, where there is no coalition partner, dissolution should be that much easier. While a coalition partner, as described above, cannot act as a veto player, it can affect the payoffs for each outcome. Without this influence, the game becomes even simpler; the prime minister, anticipating the head of state’s ex post veto, will only propose dissolution when she knows it will be approved.

In addition, there is a second special case, which is even less restrictive. If the prime minister can dissolve parliament needing the approval of a non-partisan or powerless head of state, then he is any other veto player, then he possesses complete control over the process. So long as the prime minister’s electoral benefits from calling an election are positive, then she can proceed with the timing decision. This special case would be ideal for assessing the election timing argument, as assessing an unrestricted prime minister’s calculus should be a clear gauge of whether an election was to be called. In this study, the one case that fit this description, New Zealand, did not seem to have leaders that often took advantage of this position.

There are other, more restrictive special cases. A third case can be when a cabinet or parliamentary majority’s approval is necessary for an election to be called. This transforms the coalition partner from a powerful player in the game to a veto player. Since this player’s conditions must be met, in addition to the conditions of a prime

minister and partisan head of state, then there should be fewer elections called early in this case.

Finally, there are examples of dissolution powers being granted to the head of state only, as in France and Italy. In this fourth special case, the head of state's decision to call an election is unchecked, giving him a great deal of power and leverage over the legislature. Strom and Swindle are quick to note that this is not necessarily a more or less restrictive case. The preferences of the prime minister in the second special case, where he is largely unconstrained, do not mirror those of the head of state in this fourth special case; the head of state might or might not call elections earlier than an unrestrained prime minister. These institutional rules serve as a blueprint for further investigation of early elections.

Methods

The government duration and election timing literatures have been well-served by improvements in methodological techniques. As Laver (2003) explains, the introduction of event history analysis, specifically survival analysis, allowed scholars a more accurate and appropriate tool of investigation. A hazard rate was a more telling measure of the stability of a government than an OLS regression coefficient. Additionally, the distribution underlying this measure could be assumed and applied; while many sought to justify a constant hazard rate, Warwick (1994) convincingly argues that the chances for election increase over the course of a government's term. Subsequently, this had led to the assumption of an underlying Weibull distribution in many survival models. More recent studies, such as those by Kayser (2005; 2006), utilize a non-parametric Cox model where this assumption does not matter.

Another contribution of Strom and Swindle's (2002) study is the use of a basic formal model to simplify the preferences of actors involved in the timing decision. This would be another important refinement of further studies; formal models may be the best means to clearly illustrate the interaction of government actors prior to the call of an election. Smith (2004) does include this in his work but this model is certainly only applicable to the United Kingdom. Using Strom and Swindle's far less complicated approach, I would have to adjust aspects of Smith's dynamic model to the various institutional constraints they identify.

Disproportionality and Uncertainty

Additionally, I have identified a number of independent variables that prove useful in assessing the timing decision of prime ministers. Future applications of the argument from this paper may include different operationalizations of these variables or new variables altogether. With regard to disproportionality, I find lukewarm support for it as an explanatory variable. Before I abandon it as a valid attribute, I must consider if my current operationalization is sufficient to test my theory. One consideration might be that disproportionality is too crude of a measure. For the theory to be properly assessed, I might refine my measure from the government-level to the district-level. The hypothesized effect of disproportionality reflects uncertainty as a deterrent; prime ministers should hesitate to call an election when they are less certain of the outcome.

There may be support for this hypothesis if I look to the marginality of specific races. If the margin of victory in a number of these races is expected to be tight, then a prime minister may be dissuaded from calling election. If this margin of victory is large and in her favor, a prime minister might then be more likely to call an election. I would

need to collect district-level data for a number of countries. This would be difficult and would require a focus on the recent past, where data is more reliably maintained. Also, I would have to recast this argument as less about electoral systems and disproportionality and more about incomplete information and uncertainty. Still, this may be the best means of testing the theoretical argument that supported my disproportionality hypothesis.

Government Strength

Given Strom's (1990) work on minority governments, I also consider an alternative operationalization of the government strength variable used in this study. This measure addresses the argument that the relationship between government strength and election timing decisions might be a nonlinear one. When a government has a large majority, defections should have a much less pernicious effect on stability as when the government is on the border of a majority/minority. An MP voting against a party that holds sixty percent of the seats in parliament does not threaten the stability of the government as much as an MP that defects when the government hold fifty percent of the seats, plus one.

Likewise, a government that is firmly entrenched in the minority would not appear to be as vulnerable to an individual's defection on a given measure as would a government that is hovering around the fifty percent mark. When a party has a small minority, it has a great deal of reliance on other parties. It will structure its confidence and supply agreement accordingly; the potential defection of an individual is not as much a make-or-break proposition as when the government is clinging to power.

While minority governments are always susceptible to defection, those that are close to the fifty percent mark might be more damaged by an individual's defection than a minority government that is, say, closer to forty percent. Under this scenario, elections will be more likely to be called when the government's seat share is close to fifty percent. Large majority governments, and smaller minority governments for that matter, should be fairly established in their positions. A defection of one or two members matters less to these governments than to a government with a bare majority. We should not expect elections to be called as frequently in these cases.

In the case of Britain, the defection of a Labour party MP from Gordon Brown's government would not be as pernicious as if Labour had only a seat or two majority in the House of Commons. In the latter case, the potential for instability is high, leading to an increase in the likelihood that an early election may be called. Brown's government, by contrast, held a 33-seat majority in 2007. While this is small in comparison to the large majorities enjoyed by the prior, Blair-led governments, it is big enough to absorb the defection of a few MPs. This further explains why Brown would not have called an election during Fall 2007; he did not need to worry about a minor party revolt toppling his government.

To test this, I would alter the government strength variable described above. I argue that governments with large majorities and smaller minorities will be less likely to fail than those governments that hover around the majority mark of 50 percent. Since this is a nonlinear relationship, I would take the absolute value of the government strength variable: $\text{Government Strength} = |\text{Government Seat Percentage} -$

50 percent|. I would use the absolute value, since the initial government strength variable produces negative values for minority governments; I could, alternatively, square the government strength variable. On this new scale, larger values will correspond to governments with large minorities and small minorities. Smaller values will correspond to governments that are close to 50 percent. I would then have a means to test this nonlinear conception of government strength and, perhaps, offer a contribution to the minority government literature.

Another way to assess government strength may be to consider the polarization of the party system. If parties are spread across a wide ideological spectrum (Tsebelis 1995), then it may be more difficult for governments to last the entirety of their term because of large differences in policy goals. Parties that are concentrated closer together might have more preferences in common with one another; I would then expect to find fewer instances of early elections when the ideological range of the parliament is smaller. The government would observe a high value to holding power when there are fewer differences and would want to avoid being voted out of office. A government in a system with wide range of policy preferences would be more likely to fail because the value of holding office would be much lower; it would accomplish fewer of its goals with more ideological diversity in the opposition.

There are a number of ways to operationalize this measure of strength. First, one could look at the simple number of issue dimensions in the electorate. These cleavages should, depending on the electoral system, contribute to volatility in the party system (Lijphart 1999). Second, one could observe the number of seats

controlled by extremist parties in the legislature. The more seats controlled by these parties, the lower the value of holding office. If these extremist parties hold many seats, they can band together to oppose government policies. This would make elections more likely (Powell 1982). Third, one could measure the ideological concentration of opposition parties. If these representatives cluster around similar preference points, they could pose a more formidable opposition to government initiatives than an opposition that is scattered and diffuse (Strom 1990; Warwick 1994).

Finally, I noted the difficulty in testing hypotheses about government strength in Japan because of contextual factors. Chief among these factors is the presence of factions within the LDP. Factions have long been a part of Japanese politics, and have contributed to divisions within the governing party. This intra-party competition emerged as a result of the SNTV system that voters used to elect Dietmembers prior to reform in 1994. Candidates from the same party competed against one another in multi-member districts and created personal support organizations (*koenkai*) that contributed to an elaborate system of factions. These factions fought for control of the central party apparatus.

The SNTV system and the personal support organizations employed by candidates to ensure election contributed to the split within the LDP. Members from the same district competed against one another, regardless of their party affiliation. They were more concerned with providing services than announcing policy preferences. While *koenkai* and factions emerged as a result of SNTV, they continue to exist today. There may be a weakening of factions as the party system consolidates, but any further study of

Japan must account for the fractionalization of the LDP and the subsequent effects of this process on government strength.

Expectations of Elections

Another improvement would entail measuring the expectations of elections. The theory, as constituted now, assesses the likelihood of an election given certain independent variables. However, an important refinement to this approach would be to assess whether the hazard rate, or the likelihood of failure, is elevated for the few months prior to the call of an election or whether the hazard rate rises sharply at the end of the period. In the former case, elections would be expected, meaning that voters would be less likely to punish governments for going to the polls. In the latter case, elections would seemingly appear to come out of nowhere and voters might be more suspicious of the prime minister's intentions.

This would further clarify the argument made in earlier chapters. Voters punish governments that end early because they view an early dissolution as a signal of declining economic conditions. Of course, there are times when elections are expected and voters do not punish a party calling an early election. The problem with determining which elections are expected and which are not is fairly difficult. At best, I could conduct a content analysis of newspaper stories to determine whether reporters discussed potential elections. Once an article was identified as one where potential elections were discussed, I could assess whether the frequency of stories about the timing of an election increased prior to an election. Those elections that occurred during periods where the publication of these articles was higher would be more expected, while those that occurred when the frequency of election articles was lower would not be expected.

Smith (2004) codes newspaper data for the United Kingdom, but only for the six months and year prior to an election. This, in and of itself, is problematic; he does not allow for periods where the frequency of newspaper stories may increase, but where elections do not occur. This would ignore periods where elections had been expected but were not called.

Additionally, Smith switches between newspapers in counting these stories. He relies on *The London Times* index to count those pieces much earlier in the period but uses LexisNexis to count news stories from later in the period. Unfortunately, different authors and different editors across time and across periodicals may have different agendas. This lack of standardization limits the comparison between parliaments in his study, as he admits.

An alternative to counting newspaper stories is to use predicted values and compare them to the actual dataset. To do this, I would need to transform the hazard rate into an independent variable to gauge whether elections had been expected or not. If I had run a simple regression model, I could have generated residuals by subtracting the observed values in the data set from the predicted values of the election timing models. I then would have assessed the significance of my independent variables, such as future economic conditions and disproportionality, in predicting changes in the size of these residuals. Survival models, though, do not generate such residuals in an interpretable form (Smith 2004: 134).

However, Smith offers a ratio of cumulative hazards as a means to test the effect of expectations on timing of elections. The hazard rate generated in a survival analysis tells us the likelihood of failure. Since I investigate the timing decision with a daily unit

of analysis, I can generate the likelihood a government will fail on a given day from the models in Chapters Three and Four. Following Smith, I would then sum the hazard rates for each day in the month preceding an election. I would also sum the daily hazard rates for the preceding half-year. I would then divide the cumulative hazard rate over the previous month by the cumulative hazard rate over the previous half year. This ratio would be a measure of whether the election was called with little warning or had been expected (140).

To clarify, I should expect the hazard rate to rise sharply preceding an election. This should be due to the factors assessed in these earlier models of election timing, such as measures of future economic performance. If conditions arise suddenly to create the incentive to call an election, then this should be an unexpected election. If conditions exist for an election to be called but the prime minister delays her decision to dissolve the parliament, then an eventual election call would be expected.

An unexpected election would be characterized by a higher value of the ratio of cumulative hazards. Since the numerator is reflective of the chances of an election being called over the month preceding an election, it should be relatively large. However, if the election is unexpected, the denominator should be smaller; the cumulative hazard rate for this period would be low given that the conditions over the previous half-year would not be conducive to calling an election.

Likewise, an expected election would correspond to a lower value of the ratio of cumulative hazards. Again, the numerator would be large. So, too, would the denominator. If the conditions over the previous half-year are likely to cause an election to be called, then the cumulative hazard rate for this period should be high. Therefore,

expected elections should generate larger values for the denominator, which, in turn, reduce the overall value of the ratio.

Smith tests this by including the ratio of cumulative hazards into a model predicting the change in support from Labour to Conservative for a given period. He calculates this by comparing two-party support from an opinion poll prior to the announcement of an election to the results of the subsequent election. He does find preliminary support for this measure; the coefficient is negative, suggesting that the more unexpected the election, the greater the change in vote support. Thus, the theory is further refined, as the expectations of elections become influential in the timing decision.

There are two additions to this approach that would be needed to allow for its application to other cases. First, the ratio of cumulative hazards should be calculated for an entire period, not just the half-year or year before an election. Not only would this provide more data points, but it would also allow for the consideration of a broader concern. As it stands, by selecting cases based on when elections occur, Smith is limited by his focus on the calling elections; he does not really account for the absence of elections. However, by calculating the ratio over several months for an entire term, this model could explain why elections occur and, possibly, why they do not occur.

Second, as has been noted before, the acquisition of reliable poll data is difficult in cases outside of the United Kingdom. To create the dependent variable, I would have to find party preference data in three countries and compare this to electoral results. Otherwise, a proxy for party preference or government popularity must be implemented as the dependent variable to test for the effects of the ratio. While this may prove

challenging, surely the use of these methodological refinements would go a long way to better explaining timing and dissolution in further iterations of this study.

Discussion

These refinements would be useful additions to the timing and duration literatures. While Smith's informational thesis has proven an effective tool in determining the timing of elections, more work needs to be done on improving the study of the attributes that work within this framework. While I find limited support for disproportionality and government strength as predictors of early elections, I believe they do touch upon a fundamental question underlying much of the literature: how do government leaders ensure their re-election?

Many of the answers posited include a government's assessment of its performance, the anticipated voter reaction to this performance, and the government's ability to maximize its chances for victory given its strengths and weaknesses. This is a cold calculation and further work will likely include more refined statistical measures of expectations and changing likelihoods. Yet, these government leaders are human and make mistakes; many of the anecdotes concerning the 1984 general election in New Zealand support this. Scholars must, then, work to assess the conditions for early elections while at the same time accommodating the stochastic nature of this process. Explaining human behavior may be frustrating, but the advancements in the study of government duration and election timing demonstrate that scientific rigor and analysis can provide a framework to understand a complicated and, often, unpredictable process.

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