

UNITING THE INCOMPATIBLE

An analysis of the formation of the
extra-parliamentary construct in Limburg 2019

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Abstract

This thesis test the extent to which coalition theory can provide an explanation for the formation of the extra-parliamentary construct in the Limburg Provincial Council after its election of 2019. The extra-parliamentary construct was deemed a novelty in the Dutch provinces. Coalition theory provides a framework which expects the formation of a nonpartisan government when the fractionalisation and polarisation of the party system combined with institutional and political constraints complicate the formation of a coalition, despite parties' willingness to participate in government. The empirical analysis of the party system, institutional elements and the formation process leads to the conclusion that coalition theory does not provide a conclusive explanation for the formation of the extra-parliamentary construct.

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List of abbreviations

CDA	Christen-Democratisch Appèl
CU-SGP	ChristenUnie-Staatskundig Gereformeerde Partij
D66	Democraten 66
LL	Lokaal-Limburg
PNL	Partij Nieuw Limburg
PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid
PvdD	Partij voor de Dieren
PVV	Partij Voor de Vrijheid
SGP	Staatskundig Gereformeerde Partij
SP	Socialistische partij
VPL	Volkspartij Limburg
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie

1 Introduction

In the aftermath of the Dutch provincial elections of March 2019, the media was dominated by the introduction of Forum voor Democratie in the provinces and the Senate (Nieuwsuur, 2019; NOS Nieuws, 2019; RTL Nieuws, 2019; Valk, 2019). The landslide victory of Forum voor Democratie (Kiesraad, n.d.-e) altered the political reality in the twelve Provincial Councils. The formations, however, only resulted in one Deputy for young party (ANP, 2019). This shows that the negotiations to reach a government after an election is held is not a straight forwards process. This was also the case for the southernmost province: Limburg.

The formation of the extra-parliamentary construct in Limburg in 2019 was quickly named a historic event by its proponents. The new form of government, or better said the new shape of relations between government and parliament was the result of a three month long formation. The seven deputies which form the provincial government were appointed by the Provincial Council after being nominated by the two formateurs, not the coalition partners. Opponents of the construct labelled it a smokescreen to hide the coalition between four right-winged parties. It is safe to say that the result of the formation process raised numerous eyebrows.

After less than two years the complete extra-parliamentary government of Limburg stepped down as a result of a lack of trust from the Provincial Council after the media publications on a supposed integrity-affair concerning a former-Deputy (Bots & Hensels, 2021; Horrichs, 2021; Tiems & Van Hoof, 2021). The crisis was deemed “great and unusual in size” by Minister of Internal Affairs and Kingdom Relations Kajsa Ollongren (Metsemakers, 2021) and named “a first” by professor regional government Klaartje Peters (Horrichs, 2021). The short lived governmental experiment is subject to academic research (Leenknecht & Groenleer, 2020, 2021), but the formation which led to the construct remains a mystery to many.

Political scientists have attempted to clarify government formations through coalition theory. As will be elaborated on in the literature review, traditionally the formation of a minimal (connected) winning majority coalition was expected, but more recent refinements have extended the framework to explain the formation of minority cabinets and nonpartisan governments. The extra-parliamentary construct, nevertheless, seems to fit with neither of these types of government. In an attempt to uncover the path taken by the Provincial Council in order to reach this supposed democratic innovation, this thesis assesses whether coalition theory is capable of explaining the course of events and the outcome. It does so by answering the research question: To what extent do the different elements of coalition theory provide an explanation for the formation of the extra-parliamentary construct by the Provincial Council of Limburg in 2019?

It does so through the analysis of the party system in Limburg, the institutional elements of the Provincial Council and the formation itself. The reasons for the political parties and the informateurs, as well as the formateurs involved are established through process tracing.

Relevance

Western-European democracies are confronted with increasing fractionalisation of their parliaments. The traditional reaction of political parties to form a majority coalition which guarantees a parliamentary majority for the government, has as a result become increasingly complicated. In search of solutions to the coalition puzzles the extra-parliamentary could be one of the potential solutions. In order to learn from the experiences in Limburg, however, the events first have to be understood. Through this thesis the formation is analysed and a better understanding of the formation is gained. A second challenge to Western-European democracies is the declining trust of citizens in politics. The secrecy involved in political negotiations is one of the causes of this distrust. This scepticism was also present when the extra-parliamentary construct was announced in 2019. The analysis of the formation aims to provide an insight in the process. This clarity can aid the citizens of Limburg in grasping why and how this government was formed. Via both paths this thesis contributes to the societal discussion on the state of politics and the formation of governments.

Simultaneously this thesis aims to contribute to the academic debate on coalition theory. This field of political science has been studied extensively over the years and matured from a purely economic theory applied to a social context to a study of politics. At this point the study of traditional minimal winning majority coalitions seems saturated. The deviating results of formations, however, provide an opportunity to uncover mechanisms at play when the traditionally expected process does not occur. The analysis of the formation in the Limburg Provincial Council can provide the basis for the further development of coalition theory by testing whether the deviating outcome can still be explained by the traditional and more recent contributions to coalition theory. This thesis also applies coalition theory based on the formation of governments at the national level to the new context of subnational government formation. By testing the hypotheses to the process in a Dutch province it can be assessed whether the range of coalition theory covers not only national politics, but also the intermediary level of politics. As a result this thesis provides support for extending the range of coalition theory or support for the further refinement of coalition theory depending on the outcome of the analysis.

Continuation

The next chapter outlines coalition theory through a review of the current literature on government formations. The origins of coalition theory is discussed before refinements to the traditional theory is discussed. Based on this review hypotheses are formulated which predict the outcome of the

mechanisms involved in the formation process. The third chapter sets out the approach chosen for this research. The hypotheses are tested in a diagnostic case study through process tracing. The concepts of the hypotheses are also operationalised in this chapter. The fourth chapter describes the results of the empirical analysis. After the case is situated, the party system characteristics are elaborated on before the institutional elements of the Provincial Council of Limburg and the formation itself are discussed. Based on this analysis the hypotheses are either confirmed or rejected. In the final chapter the hypotheses are discussed and the research question is answered. The implications for coalition theory, as well as the limitations of the research are also commented on.

2 Theoretical Framework

The aim of this thesis is to potentially expand the scope of coalition theory to situations in which an extra-parliamentary construct is formed instead of a coalition, regardless of the specific form of government. The process of government formation is one of the most fundamental processes of parliamentary democracy in Europe (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p. 89). As such, the study of government formation is one of the most theoretically active areas of political science (Martin & Stevenson, 2001b, p. 33). The importance of and attention devoted to understanding government formation have resulted in the extensive study of the field, which has led the field to become highly matured (Andeweg, 2011, p. 22). The position is perhaps best summarised by Laver and Schofield: “Understanding how a given election result leads to a given government is, when all is said and done, simply one of the most important substantive projects in political science” (1990, p. 89). In order to contribute to elaborate theories on coalition formation, first a grasp of the current state of the art is necessary.

The development of coalition formation theory has been set forth quite recently by Andeweg, De Winter and Dumont (2011). The earliest accounts of classical coalition theory stem from rational choice and game theory. These theories assume that political parties are strictly office-seeking, mainly office-seeking but also policy oriented, or strictly policy payoffs-seeking. The rational choice approach centred around gaining office has led to the prediction of minimal winning coalitions, while empirical studies showed that merely around forty per cent of cabinets formed fit this description (Andeweg, 2011, p. 29). This prompted theoretical refinements of the size principle. The inclusion of policy-seeking as a motivation resulted in the prediction of minimal *connected* winning coalitions. Axelrod (1970, p. 184) explains that parties are more likely to come to an agreement and cooperate in a coalition when the differences in policy positions are smaller, and therefore coalitions of parties adjacent to each other on a policy dimension are more likely. Eventually theories explaining the formation of both undersized and oversized government coalitions were also formed (Andeweg, 2011, p. 30). In this sense undersized means that the government coalition holds only a parliamentary minority, while oversized means that the government coalition includes parties which are not necessary for a parliamentary majority. The inclusion of policy as a motive for parties to participate lessens the importance of holding office. As a result political parties are more open to share the fixed spoils of cabinet positions with more coalition partners and since policy objectives can be achieved without holding office as well, parties may be less inclined to join the coalition. Part of the explanation for these minority and grand coalitions is found in political parties being motivated by vote-seeking (Strøm, 1990, p. 45). The presence of an investiture vote, bicameralism, institutional rules have been theorised to influence the outcome of the government formation process other than parties’

motivations (Müller & Strøm, 2000, pp. 567–569). These institutional elements would have an impact on which outcomes of the formation are aimed for by the actors involved.

In the next sections the different stages of coalition theory described above will be elaborated on, based on the influencing motivations and contextual factors. As a starting point the main prediction of minimal connected winning coalitions, driven by the office-seeking and policy-seeking motives, will be set out. Hereafter a theoretical explanation for the formation of minority governments is provided, based on vote-seeking motivations. Additionally, the influence of both institutional as well as party system constraints on coalition formation is commented on. This explanation is followed by a discussion of the extra-parliamentary construct and the causal model explaining the occurrence of an extra-parliamentary construct derived from the earlier theories which predict both majority and minority governments. Finally, several hypotheses will be formulated grounded in this theoretical framework explaining the occurrence of the extra-parliamentary construct in order to test the central question of this thesis to the empirics.

Rational Choice Theory

The early approaches to decipher coalition formations were provided by game theory, which view the politics of coalition formation as a constant sum game with holding office as the fixed prize (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p. 9). It was William Riker who in 1962 applied mathematical game theory to social situations, after he redefined criterion of rationality criterion of Von Neumann and Morgenstern. They conceived of rationality as the assumption “that the aim of all participants in the economic system [...] is money, or equivalently a single monetary commodity” (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007, p. 8). Riker deemed Von Neumann and Morgenstern’s theory of *n-person* games “essentially a theory of coalitions” (1962, p. 12). In order to apply their rationality condition to the social situation of politics, Riker moved away from the economic context and towards a political context through the use of a revised and more abstract condition following the work of Luce and Raiffa:

Given a social situation in which exist two alternative courses of action leading to different outcomes and assuming that participants can order these outcomes on a subjective scale of preference, each participant will choose the alternative leading to the more preferred outcome. (1962, pp. 18–19).

Before the application of game theory to politics is discussed, an understanding of game theory itself is required.

Game theory

The theory on zero-sum n -person games (n potentially being any number greater than two) is derived from theory on zero-sum three-person games. The core assumption of game theory is that an individual acts rational, meaning they attempt to obtain the maximum of whatever satisfaction or utility the player desires (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007, pp. 8–9). In a zero-sum game the total prize is fixed and therefore in a two-person game there is always an absolute antagonism of interests (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007, p. 220). The three-person game deviates from the more limited zero-sum two-person game because the interests of players are not necessarily opposite to each other. Besides the opposition of interests, a parallelism of interests may occur in a game of three persons since the move of one player could be advantageous for one of the two other players (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007, p. 220). This parallelism of interest makes it rational for the players involved to cooperate and make an agreement, while the players are expected to act independently from each other when their interests oppose because there is no benefit in cooperation (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007, p. 221). As the interests of players in a two-player zero-sum game by definition oppose each other, cooperation and therefore coalition is impossible and therefore the two-player game is irrelevant for coalition theory.

In a three-player game each player individually makes a move in the game. Therefore if two players want to cooperate in the game, they must determine their strategy together before they have to play (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007, p. 223). A player must be convinced that the coalition partner will also keep to the agreed upon strategy, in order to live up to the agreement. If the coalition partners do not trust each other, following the strategy will not lead to a winning outcome. Since players are assumed to be rational, players will not follow the agreement when they are not convinced that it is the best strategy. Game theory so far predicts that a coalition is formed, but not which coalition is most likely to be formed. Perceiving coalition formation as a game which offers the same total return to each coalition, but a different distribution of returns to each player brings this kind of prediction closer (2007, pp. 226–277). The returns a player receives depends not merely on the rules of the game, but also on the possibilities of coalitions for each player. In order to persuade another player to join a coalition, the player must pay compensations to the coalition partner. The height of the compensation depends on the alternative coalitions a player can potentially join. A player will never pay such compensations that he will be left with less than he would have gained on his own. Since coalition formation is still a zero-sum game, this means that a player can also not win a higher amount than he could have gained without the help of others (2007, p. 230).

The primary aim of a game of coalition formation is to form a decisive coalition (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007, p. 420). A decisive coalition being a coalition containing players that are necessary in order to win the game. Nevertheless, when another player joins a decisive coalition, the coalition still wins the game. Another term for 'decisive coalition' is 'minimal winning coalition'. In a minimal winning coalition each partner is necessary for the coalition to be winning and no partner can be spared (2007, p. 430). In a non-minimal winning coalition the winnings have to be distributed among more players than strictly necessary to gain these winnings as a coalition. Therefore, forming such a coalition is deemed wasteful by Von Neumann and Morgenstern (2007, p. 437). As wasting winnings is not in line with attempting to obtain the maximum, forming a non-minimal winning coalition is not rational and thus it is predicted that players will not opt for this kind of coalition but a minimal winning coalition instead.

Applied to politics

In applying game theory to the social situation of politics, Riker acknowledges that the rationality condition is in need of refinement. Reducing rationality to the aim of gaining a maximum of the desired utility passes over the empirical evidence that significant amounts of people prefer not the maximum but a smaller amount of the desired (Riker, 1962, p. 18). Riker therefore asserts that "if a person can decide what action will suit him best, then he will choose that action" (1962, p. 19). This description of the rationality condition avoids the necessity to objectively assess an individual's preferences on an ordinal scale. It also accounts for the possibility that an individual's preferred outcome are perceived as irrational by outside observers. This rational behaviour is emphasized by the institution if a decision-making process is controlled by people who aim to maximize their benefits (Riker, 1962, p. 21). In these cases all players of the game are urged to act rationally. As a result players must be willing to cooperate with other players with little regard for ideology, in order to win the game (Riker, 1962, p. 21). The implication of this conclusion is that a "politically rational man is the man who would rather win than lose, regardless of the particular stakes" (Riker, 1962, p. 22). The motive of a participant in coalition formation games therefore is not substantive or concerned with policy, but merely with gaining office, according to this form of rational choice theory.

As stated before, in a zero-sum game the total gains of the winning players are exactly equal to the losses of the losing parties. Negotiations between prospective coalition partners thus come down to bargaining over the gains for the involved parties. If the losing parties also gain more than their loss merely through participation in the game, it would have to be considered a non-zero sum model (Riker, 1962, p. 30). When the realisation of certain policies would be considered part of the prize gained by winning the game, it is possible that not only the winning but also the losing parties gain (part of) the

prize. Thus, under the assumptions on which Riker bases his analysis of the coalition formation process only the positions in office are to be considered a relevant motive for players of the coalition game.

Riker concludes that “in social situations similar to n -person, zero-sum games with side-payments, participants create coalitions just as large as they believe will ensure winning and no larger.” (1962, pp. 32–33). The condition of negotiations being zero-sum games reinforces office-seeking as the only motivation for participating players, because the perception of policy-issues as the ultimate winnings not just side-payments would mean that coalition formation is no longer a zero-sum game. He reaches this conclusion through several findings of his theory on coalition games. The first is the so called zero-sum condition that the sum of the gains of the winners has to be equal to the sum of the loss of the losers (Riker, 1962, p. 39). The consequence is that a coalition of all parties is highly unlikely because without losing parties there is nothing to be gained by the winning parties. Since the amount lost by a losing party is determined by the winning coalition, a party who does not join the coalition has no control over the amount lost. This also means that such party can only gain more when joining a coalition, because the party can resign from the coalition at any stage of the process if the other parties attempt to force a more negative outcome. The conclusion that only minimal winning coalitions are realized under these conditions centres on the motivation of the parties involved (Riker, 1962, pp. 42–43). For parties whose amount won by joining a coalition diminishes as the number of partners grows, it is rational to eliminate the partners not necessary to be a winning coalition. The total gains namely can be divided between fewer parties and therefore the amount gained by the individual parties becomes larger if the excessive parties are excluded from the coalition. For parties whose gains are immune to alterations in the amount of partners it is still rational to form a minimal winning coalition because including excessive partners who are more easily persuaded to break away from the coalition brings with it a greater risk of the coalition losing its position.

In order to understand why these minimal winning coalitions are formed, a deeper understanding of the formation process is required. In the following paragraphs the influence of different roles to be played and side-payments are discussed to provide this understanding. During the formation process there typically is one ‘leader’ who regulates the coalition-building by persuading other parties, so called ‘followers’ to join the coalition (Riker, 1962, p. 103). Riker distinguishes the concept ‘coalition’ from other stages of cooperation in the formation process by using it only to describe the final product of the process. The association of parties which will change in size until the final coalition is reached is labelled a ‘proto-coalition’ (1962, pp. 103–104). The leader of a proto-coalition attempts to persuade parties to join the proto-coalition by offering so called ‘side-payments’ (1962, p. 105). These side-payments consist not only of material objects, but also intangible objects. They have value as long as

one of the parties involved in bargaining is willing to concede something else in order to obtain it. One kind of side-payments is changes in policy (1962, p. 106). Because policy changes cannot benefit all members in society, their value is determined by scarcity. As a result of this scarcity the amount of parties whom the leader can ask to join the proto-coalition is limited and side-payments cannot be used exorbitantly.

Side-payments can be grouped into five kinds, according to Riker (1962, pp. 109–114). The first kind is the threat of reprisal a leader can make to parties if they do not join the proto-coalition. This kind is however not part of the main kind of decision-making in democratic systems. The second kind of payment are objects of which the value can be expressed in terms of money. While these payments do occur, it offends the democratic principle. Some forms of payment, nevertheless, are legal and ethically approved such as certain offices in the bureaucracy. The third kind consists of promised policy change. The initial followers of the proto-coalition are likely to agree with each other on the policy issues at hand. There is a tension in using policy points as a side-payment to persuade other parties to join the proto-coalition because it risks alienating the initial followers. The fourth kind of side-payment is a promise of subsequent decision-making. An agreement not on a substantive aspect, but on the process can persuade the necessary parties without having to reach an agreement on the issue at hand. The final kind consists of emotional satisfaction. This category incorporates irrationality in the process.

The side-payments made by the leader are to be grouped into three categories: contingent payments out of profits, payments out of working capital, and payments out of fixed assets (Riker, 1962, pp. 115–119). Contingent payments out of profits are part of the prospective gains from the decision that has to be made. This category of payments includes the contents of policy and patronage over specific topics. As positions can only be filled by one person at the same time and a party can represent only one position on a specific policy issue, leaders are limited in the promises they can make to followers. Payments out of working capital relate to objects and promises which the leader can give away, such as promises concerning the process, decisions that still have to be made and objects that the leader possesses. The final category of payments out of fixed assets relate to the position of the leader. A leader who convinces followers by showing affection or threatening reprisals, risks the position when the followers no longer feel the affection or fear the threat. Because the leader pays with risking their leadership position each time, the value of these payments are incalculable. The leadership of a party leader, however, is fixed in the sense that the number of leaders is a given and that each leader owns the position only once at that given moment.

According to this theory policy issues can be used as side-payments in order to persuade parties to join a proto-coalition. Since policy is used as currency it cannot be perceived as the main motivation of parties in the coalition formation process. It is secondary to joining the (minimal) winning coalition, which brings positions in political office with it.

Spatial theory and electoral competition

Office-seeking motivations

The conclusion that minimal winning coalitions are the most rational outcome of the coalition formation because parties are office-seeking, is the point of departure for spatial theory concerning the motivations of political parties. It is assumed that the members of a coalition share the goal of gaining office (Downs, 1957, p. 26). Furthermore Downs accepts the self-interest axiom because almost all economic theory is based on the premise that individuals are not only rational but also selfish (1957, p. 27). As such politicians are only driven by the goal of gaining office. As a result, political parties treat policies as a means to the end of winning office, because being elected is the only available route (Downs, 1957, p. 28). They formulate policies to win elections, instead of vice versa. Even though policies are still perceived as secondary to holding office, the importance of policy for political parties is introduced. Since being elected requires a party to receive more votes than other parties, a party will aim all its actions at maximizing votes and in doing so treat policies as a means to this end (Downs, 1957, p. 35). This means that parties cannot be ignorant of policy and will take the consequences of their actions for the policy they support into account. Just as Downs assumes that parties view elections as a means to winning office, he assumes that voters perceive of elections as a means to select their government even though the legislature – not the executive – is elected in parliamentary elections (1957, p. 146). In order for a government to function it needs the support of (a majority of) the parliament and therefore indirectly from the voters. Because voters are aware of this, they will rationally cast their vote with their ideal government in mind.

Spatial theory assumes that there is a societal consensus on the manner in which political preferences can be ordered on a single dimension and that every individual voter prefers a single point on this scale while the preference decreases monotonically with each step away from this point (Downs, 1957, p. 115). At the time of conception the socio-economical dimension was perceived as the main and only relevant policy dimension. With the rise of cleavages such as religion, centre-periphery and demarcation-integration, assuming that parties can be categorised along only one policy dimension is a grave oversimplification of the empirical reality (Gallagher et al., 2011, pp. 296–297). In the operationalisation of the hypotheses this issue is elaborated on. In a multiparty system a number of parties will come into existence and take up a position along the dimension and continue to reposition

themselves until the distance between each party and its neighbours is equal for all parties (Downs, 1957, pp. 126–127). Because there is much competition present, parties in a multiparty system will likely attempt to distinguish themselves from each other ideologically and maintain their position. In doing so they are more likely to win a larger amount of votes, which contributes to the primary goal of gaining office. This means that parties will continue to attempt to hold on to their policy positions, in order to keep their position compared to other parties so they can convince voters to vote for them once more in future elections.

Political parties face different forces when they join a (proto-)coalition concerning the policy to adopt (Downs, 1957, pp. 157–159). A government, thus also a coalition government, is tasked with solving the problems in society. In order to do so a coalition must be able to act efficiently, at least to a minimum degree. Therefore parties in a coalition must be able to cooperate with each other. One of the effects is that parties adopt similar policies in order to limit (potential) conflict. Nevertheless, each party in the coalition still wants their proposed policy to be dominant as they believe that this will provide the best position to gain office again after the following election. This is a continuous cycle because a larger share of the votes in the next election allows a party to dominate the policy of that future government, which will hopefully lead to a larger share of the votes, and so on. Therefore, parties seek to win the votes from other parties, both coalition partners and opposition parties. The more peripheral parties are thus encouraged to move towards a position in the middle because the competitors are positioned closer to the centre, while the peripheral parties in the coalition can be urged to move away from the middle because a more distinguished policy position without a competitor near is likely to result in a larger amount of votes. When a coalition partner fears that they will not be re-elected to hold office if any coalition other than the current one is formed, parties may be inclined to maximise the chances that the complete coalition is re-elected. They do so by spreading the ideological positions of the parties by diverging from each other. These three findings make it logical to believe that a coalition is able to govern more effectively when the parties agree roughly on policy. This conclusion leads to the belief that policy driven motives do have an effect on the coalitions that are formed. The desire of political parties to join a coalition with ideologically adjacent parties may lead to a coalition that is no longer minimal winning from a purely mathematical approach.

Policy-seeking motivations

In his work on conflict in interest Axelrod sees policy, more specifically the distance between the policy position of political parties, as the determinant of which types of coalitions are most likely to be formed (1970). He contends that officials have different policy preferences and that these differences specify

the utility of the participants (Axelrod, 1970, p. 140). Since political officials are driven by their policy positions, political parties are so as well because they are a vessel for politicians.

Because parties have different substantive goals, the goals of a given party will be more similar to those of some of the parties than of others (Axelrod, 1970, p. 166). The distance between the policy positions of parties are a breeding ground for conflict. The general hypothesis he employs is that “the less conflict there is, the more likely is cooperative behaviour” (1970, p. 167). This hypothesis leads to two predictions on political coalitions. The first being that the less conflict of interest there is in a coalition, the more likely the coalition will form and the second being that the less conflict of interest there is in a coalition, the more likely the coalition will have a long duration if formed. For the purpose of this thesis only the first prediction is relevant. Combined with the premise that the policy positions of political parties are a source of conflicts of interest, the prediction implies that the smaller the distance in policy positions of the coalition partners is, the less conflict of interest there will be (1970, p. 169). Therefore it is more likely that the coalition is formed, and sustained.

As the coalition grows, the distance between the member parties with the most extreme policy positions also grows. The total dispersion of the coalition’s policy positions increases and therefore a conflict of interest is more likely. This means that not only the connectedness, but also the size of a coalition have an influence on the amount of potential conflict (Axelrod, 1970, p. 170). Earlier it was established that a coalition typically aims to be a winning coalition so the executive government can rely on a majority in the legislative branch (Axelrod, 1970, p. 170). This leads to the Axelrod’s conception of the ‘minimal *connected* winning coalition, which he defines as a coalition that consists of adjacent members, can give a cabinet a vote of confidence, and can lose no member party without ceasing to be connected or winning (1970, p. 170). Combined with the hypothesis that the formation of a coalition is more likely, the less conflict of interest there is in the coalition, it has to be concluded that minimal connected winning coalitions are more likely to form than suggested by chance, or even compared to other winning coalitions (Axelrod, 1970, p. 171). A minimal connected winning coalition can be an oversized coalition when viewed from a mathematical perspective. The abovementioned shows that the motive for political parties to form such a coalition nonetheless, is driven by (differences in) policy positions.

Deviations from minimal connected winning coalitions

Earlier it was established that in a parliamentary system a government has to rely on a majority in the legislature. This necessity is twofold (Strøm, 1990, p. 5). In the first place a government has to be viable, meaning it is able to win votes of confidence. In the second place a government needs to be able to govern effectively, meaning that it must be able to mobilise majorities for legislation, budgetary bills

and other decisions mandated to parliament. Strøm states that the two assumptions related to these necessities which lead to the prediction of minimal connected winning coalitions are not necessarily true (Strøm, 1990, p. 5). The legislative coalition supporting a government's viability and effectiveness do not have to be identical and the legislative majorities can be made up of different political parties than the parties from which members of government are drawn. This finding opens the door for explanations of different types of government such as minority governments and nonpartisan governments.

Minority governments

The explanation for the formation of minority governments provided by Strøm is grounded in five assumptions (1990, p. 38). Firstly, assuring the coalition has the majority in parliament need not be the effective decision point during the government formation. It is possible that the involved parties are looking to solve other issues than the majority status. Secondly, political parties in government formation are not merely seeking office, but also influence over policy. Earlier theories on government and coalition formation have also taken the policy driven motivations of political parties into consideration. Thirdly, as policy influence (in part) determines the behaviour of political parties, participation in government is not necessarily required for a payoff. Fourthly, the short-term and longer-term goals of political parties will conflict from time to time. Finally, political parties are mainly concerned with future elections when it comes to longer-term considerations. As a result of this vote-seeking motive a trade-off between short-term goals of gaining office and policy influence and longer-term electoral incentives has to be made.

While party leaders have a high-ranking position within their party, they rely on the support of their members. Besides their personal interest in the power ambitions of the party, party leaders have to take the policy objectives into consideration when they participate in coalition negotiations and government formations (Strøm, 1990, p. 40). Strøm therefore expects the behaviour of political parties to be influenced by motivations aimed at both policy and positions of power. The realisation of the former motivations does not require participation in government. The governing parties can autonomously serve the policy objectives of an opposition party or an opposition party can exert influence on the government's policies deliberately, for example from the legislature (1990, p. 41). The influence an opposition party can exert on policy depends on the 'policy influence differential', an index of the advantage of governing parties over nongoverning parties concerning policy influence (1990, p. 42). The differential is determined by the strength and decentralization of the legislative committees. When the committees are stronger and more decentralized, the incentive for policy-motivated political parties to hold office diminishes because the benefit of holding office is limited

(1990, p. 44). Consequentially, the parties will be more likely to decline government membership and the probability of a minority government being formed increases. Strøm also includes the vote-seeking motivation of parties as a means towards the goal of holding office or influence over policy (1990, p. 45). As such parties may decide to decline participation in a government because of expected electoral consequences in the future. In a broader sense the costs of holding office should be balanced by the benefits in order for a political party to participate in government. The benefits include holding office itself and the desired influence over policy, while the costs of holding office is determined several factors (1990, pp. 47–48): 1) the identifiability of governmental alternatives, 2) the electoral competitiveness in the system, and 3) the electoral responsiveness of government formations. The identifiability of governmental alternatives means voters are presented with a clear choice between which parties will form the government, before the election. In a two-party-system elections, therefore provide highly identifiable alternatives. Electoral competitiveness relates to the electoral volatility in a party system. A high volatility means that voters are more easily persuaded to vote for a different party in the following election and therefore parties which participate in government risk losing their electoral support. When a government formation is highly responsive to the election, the winners of the election are most likely to be invited to the formation table. If a formation is nonresponsive to elections, parties are less concerned with the outcome of the election because winning the election is not required for government participation. Minority governments are most likely to form when the benefits of holding office are outweighed by the costs for a majority segment of the parties in the system (1990, p. 69).

The formation of minority governments is explained by two variables, according to Strøm. The first variable is the potential influence of the parliamentary opposition (1990, p. 70). As the potential influence of the opposition increases, the relative benefits of governing decrease and the formation of a minority government becomes more likely. The oppositional influence is determined by the properties of parliamentary committees, specifically by five indicators (Strøm, 1990, p. 71). Firstly, the number of standing committees, since a minimum number is required for effective deliberation and therefore influential opposition. Secondly, fixed specializations for these committees as it indicates more deliberative legislatures, which leads to greater influence for the opposition. Thirdly, the correspondence of committees to ministerial departments because if so, a committee is more likely to enact effective oversight. Fourthly, the restrictions on the number of committee assignments per parliamentarian, for restrictions demand specialization of parliamentarians. Finally, the proportionality of the distribution of committee chairs among parliamentary parties, since the alternative is usually government control over all positions.

The second explanatory variable, according to Strøm is the decisiveness of elections (1990, p. 72). The more decisive an election is, the more likely it is that parties are confronted with high electoral costs for participating in government. As a result parties are less inclined to join a coalition and therefore the formation of a minority government will be more likely. Decisiveness consists of the same components as the expected costs of holding office (1990, pp. 72–74). Firstly, the identifiability of government alternatives, meaning the presence of clear governmental options before the election. Secondly, volatility or electoral competitiveness. In order to be decisive an election must result in significant fluctuations in the seat distribution between parliamentary parties compared to the previous election. Thirdly, the electoral responsiveness, which comes down to a non-perverse relationship between electoral success and government participation.

Nonpartisan administrations

In explaining the formation of minority governments, Strøm lightly touches upon the concept of 'nonpartisan administrations'. A nonpartisan administration is defined as a cabinet consisting of members who do not represent a party (1990, p. 7). This does not mean that cabinet members cannot hold a party membership. In the analysis of conventional explanations for minority governments, Strøm finds that nonpartisan administrations are most likely to be formed in the most polarised and most fractionalised party systems (1990, p. 66). A highly polarised party system is characterised by a great dispersion of ideological positions of the present parliamentary parties, while a highly fractionalised party system is composed of many small parties (1990, pp. 64–65). In a more fractionalised system it would be more difficult to form a winning coalition, because more parties would have to reach an agreement. The great dispersion in positions of the parties further hampers this objective.

Furthermore, in analysing the duration of cabinet formations, both in days and attempts, Strøm finds that the number of parties involved in the formation process is the determining factor (1990, pp. 67–68). The analysis also shows that typically nonpartisan administrations are formed after the most attempted formations. This indicates that other possibilities such as majority coalitions or minority governments have been exhausted before the formation of a nonpartisan administration is attempted. The finding therefore suggests that a nonpartisan administration is formed as a last resort. Combined with the knowledge that nonpartisan administrations form in the most polarised and fractionalised systems, this implies that a nonpartisan administration is formed when the formation is so complex that the formation of a coalition is not possible. As a response to this situation the nonpartisan government is appointed.

Constraints on coalition formation

Until this point the behaviour of political parties in coalition formation has been the subject of discussion. Parties, however, do not act in isolation, but are part of a party system. Both party systems themselves and institutional factors are found, by Müller and Strøm, to have great influence on the formation of coalitions (2000, p. 562). They define constraints as “any restrictions on the set of feasible cabinet coalitions that is beyond the short-term control of the players [the leaders of the coalitional political parties]” and distinguish institutional and party system constraints (2000, p. 565).

Müller and Strøm define institutional constraints as formal rules, both derived from constitutions and otherwise, that determine the available options during coalition negotiations and in office and identify three institutional constraints (2000, pp. 567–569). The first constraint has the form of a convention. In many parliamentary democracies it is customary for the largest parliamentary party to make the first move in the formation process, which gives the party more control over the process. The second constraint is related to the beginning of a cabinet’s reign. In several systems an investiture vote is required. The requirement of an investiture vote confronts the cabinet with an immediate vote of confidence. As a result the formation of a majority government becomes more likely than the formation of a minority government. The third and final institutional constraint stems from the state structure. When a cabinet has to function in a bicameral system a majority in both houses is required. Thus a broadly based coalition is more likely than a minority government or a minimal winning coalition in the first chamber because a majority in the second chamber is also aimed for.

Party system constraints can also limit the available options in negotiations (Müller & Strøm, 2000, p. 569). The first is the presence of anti-system or pariah parties may limit the number of feasible coalitions, because they are likely to be excluded by other parliamentary parties. As a result the amount of seats in play decreases. A second constraining feature of a party system can be pledges of (majority) parties that they will not participate in a coalition or government. As a result, similar to the exclusion of parties, less seats are part of the coalition game. Lastly, political parties may exclude themselves from the coalition game if they perceive little potential for their policy points because the political agenda is constrained. Not all issues are equally salient at the same point in time and therefore a political party may find it not opportune to shoulder governmental responsibilities. This again results in a smaller amount of potential seats for the coalition.

Hypotheses

The above set out theory on the formation of coalitions results in four hypotheses, which together provide an explanation for the formation of an extra-parliamentary construct. The assumption that political parties are not only motivated by gaining office, but also by determining the government’s

policy makes that the lower the policy influence differential is, the more limited the benefits of government membership are and therefore the less likely it is for political parties to participate in government. As such, H₁: When the policy influence differential is lower because the legislative committees have a strong position, the benefits of participating in government are more limited and therefore the incentive for political parties to participate in government is smaller.

In order to fulfil the desire of gaining and remaining in office and determining policy for a longer period of time, political parties are vote-seeking. Therefore, as elections are more decisive the prospective costs of holding office increase, which will make it more likely that political parties reject government participation because they expect high electoral costs in the future as a consequence. Thus, H₂: The more decisive the election is, the higher the prospective costs of holding office are, which increases the incentive for political parties not to participate in government.

The institutions may put constraints on the formation of a coalition. The requirement of an investiture vote and the formation of coalitions in a bicameral system increases the necessity for a government to be supported by a majority in parliament, thus the formation of a government supported by a parliamentary majority is more likely. Hence, H₃: The presence of an investiture vote or a bicameral system increase the urgency for a parliamentary majority to support the government, thusly a government which has the support of the majority of parliament is more likely to be formed.

The combination of factors shows that in a highly fractionalised and polarised party system in which incentives for political parties to not participate in government are present, while the requirement for a parliamentary majority supporting the government also exists, an extra-parliamentary government is most likely to be formed. Therefore, H₄: As the level of fractionalisation and polarisation in a party system increase and a larger amount of parties is excluded from coalition formation, a larger number of attempts is necessary for the successful formation of a government, which is more likely to be a nonpartisan government.

3 Research approach

In their approach to solving coalition puzzles, Dumont, De Winter, and Andeweg propose the use of case studies as a means to find explanations for and uncover the causal mechanisms of the deviations from traditional coalition theory (2011, pp. 22–25) and in doing so offer perspectives for general theory building on a topic which has mainly been approached through statistical analysis (2011, p. 38). Analysing the causal mechanisms that drive these deviations helps to test theories and when empirical evidence to support the theorised mechanisms is found, the development of the theory can be furthered (George & Bennet, 2005, p. 19). Through the analysis of coalition puzzles potential causes for the formation of a specific coalition can be identified, and if generalisable the factors can be incorporated into existing theory or even replace elements of the theory (Andeweg, 2011, p. 222). Following this approach, this thesis takes the form of a case study of the government formation in the province of Limburg in 2019 resulting in the so called extra-parliamentary construct.

The following chapter will discuss and account for the reasons why this type of research was deemed most suitable and why the formation of the extra-parliamentary construct by the Provincial Council of Limburg in 2019 was selected as the subject of study. The research approach and method of analysis, being process-tracing through content analysis, is also elaborated on as well as the empirical material examined. Furthermore the theoretical concepts in the hypotheses are operationalised for the analysis. Lastly, a reflection of this research design is provided.

A diagnostic pathway case study

The aim of this thesis is to simultaneously contribute to coalition theory and offer an explanation for the formation of the extra-parliamentary construct by the Provincial Council of Limburg. As such the main elements of coalition theory are refined and the theories which account for deviations from the predicted formation of a minimal connected winning coalition or even a minority government are either confirmed or disconfirmed. Following the description by Gerring (2017, pp. 98–99) this purpose is best served with a diagnostic case study. This type of case study namely enables the assessment of, amongst others, potential confounders for the hypothesised causal relationships and the causal mechanisms at play. The theorised influence of variables on the outcome of government formations, other than the motivation of political parties, is not only either confirmed or disconfirmed but the path the influence takes is also explained (Gerring, 2017, p. 99). Applying coalition theory based on coalition formations at the national level to a government formation at sub-national/provincial level allows this research to demonstrate whether the hypothesised mechanisms present at the national level also provide a sufficient explanation for the process of government formation at the subnational level. Therefore the formation in Limburg was approached as a subtype of a diagnostic case: a pathway case.

The hypotheses are based on coalition theory which has been the result of research on coalition formation at the national level in different states. As a result the relationship between the independent and dependent variables has not yet been under scrutiny in a subnational context. The case study can therefore be seen as a so called “empirical existence proof” (Goertz, 2017, Chapter 6). It follows the logic that if a theory can explain a mechanism in a certain context, it may also apply in a different context. This presumption, however, does require empirical evidence to support the claim. This case study explores whether or not the formation by the Limburg Provincial Council can provide such support.

Therefore this thesis could be seen as an early attempt to illustrate the refined coalition theory and demonstrate the plausibility of the theorised mechanisms (Gerring, 2017, p. 105). Testing the hypotheses to an empirical cases grounds the abstract theory in the real world. This allows for a better understanding of the theory. Both confirming or disconfirming the hypotheses gives an insight into the soundness of coalition theory applied to the provincial level of government.

Andeweg, Dumont and De Winter (2011, pp. 33–34) claim that the standard approach to coalition theory has been the use of statistical analysis as suggested by Martin and Stevenson (2001a). They do, however, acknowledge that case studies can best be employed in order to investigate causal mechanisms and thereby test and further develop coalition theory (Dumont et al., 2011, p. 25). The in depth study of a single case allows for a focus on the mechanisms at play, instead of merely on the hypothesised relationship (Gerring, 2017, p. 106). Through the analysis of the formation process it can not only be assessed whether but also how the different variables interacted with each other. As such an analysis of a single case to better understand the reasons why the process has resulted in the specific outcome, is more fruitful than a quantitative comparison between cases. Furthermore, the objective of this research is to attempt to find empirical support for the theorised causal mechanisms.

As shown in the literature review, coalition theory expects a number of mechanisms to influence the outcome of government formations. In the first place, political parties aim at gaining office and influencing policy. The potential policy influence depending on the position of parties is therefore theorised to determine the objective and strategy of parties. In the second place, the power position a party holds over a long period of time is taken into account. The electoral costs of their behaviour is theorised to also influence the decisions made by political parties. The height of these costs is determined by the decisiveness of the elections. In the third place, it is hypothesised that institutional aspects of a parliamentary system, such as the requirement of investiture and accountability to two legislative bodies, are important factors in determining the type of government formed because they determine the framework for the politicians to operate in. In the last place, the fractionalisation and

polarisation of the party system is theorised to determine the complexity of the formation. These factors namely determine how many parties are required to cooperate in order to reach a majority and how likely cooperation between the parties is.

The first hypothesis for example empirically tests the relationship between the potential policy influence political parties have in either a coalition of opposition role and the benefits political parties experience from joining a (coalition) government. Afterwards the role that the prospective benefits play for political parties in determining their formation strategy is tested by uncovering their motives in the process. This is done through analysis of the behaviour of the political parties during the formation. The hypothesised mechanisms of policy-seeking is hereby compared to the actual motivations of political parties at the provincial level.

Case selection

The formation of the extra-parliamentary construct by the Provincial Council of Limburg, the Netherlands, after the election of 2019 was selected as the subject of the analysis for several reasons. In the first place, the outcome of the formation deviated from the pattern of coalition formation displayed by the Dutch Provincial Councils. Previous to the formation in Limburg in 2019, formation processes at the provincial level had always led to a majority government. This means that the situation in Limburg allows for coalition theory to be tested in a novel context. The case therefore provides an opportunity to develop the theory because it represents an anomaly for which an explanation is provided by applying existing theory to a new situation. In contrast to a deviant case study, the diagnostic case study does not test a new causal factor or relationship to a known environment but known causal mechanisms to an unknown environment (Gerring, 2017, pp. 74–75). If the hypotheses are confirmed, the scope of the theory is extended as a result. In the second place, the Provincial Council aimed at forming a majority coalition. As a consequence the case allows for the testing of earlier stages of coalition theory, as well as the testing of relatively recent refinements. Apparently forming a traditional coalition was not possible. Therefore the case should be able to show why refinement of coalition theory to the point it has been developed, is necessary. In the final place, the level of documentation of the formation process enables an extensive analysis possible, within the scope of the research. Besides the elaborate formation dossier, also media coverage, party documents and interviews with people involved with the formation were available as primary sources.

Process-tracing as research approach

The objective of this research is to find evidence for the different stages of coalition theory. The different stages each suggest the presence of different causal mechanisms which explain different outcomes of the formation process. The analysis of the formation of the extra-parliamentary construct

in Limburg in 2019 should provide results which allow for the confirmation or rejection of the hypotheses. In order to uncover the black box of causal mechanisms, the formation process has to be comprehensible. Therefore a reconstruction of the process is required. The application of process-tracing ensures this reconstruction.

The hypotheses together cover the development of the theory from its earliest forms until the final refinements. The different stages of coalition theory would each result in a different predicted outcome. Therefore tracing the steps taken during the formation process along the structure of the hypotheses allows for the identification of (the lack of) empirical evidence to support the hypothesised causal mechanisms. Jacobs (2014) offers several suggestions to improve process-tracing. The first of his suggestions is to analyse (private) communication between people involved in the traced process. While private communication was unavailable, the formal communication between the different political parties and the informateurs is subject of analysis. As government formation involved convincing political parties to join the proto-coalition, this communication should give insight into the reasons they provide for either participating or not participating. The communication by the informateurs will contain their reasoning for their advice to form an extra-parliamentary construct. In addition, both informateurs were interviewed with the aim to uncover elements which could not be traced from the other analysed material. Jacob's second suggestion is to analyse covariation over time. While the formation took place over a limited time period, an analysis of the sequence of decision-making is possible. Therefore an analysis across the different steps in the decision-making process should give insight into the decisions made by parties involved. Thirdly, Jacobs suggests that the analysis of within-case cross-sectional covariation is useful to uncover the different positions of the actors. As not only a number of political parties, but also the informateurs have different motives, the analysis of the different actors involved is expected to result in showing differences in the behaviour of the actors involved.

The analysis can be divided into two parts: the content analysis of documents part of the formation and the analysis of interviews with both informateurs Ger Koopmans and Geert Gabriëls. The informateurs were involved in the process from the elections until the advice to form the extra-parliamentary construct and will therefore be able to give an insight in the process and considerations behind the scenes. The lion's share of the analysed material, however, consists of documents that had a role in the formation. This includes the party manifesto's of the elected parties, the correspondence between the (in)formateurs and the Provincial Council and expressions in the media by involved actors. Besides these documents, data on the distribution of seats among the political parties in the Provincial Council will be used in order to assess the party system and the decisiveness of provincial elections in Limburg. In order to determine the decisiveness of the elections not only the 2019 election, but also

the 2011 and 2015 elections are analysed to account for outliers. Data from the *Kiesraad* was used in order to ensure that the analysis is based on the correct data. For each of the operationalised concepts the empirical material used for analysis is described below.

Operationalisation

Participation in government

Based on the definition of a coalition used by Strøm (1990, pp. 24–25) four indicators are used to determine whether a party participates in government. The first of these indicators is the agreement on a common set of goals. The second indicator is the decision of political parties to pool their resources, parliamentary seats. The third indicator is the communication of their commitment to the set of goals by political parties. Finally, the fourth indicator is the agreement between political parties on the distribution of the payoffs. Whether the political parties in the Limburg Provincial Council participate in government is assessed through the analysis of the plenary debate prior to the installation of the Deputies and through the policy agreement the Deputies have agreed to carry out in their term. The commitment of political parties to the policy agreement provides evidence for the first three indicators, while the inclusion of party members in the executive provides support for the fourth indicator.

Decisiveness of the election

The decisiveness of an election consists of several components, according to Strøm (1990, p. 72). The first component is the identifiability of viable government alternatives, because being presented with distinct possible governments enables citizens to cast their vote with their preferred government in mind (Strøm, 1990, p. 72). Strøm uses an impressionistic measure to score government systems ‘low’ (0) ‘medium’ (0,5) or ‘high’ (1). In order to determine the identifiability of viable government alternatives for the Limburg Provincial Council in 2019 the informateurs are asked for their impression and the level of fractionalisation is assessed because a larger number of parties without clear ideological blocks makes it more difficult to identify alternative coalitions.

A second component is the electoral volatility, since decisive elections require fluctuations in the distribution of seats between elections (Strøm, 1990, p. 73). The volatility is measured according to the method proposed by Pedersen (1979, p. 4). The change in the percentage of votes a party gained at election t compared to the percentage of votes a party gained at the previous election is added together for all the parties that participated in both elections to reach the Total Net Change. Because the net gains for winning parties are equal to the net losses of the defeated parties, the volatility is

calculated by dividing the Total Net Change in half. The volatility is “the cumulated gains of all winning parties in the party system [...] and can be expressed in terms of a percentage”.

The third component is the electoral responsiveness, in other words the requirement that a government is formed by the parties which have won instead of lost seats (Strøm, 1990, p. 73). The last three Provincial governments before 2019 will be scored to the proportion of electoral gainers among the constituent parties and the mean of these numbers will be used as the indicator.

Prospective costs of holding office

Votes and indirectly policy influence can be used to measure the costs of holding office (Strøm, 1990, p. 69). Typically parties which participated in government lose more seats in following elections than opposition parties (Rose & Mackie, 1983, pp. 115–137). The prospective costs of holding office compared to the benefits of holding office are determined by the policy influence differential and the decisiveness of future elections (Strøm, 1990, pp. 69–70). A low policy influence differential limits the benefits of government participation while more decisive elections increase the risk of electoral punishment.

Policy influence differential

Strøm uses the concept of policy influence differential to describe “the relative policy influence advantage of governing over nongoverning parties as a policy influence differential” (1990, p. 42). This means that the smaller the differential is, the more limited the advantages for a political party are to holding office. The concept refers to the potential power the parties, both in government and opposition, can exercise. Whether they do indeed exercise the full potential of their powers is a different matter. Because the policy influence differential in polities with a strongly deliberative legislature is low, Strøm measure the policy influence differential by the decentralisation and strength of the legislative committee system (1990, p. 44). The deliberative strength of the whole parliament namely increases as the legislative committees are more institutionalised, more autonomous and more specialised (Strøm, 1990, p. 43). Strøm employs a five-point index for the potential oppositional influence grounded in the properties of parliamentary committees (1990, p. 71). The index is the aggregation of five dichotomized indicators. The higher the score on the index, the lower the policy influence differential is. A government’s score is the sum of the positive values and can therefore range between 0 and 5. The first indicator is the number of standing committees because a minimum number of standing committees is required for effective deliberation, thus for oppositional influence. Strøm sees ten committees as the minimum required for the opposition to have great influence. If a parliament is organised in less than ten committees the policy areas a committee is concerned with remains too broad for parliamentarians to sufficiently specialise themselves in the policy field.

Therefore, this indicator is scored positively only if the parliament contains at least ten committees. The second indicator is whether these committees have a fixed specialisation, because this indicates the presence of more deliberative structures. This indicator is scored positively only if the committees are indeed fixed on the specialisations. Whether the jurisdictions correspond to the ministerial departments, is the third indicator because this enables a more effective oversight. Since a Dutch province does not include different ministerial departments, but because the Deputies are each primarily responsible for their own portfolio, the correspondence of the committees' jurisdictions to the Deputies' portfolios is used as the indicator. If so, the indicator is scored positively. The fourth indicator is the presence of restrictions on the number of committee assignments per member of parliament, because in this case the parliamentarians are more often specialised and it limits the opportunities for manipulation by government parties. A more narrow specialisation by members of parliament allows them to be more knowledgeable on the policy area and therefore to better adjust the government. When restrictions are present, the indicator is scored positively. The proportional distribution of committee chairs is the last indicator, as the alternative is a government-controlled distribution. When the distribution of committee chairs deviates strongly from the distribution of seats, the indicator is scored negatively. In order to determine the policy influence differential, the organisation of the Provincial Council of Limburg is analysed based on the Council's regulations.

Benefits of government membership

As has been established previously, a large part of the benefits of participating in government is captured by the policy influence differential. Additionally government membership comes with the benefit of holding office (Strøm, 1990, pp. 40–41). Therefore the policy influence differential together with the expected payoff in terms of government portfolios is used to measure the benefits of government membership. Whether political parties expect to hold office is assessed through the analysis of the correspondence and minutes of talks between the (in)formateurs and political parties.

Nonpartisan government

The most fundamental norm of coalition theory is, violated by nonpartisan governments because these cannot be considered party governments (Duverger, 1954; Rose, 1974). A nonpartisan government differs from a partisan government in the sense that there is no alignment between the executive and (a part of) the legislative (Sartori, 1976, p. 97). Therefore the party membership of the appointed Deputies is compared to the constellation of the Provincial Council and to the parties who have expressed their support for the executive when the Deputies were installed. Also the categorisation of the Limburg executive by Van Leenknecht and Groenleer in their analysis of the extra-parliamentary executive in Limburg (2020) is used to determine whether it qualifies as a nonpartisan government.

Fractionalisation of party system

The fractionalisation of party systems is a measure beyond the absolute number of parties present in parliament. The Herfindahl index determines the fractionalisation based on the relative size of political parties (Dalton, 2008, pp. 902–903):

$$\text{Herfindahl} = \sum (\text{party seat share in legislature}_i)^2$$

In this formula i represents individual parties. Lower values indicate a more fractionalised party system. This measure has been widely used in empirical research on party systems (Dalton, 2008, p. 903). The fractionalisation in the Provincial Council of Limburg is calculated from the distribution of seats ascertained by the Kiesraad. The fractionalisation in Limburg after the previous three elections is calculated to determine whether the fractionalisation has increased.

Polarisation of party system

The polarisation of party systems is measured by the Polarisation index proposed by Dalton (2008, p. 906). The measure includes the relative position of each party along a Left-Right scale (L/R score) and the party's position weighted by party size, since a larger party with an extreme position signifies greater polarisation than a smaller party. The Polarisation index (PI) is calculated as follows:

$$\text{PI} = \text{SQRT} \{ \sum (\text{party vote share}_i) * ([\text{party L/R score}_i - \text{party system average L/R score}] / 5)^2 \}$$

In this formula i represents individual parties. A value of 0 means that all parties occupy the same position on the Left-Right Scale, while a value of 10 means that all parties are split between the two extremes of the scale. Following Daltons' method the ideological position of the political parties is measured through the perception of the electorate (2008, p. 904). Data gathered by Ipsos has been used to determine the perceived positions of political parties (Van Heck, 2021). The data was gathered through an online survey amongst all Dutch citizens eligible to vote at three points in time (May 2021, Juni 2019 and August 2018). The results from the survey have been weighted for gender, age, level of education, region, profession and voting behaviour in recent national elections in order to provide a representative sample of the population. The participants were asked "when you think of the positions of the following political parties, where would you place these parties, left or right? (0-10)" (Van Heck, 2021). The average scores per party were used to determine their position. See appendix E for the positions of the parties.

While placing the political parties on a one-dimensional scale seems to oversimplify reality, the effect is limited. Survey participants base their scores on the positions of the parties on the issues they find

most relevant. Therefore it can be expected that the left-right scale summarises the issues and cleavages that determine the competition between political parties in a nation (Dalton, 2008, p. 904).

Exclusion from coalition

A party is deemed excluded from a coalition either when the party itself proclaims that it will not participate in government, or when another party or parties proclaim that they will not participate in a government together with the considered party. For these statements to be relevant, they have to be made during the talks with the informateurs(s) or formateur(s) because the talks between the political parties and the (in)formateurs are considered the formal formation process. Therefore the contents of these talks are considered relevant when considering the exclusion of parties from participation in coalitions. In order to determine whether parties have excluded themselves or others in the formation in Limburg in 2019, the correspondence of the informateurs(s) with the Provincial Council and the minutes of the meetings between the informateurs(s) and the political parties are analysed. Until the exclusion is formally stated the informateurs are not likely to take potential exclusions into account.

Number of attempts

The number of attempts necessary to successfully form a government is indicative of the complexity of the formation (Strøm, 1990, pp. 67–68). Following Strøm a new attempt is counted with each change in (in)formateurs and with each change in the intended party composition (1990, p. 67). Through analysis of the correspondence between the (in)formateurs and the Provincial Council as well as the minutes of the talks between political parties and the (in)formateurs the number of attempts is determined.

Majority support for a government

The support for a government is measured by the number of seats the political parties that express their support for the government have in parliament. The expression of support can be measured by the declaration of parties that they will support a government in their talks with the (in)formateurs because they are held to these claims by other parties and the public. When an investiture vote is required, the outcome of this vote is used to determine the support for a government. When no further specification of the necessity of a (qualified) majority is uncovered in the Provinciewet or Provincial regulation, the simple majority is used as operationalisation of majority. The distribution of seats in the Provincial Council of Limburg will be used to calculate whether there is a (simple) majority.

Requirement of an investiture vote

The requirement of an investiture vote can come in two forms. There is a legal stipulation present which either requires that a (qualified) majority of the parliament votes in favour of either the government as a whole, or the individual members of the governing body. The hypothesised effect of the requirement of parliamentary investiture at the moment of government formation namely focusses on the requirement of a parliamentary majority. As a result the effect of the investiture vote is the same for a vote on the members of government and the group as a whole. The requirement of an investiture vote is established through the assessment of the *Provinciewet* (provincial law) and the *Verordening van Provinciale Staten van de Provincie Limburg bevattende het reglement van orde van Provinciale Staten van Limburg* (Provincial regulation, hereafter described as *Verordening*).

Presence of a bicameral system

A bicameral system is present when the government is responsible to not one, but two legislative bodies (Müller & Strøm, 2000, p. 569). This should be stipulated in the legal basis for the Provincial Executive. As such the *Provinciewet* and the Provincial regulation is analysed in order to determine which legislative bodies can hold the Deputies accountable.

Reflection

The design for this study has been deliberately chosen. Nevertheless it could be asked why only one single case is examined instead of a plurality of cases. Several reasons have led to this decision. A comparative case study requires the use of cases which are similar to a degree that makes a comparison not only possible, but also useful. As formations within the same political arena deviate strongly from each other, formations within different political arenas are even less likely to provide a sound basis for comparative research. The factors which influence the formation process and outcome can differ in such a way that a meaningful qualitative analysis is hampered. Additionally, as has been established earlier the development of coalition theory is helped best through the analysis of cases which deviate from the outcome expected by the main theory (Dumont et al., 2011). Through a single case study the presence of the variables can be established and the way these variables influence one another can be assessed. The latter would have been more difficult if a different research design was chosen.

The research is grounded in the content analysis of mainly documents which were part of the formation in 2019, documents and data which determine the party system and two separate interviews with the informateurs Ger Koopmans and Geert Gabriëls (see appendices A & B) for the transcripts). The purpose of the interviews was to gain insights in the process which could not be

derived from the documents. Both interviewees, however, had to recount the process from memory and were held to the confidentiality of the process. As such the content of the interviews alone is insufficient basis to draw conclusions and will only be used to support the findings from the content analysis. To hold interviews with the negotiators for each party during the formation was considered, however, at the time the research took place the Provincial government was confronted with a governmental crisis¹. Therefore it was deemed not opportune to interview the people involved in the formation in 2019 and 2021. In order to prevent a biased analysis this led to the conclusion that none of the negotiators would be interviewed.

Another caveat in the empirical analysis is the lack of material that would provide an insight in the personal and informal communication between actors involved. This is a recurring issue with research on government formations. As such the conclusions of the analysis have to be aware of this limitation.

For the operationalisation of the concept ‘polarisation’ the position of political parties on the left-right scale Dalton proposes that the position of parties is determined based on the identification of the public (2008, pp. 904–906). No such data was available on the Limburg branches of the political parties. Organising a survey aimed at determining the position of these branches would not have yielded useful data because the perception of a political party is prone to change. The research by Ipsos shows this phenomenon (Van Heck, 2021). The perception of political parties is often dominated by the performance of political parties at the national level and that in recent years the turnout for provincial elections has been limited in the Netherlands (Andeweg & Irwin, 2014, p. 213), which indicates limited interest in the Provinces. Therefore it was found acceptable to use national data, despite the possibility that the perception of inhabitants of Limburg differs from the national average. Because the polarisation at the time of the formation is the relevant factor, the scores from June 2019 were used as the formation spanned from March until June from that same year.

The local party Lokaal-Limburg was not included in the survey. As a result they were scored with the most neutral value of 5. This decision is supported by the own perception of Lokaal-Limburg, because during talks with the informateurs the party stated it would “reinforce the right-wing of a left-leaning coalition and the left-wing of a right-leaning coalition” and that this orientation is applicable to their role in both a coalition and opposition (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019b, pp. 10 & 37).

¹ Following publications in national newspaper NRC about entanglements in landscape management in which a former-Deputy was involved, the complete Provincial government including the King’s Commissioner resigned. This left Limburg with a caretaker King’s Commissioner and the Provincial Council with the task to form a new government in a short period of time.

4 Empirical Analysis

The results of the empirical test of the previously set out hypotheses concerning coalition theory are described in the following chapter. In order to better understand the results of the analysis an understanding of the context in which the analysed formation took place is required. Therefore the position of the provinces within the Dutch state structure and the political situation in Limburg before the election of 2019 is elaborated on, as well as the election and its results itself. Afterwards three aspects of the formation are discussed. Finally the findings of the analysis are summarised and it will be concluded whether the hypotheses should be rejected or accepted for the time being.

The Provincial Council of Limburg

Dutch provinces

Governance in the Netherlands consists of three layers: the national, the provincial and the local government. Depending on the perspective the European Union is considered a fourth governmental layer. For the purpose of this thesis only the position of the provinces and their relation to other layers of government is discussed. From 1982 on the Dutch government has decentralised a great amount of tasks to subnational governments (Andeweg & Irwin, 2014, p. 212). This decentralisation has, however, resulted mainly in new tasks for the local governments. As a result the Province has become the least powerful layer in the system (Andeweg & Irwin, 2014, p. 212). While the national and local administrations became increasingly powerful, the provinces had to give these powers away (De Vries, 2004, p. 311) because the shared amount of power did not increase.

The provinces each have their own legislature and government. The legislature, the Provincial Council, is directly elected by the citizens, which provides the mandate to form a government (Andeweg & Irwin, 2014, p. 212). Together the government and Council make policy. Their impact is, however, limited because they only formulate policy independently on a limited number of policy fields. The provinces act mainly as an intermediary between local and national administrations (Andeweg & Irwin, 2014, p. 2012). As a result it can be said that provinces deal more directly with other governments than with citizens (Nomden, 1999). Consequently citizens rarely identify with their province, with the exception of the northern provinces and the southern provinces, including Limburg (Andeweg & Irwin, 2014, pp. 212–213). Traditionally the confessional, more specific Catholic, parties have been strong in the southern provinces, although their position is rapidly decreasing.

The Provincial Council of Limburg

In Limburg the loss of the traditional position by the Catholic parties can be seen in the decreasing share of the electoral vote held by the confessional party the CDA from 47.43% in 1991 (Kiesraad, n.d.-

g) to 18.65% in 2019 (Kiesraad, n.d.-f) with a revival in 2003 (Kiesraad, n.d.-a), but a steady decline afterwards. Since 2007 the Provincial Council of Limburg consists of 47 members, after the alteration of the *Provinciewet* to lower the number of Council members (*Provinciewet*, 2018). In between 2007 and the election of 2019 Limburg was governed by five coalitions with the Christian democrats as a constant factor. After the 2015 provincial election an oversized coalition of CDA, SP, VVD, D66 and PvdA with 32 of the 47 seats (Kiesraad, n.d.-c) was formed (Provincie Limburg, 2021; Van Hoof, 2015).

Six months before the 2019 provincial election the Socialist Party left the coalition after D66 and PvdA had voted in favour of a motion of censure against one of the SP-Deputies (Binnenlands Bestuur, 2018; NOS Nieuws, 2018; Opdenacker, 2018). The other coalition partners still held a one seat majority in the Provincial Council and continued to govern the following six months until the election.

The 2019 provincial election

The elections of the Provincial Councils of the twelve Dutch provinces on March 20th 2019 showed two clear winners at the national level: GroenLinks and Forum voor Democratie. GroenLinks doubled its number of seats in the Provincial Councils from 30 to 61, while Forum voor Democratie entered the Provincial Councils with 86 seats making it the largest national party at that time (See appendix C) (Kiesraad, n.d.-e, n.d.-b). The mainstream parties VVD, PvdA, SP, D66 and the PVV all lost a significant number of seats. The victory of both Forum voor Democratie was quickly named a “political landslide”, while the electoral gain of GroenLinks was also noted (Nieuwsuur, 2019; RTL Nieuws, 2019; Valk, 2019).

After the 2019 election eleven parties resided in the Provincial Council of Limburg (Kiesraad, n.d.-c)(see appendix D). The Christian democrat party CDA remained the largest party with nine seats, despite a two seat loss. The CDA had only once been the second largest party after the 2011 provincial elections (Kiesraad, n.d.-d). The far-right newcomer Forum voor Democratie had reached 14.57% of the votes in Limburg, or seven seats (Kiesraad, n.d.-f), which was in line with the national average of 14.53% of the votes (Kiesraad, n.d.-e). The green party GroenLinks had doubled its two seats after the previous election to four seats after the 2019 election (Kiesraad, n.d.-c, n.d.-f). GroenLinks had mirrored the national trend in Limburg by doubling its size in parliament. At the same time the Socialist SP was lost four seats in the election, which means they were halved (Kiesraad, n.d.-c, n.d.-f). The liberal VVD party remained stable at five seats (Kiesraad, n.d.-c, n.d.-f), thereby being the only coalition party not to lose seats. The elderly party 50PLUS was the only other party to remain stable, be it at one seat (Kiesraad, n.d.-f, n.d.-c). Both the social-liberals of D66 and the social democrats of the PvdA were elected with three seats which means they both lost one seat (Kiesraad, n.d.-c, n.d.-f). The local party Limburg-Lokaal and the Eco party PvdD won a seat, resulting in two seats for both parties (Kiesraad, n.d.-c, n.d.-f). Lastly, the anti-immigration party PVV gained 13.55% of the votes and as a result held on to seven

seats while losing two (Kiesraad, n.d.-f, n.d.-c). While Forum voor Democratie and PVV are equal in number of seats, Forum voor Democratie became the second largest party in Limburg.

Several people involved expected the formation to be complex after this election result (Peeters, 2019). In the pre-information phase the representatives of the PvdA, D66, CDA, 50PLUS, SP, VVD and GroenLinks named asked for a meticulous approach and found the duration of the formation of lesser importance because of the array of possibilities (Koopmans, 2019, pp. 2–4, 6, 8, 10–11). The formation would last more than three months and prove complex as a result of the fragmentation, polarisation and exclusion of parties. The following sections will elaborate on these elements.

The party system

The composition of the Parliament of Limburg is, as usual in democracies, determined through elections. Before the election in 2019 the Provincial Council contained eleven parties and had a Herfindahl score of 0,150. After the provincial election the Herfindahl score for Limburg decreased to 0,119 when again eleven parties were elected. The largest party held nine of the 47 seats of the Council (Kiesraad, n.d.-f). As such the election does not seem to provide a clear choice between potential governments for voters. Informateur Koopmans, also the CDA party leader, was convinced that it was not possible to indicate which parties would form the next government before the election (Koopmans, 2021, II. 64–67). The fact that Forum voor Democratie participated in the election for the first time, while having gained a large following nationally contributed to the uncertainty of the election outcome. Therefore the identifiability of viable government alternatives is scored 'low'. The second component of decisiveness is the volatility of elections. The average volatility of the Provincial Council over the last three elections comes down to 22,78%. This means that on average every one in 4.4 seats changes parties. After the election in 2019 the volatility was nearly identical to the average volatility, namely 22.5%. As such there is a significant fluctuation in the distribution of the seats over the parties. Most notably Forum voor Democratie entered parliament with seven of the 47 seats (Kiesraad, n.d.-f). The third component consists of the electoral responsiveness. While both informateurs described that including the winners of the election in the coalition was not an objective, they did seek to form a government in which the representative body would recognise itself (Gabriëls, 2021, II. 288–290; Koopmans, 2021, I. 55). After the election of 2007 a coalition was formed by the largest party CDA and third largest party PvdA while both lost electoral support of 7,28 percentage point and 5.81 percentage point respectively (Kiesraad, n.d.-a, n.d.-h). In 2011 the coalition was formed initially by PVV, CDA and VVD as the largest three parties in parliament. PVV won 20,58% of the votes as a new party, while CDA lost 15,95 percentage point and received 19.41% of the votes and VVD grew from 14.45% of the votes in 2007 to 15.99% in 2011 (Kiesraad, n.d.-d, n.d.-h). After the election of 2015 a coalition of CDA, VVD,

PvdA and D66 was formed. CDA and D66 won 3.53 and 4.19 percentage point, while VVD and PvdA lost 4.45 and 6.23 percentage point of the votes in the election (Kiesraad, n.d.-d, n.d.-c). This analysis of the previous three elections and formations does not show a clear preference to include the winners of the election in the coalition. The elections for the Provincial Council of Limburg demonstrate a low identifiability of viable governments and no clear electoral responsiveness, besides significant volatility. Therefore the decisiveness of the election is limited.

This limited decisiveness of the provincial elections in Limburg imply that the prospective costs of holding office is limited for political parties. As the electorate is not provided with a clear choice between governments and there is limited electoral responsiveness, the risk of being punished for holding office is also limited.

Another characteristic of the party system is the level of fractionalisation. After the Provincial election of 2019 eleven parties won seats in the Provincial Council of Limburg, varying between nine at the most and one at the least (Kiesraad, n.d.-f). The Herfindahl index for the Limburg Parliament at this point was 0.119. The election of 2019 as a result complies with the trend in Limburg since the election of 2011. Since 2011 the Parliament of Limburg has increasingly fractionalised. In 2007 the Herfindahl index was 0,238 with nine parties in parliament. The CDA was the largest party with eighteen of the 47 seats, while D66 was the smallest party with only one seat (Kiesraad, n.d.-h). After the election of 2011 the index strongly fell to 0.160 as a result of the eight seat loss of the CDA which were (mathematically) distributed almost evenly among the other parties (Kiesraad, n.d.-d). In 2015 the fractionalisation continued with an increase in the number of parties in parliament from nine to eleven and a larger amount of smaller parties (Kiesraad, n.d.-c). This resulted in a Herfindahl index of 0.150. From these numbers and the low score in 2019 of 0.119 it can be deduced that Limburg has been subject to increasing fractionalisation.

Together with fractionalisation the relative position of the elected political parties determines the polarisation of a party system. After the 2019 election the Provincial Council of Limburg was populated by eleven parties of which GroenLinks is the most leftist party with a score of 2.4 and the PVV is the most rightist party with a score of 7.4 (Van Heck, 2021). Other right-winged parties in Limburg are the liberal VVD at 6.1 and the new Forum voor Democratie with a score of 7.2. The political middle is populated by the Christian democrats (5.5), 50PLUS (5.1), the local party Lokaal-Limburg (5)² and the social-liberal D66 (4.4). The left flank completed by PvdD (3.6), the social-democrat PvdA (3.4) and the Socialist Party (2.9). This results in an average score for the party system of 4.8. Notably, the two most

² Lokaal-Limburg was excluded from the survey and therefore given the neutral score 5. See the operationalisation for a more extensive explanation.

right-winged parties together hold 14 seats, which is almost one third of the whole Council. Following the approach of Dalton (2008), the Polarisation index for the Provincial Council of Limburg is at 12.9. Comparing this score to the polarisation index of the 34 states included in Daltons study, we find that a score of 12.9 is more than twice as high as the highest scored state (Hungary, at 5.85) (Dalton, 2008, p. 907). This indicates that the polarisation is at an extraordinary high level. Therefore, based on the party system characteristics, a highly complex formation is expected. The complexity recognised by informateurs Koopmans even before the pre-information phase, as he stated that his objective was to “unite the incompatible” (Peeters, 2019).

Institutional elements

The Provincial Council of Limburg has several committees to support the members of the Limburg parliament in their work. While there are numerous consultative bodies, only eight committees have the status of a standing committee (Provincie Limburg, n.d.-b), namely the Praesidium (*Verordening van Provinciale Staten van de Provincie Limburg Bevattende Het Reglement van Orde van Provinciale Staten van Limburg*, 2019, article 2, section 4), Seniorconvent (*Verordening van Provinciale Staten van de Provincie Limburg Bevattende Het Reglement van Orde van Provinciale Staten van Limburg*, 2019, article 2, section 12), the Agenda committee (*Verordening van Provinciale Staten van de Provincie Limburg Bevattende Het Reglement van Orde van Provinciale Staten van Limburg*, 2019, article 3, section 2), Control committee (*Verordening van Provinciale Staten van de Provincie Limburg Bevattende Het Reglement van Orde van Provinciale Staten van Limburg*, 2019, article 6, section 4), and the substantive committees for Culture and Society, for Finances, Economics and Governance, for Mobility and Sustainability, and for Space, Agriculture and Nature (Provincie Limburg, n.d.-b). This indicates that the opposition does not derive great power from the amount of committees. As such the Limburg Provincial Council will not be scored positively. Neither the *Provinciewet*, nor the *Verordening* stipulate a fixed jurisdiction of the standing committees. The information pages of the four substantive committees each indicate that changes in the portfolio will be made (Provincie Limburg, n.d.-d, n.d.-e, n.d.-g, n.d.-f). Therefore it can be concluded that the jurisdictions of the standing committees are not fixed. Again the Provincial Council is not scored positively as a result. Comparing the portfolios of the Deputies (Provincie Limburg, 2019b, p. 65) to the portfolios of the substantive committees (Provincie Limburg, n.d.-d, n.d.-e, n.d.-g, n.d.-f) shows that four Deputies are responsive to two committees, one is responsive to three committees, and two Deputies are responsive to all four committees. Consequently this means that the jurisdictions of the committees do not correspond to the portfolios of the Deputies. Therefore this indicator is scored negatively. Neither the *Provinciewet*, nor the *Verordening* mention any restrictions on the number of assignments for one member of the Provincial Council. Therefore this indicator is also scored negatively. Article 80,

section 3 of the *Provinciewet* does prescribe that the constellation of the standing committees mirrors the distribution of seats in the Provincial Council (*Provinciewet*, 2018). Additionally the substantive committees consist of three CDA members, one Forum voor Democratie member, three PVV members, two VVD members, two SP members, two GroenLinks members, one PvdA member, one D66 member, one Lokaal Limburg member, one PvdD member, one 50PLUS member and two SVL members (Provincie Limburg, n.d.-g, n.d.-e, n.d.-d, n.d.-f). Since SVL separated from Forum voor Democratie in 2020 and the PVV with the same amount of Council seats provides three members of each committee, it stands to reason that Forum voor Democratie provided three members after the 2019 election. The Praesidium consists of the vice president and faction leaders thereby representing all parties present in parliament (*Verordening van Provinciale Staten van de Provincie Limburg Bevatende Het Reglement van Orde van Provinciale Staten van Limburg*, 2019, article 2, section 1), while the Senior convent is made up of the Governor and the faction leaders (Provincie Limburg, n.d.-c). Lastly, the Agenda committee consists of the presidents of the Provincial Council and the presidents of the substantive committees (Provincie Limburg, n.d.-a). Besides the Agenda committee, all committees either consist of members from all parties or reflect the constellation of the Council. Therefore Limburg is scored positively on this indicator. This means that The Provincial Council of Limburg scores one on the five point scale. As a result the policy influence differential is very high, meaning that there are great benefits to holding office compared to being in opposition concerning the impact a party can have on policy.

Together with the limited prospective costs of holding office, the great benefits provide a clear incentive for political parties to participate in government. In the earliest talks between the elected parties and Koopmans during the pre-information phase, parties already discussed their willingness to participate in government. In these talks only SP and 50PLUS explicitly stated that they found participating in government not fitting (Koopmans, 2019, pp. 6 & 8). They did, however, respectively, also explicitly not close the door on joining a coalition and considered giving structural support to a government. Besides PvdD and GroenLinks whose positions remained unclear (Koopmans, 2019, pp. 7 & 11), all other parties expressed willingness to participate in the Provincial government (Koopmans, 2019, pp. 2–5, 9–10 & 13). GroenLinks' willingness to participate in government is evident from their participation in the talks further in the process and their suggestion to research reinforcing the proto-coalition of CDA, VVD, PvdA and D66 with GroenLinks and perhaps also another smaller party after they expressed that they would not join a coalition with either PVV or Forum voor Democratie (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c, p. 72). The broadly shared, great willingness to participate in government displayed by the parties in the Limburg Provincial Council can be explained through the limited prospective costs and the high benefits of being a government party. In the abovementioned

it was established that the provincial elections for Limburg are little decisive and as a result the risk and consequences of electoral punishment are limited. Simultaneously, the benefits of participating in government are large because it ensures a much greater influence on policy in addition to holding office. This policy-seeking objective is demonstrated by parties in the formation talks. The representative of the Christian democrats for example aimed at a role in government with broad support and “as many elements of the CDA-party program in the policy-agreement as possible” (Koopmans, 2019, p. 4).

Other institutional elements are determined directly by the *Provinciewet* (*Provinciewet, 2018*) and the Provincial regulation. One of these factors is the requirement of a vote of investiture. Article 35, section 1 of the *Provinciewet* stipulates that Deputies are appointed by the Provincial Council by means of a vote in accordance with article 31 of the same law. Article 31 dictates that a vote concerning a person as part of an appointment, nomination or recommendation is secret. Following article 30 of the *Provinciewet* a decision by a vote requires an absolute, in other words a simple, majority. Consequentially it has to be established that an investiture vote is required in the Provincial Council of Limburg. While informateurs Gabriëls is not convinced that the investiture vote had an important role in the advice to form an extra-parliamentary construct, he does acknowledge that a majority is always required to appoint a Deputy (Gabriëls, 2021, ll. 375–377) and that a minority government was not discussed in the formation process (2021, ll. 381–383). Informateur Koopmans, however, states that a minority government was perhaps deliberated but never seriously considered (Koopmans, 2021, ll. 81–92) and that the investiture was an important factor in this decision. The obviousness of and weight attributed to the investiture vote by the two informateurs shows that the required vote of investiture reinforced the necessity of a parliamentary majority and therefore contributed to the exclusion of a minority government from being considered.

A second institutional element directly determined by the *Provinciewet* is the number of legislative bodies to which the Deputies are accountable. Article 167, section 1 of the *Provinciewet* (2018) states that “Deputies are accountable to the members of the Provincial Council about their governance.” Articles 7 and 8, section 1 prescribe respectively that the Provincial Council represents the whole population of the province and that the Council consists of at the least 39 and at the most 55 members, depending on the size of the population.³ As such the parliamentary system of the Province of Limburg has to be deemed a unicameral system. Therefore the parliamentary system cannot be the cause of an oversized majority coalition, since there is no second legislative body which would also require a majority.

³ The Provincial Council of Limburg consisted of 47 members before and after the elections of 2019.

While the investiture does result in the requirement of a parliamentary majority to support the executive, the parliamentary system does not require an oversized majority in the Provincial Council. Besides these factors, the informateurs have stated that the support of a (broad) majority was preferred by CDA and VVD (Gabriëls, 2021, ll. 44–51) and that CDA considered a majority of one seat too limited because of the power distribution (Koopmans, 2021, ll. 70–73). The CDA made its position clear in the pre-information phase, by stating they preferred a government with broad support (Koopmans, 2019, p. 5). They did so again in the first round in the information phase when they specified this to mean larger support than a simple parliamentary majority (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019b, pp. 3 & 11). From the informateurs' letter of April 16th 2019 concerning the outcome of the first round of talks in the information phase, it becomes clear that the PVV, GroenLinks, D66, PvdA, Lokaal-Limburg, CDA and VVD supported the formation of a "stable coalition that can count on broad support in and outside of the Provincial Council" (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019b, p. 3). While there is no record of the parties naming the investiture as part of their consideration, the obviousness attributed to it by informateurs Gabriëls shows that all participants were likely aware of the requirement. They all displayed a wish for a government supported by a majority. As a result the informateurs advised "to explore in which way the current coalition [CDA, VVD, PVDA, D66 with twenty seats] could be reinforced and complemented" (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019b, p. 3). Together with the statements of the informateurs that a minority government was never seriously considered (Gabriëls, 2021, ll. 378–380; Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019b, ll. 80–89), it becomes clear that the support of a parliamentary majority was considered a requirement for the new government.

The formation process

After the election, Ger Koopmans discussed the outcome of the elections, the role of each party and the coming process with a representative of each elected party (Koopmans, 2019). He suggested to organise an intermediate step in the formation process before the possible coalition were to be discussed. In this step CDA, as the largest party, and Forum voor Democratie, GroenLinks, PvdD and Lokaal Limburg, as winners of the election, discussed a limited number of subjects substantively (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019b, pp. 1–2). Koopmans also suggested to lead this step together with Geert Gabriëls because he had ties to both a local political party and GroenLinks, had experience with building a coalition with an agreement containing only the broad lines and was open to all co-operation based on policy (Koopmans, 2019). Since the pre-information phase was concerned with determine the process and because Koopmans was not replaced but joined by Gabriëls, the pre-information phase is not considered as a separate attempt to form a government. After the first round in the information the informateurs concluded that PVV, GroenLinks, D66, PvdA, Lokaal Limburg, CDA and VVD could support the approach to research in what way the coalition of CDA, VVD, PvdA and D66

could be reinforced and complemented (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019b, p. 3). At this stage it was thus attempted to form a coalition containing these four parties. From the second round of conversations eight principles for the coalition were deduced. These principles were supported by all eleven parties, with the exception of the SP on two sections (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019a, p. 1). In the following weeks the informateurs concluded that “based on policy, no coalition could be excluded” and that “the differences parties expected in certain dossiers could be bridged” (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c). In the next step the four members of the proto-coalition were individually asked two questions (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c, p. 2): whether they were “willing to form a coalition consisting of the parties CDA, VVD, PvdA, D66 reinforced and complemented with PVV and another party?” And whether they were “willing to form a coalition consisting of the parties CDA, VVD, PvdA, D66 reinforced and complemented with Forum voor Democratie and another party?” Simultaneously GroenLinks was asked two similar questions (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c, p. 2): whether they were “willing to form a coalition consisting of the parties CDA, VVD, PvdA, D66 reinforced and complemented with GroenLinks and PVV?” And whether they were “willing to form a coalition consisting of the parties CDA, VVD, PvdA, D66 reinforced and complemented with GroenLinks and Forum voor Democratie?” The fact that both the proto-coalition and GroenLinks were asked similar questions indicates that the informateurs envisioned a position for GroenLinks in the coalition. If GroenLinks would answer positively to either one of the two questions, they would become part of the proto-coalition. Because this concerns an extension of the proto-coalition it is not considered a change in the intended party composition.

GroenLinks, PvdA and D66, however, answered the asked questions negatively while CDA and VVD were open to reinforcement by either PVV or Forum voor Democratie (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c, p. 3). The first attempt at forming a coalition had hereby come to an end. The informateurs have afterwards explored the possibility of a coalition consisting of the proto-coalition complemented with GroenLinks and another party, not being PVV or Forum voor Democratie, but never attempted to form this coalition as both CDA and VVD considered the parliamentary support of this coalition to little (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c, pp. 75 & 77). As such the second attempt to form a government consisted of the advice to form the extra-parliamentary construct. Notably, Gabriëls was replaced by Karin Straus as formateur because of her experience with human resource management and experience as member of the Dutch national parliament (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c, p. 4) Therefore this can be seen as the second attempt to form a government. After talks with the parties in the Provincial Council, they proposed seven candidate-Deputies (Koopmans & Straus, 2019b, p. 1, 2019a, p. 1). As these seven candidates were appointed as Deputies by the Provincial council during the Assembly of June 28th 2019 (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, pp. 68–73), this second attempt can be considered successful. Compared to the average length of the formation of 1.89 attempts (Strøm,

1990, p. 67) the formation in Limburg required more attempts. Also, the exclusion of both PVV and Forum voor Democratie by PvdA, D66 and GroenLinks is established to one of the major reasons why the first attempt failed together with the wish of CDA and VVD to form a coalition with more than a simple majority (Gabriëls, 2021, ll. 65–76; Koopmans, 2021, ll. 70–74). Therefore the exclusion of parties did contribute to the complexity of the formation and demanded an extra attempt.

The exclusion of PVV and Forum voor Democratie took place in the fourth round of talks in the formation process. Earlier none of the participating parties had excluded each other, although PvdA had expressed their doubts concerning cooperation with PVV or Forum voor Democratie (Koopmans, 2019, p. 2). GroenLinks expressed a lack of trust in the stability of Forum voor Democratie and expected future conflict with PVV (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c, pp. 72–73). PvdA excluded Forum voor Democratie from cooperation because they saw great differences in the positions on climate change and doubted their stability, while PVV was excluded because conflict on the issues of diversity and inclusiveness was foreseen (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c, p. 79). D66 excluded both Forum voor Democratie and PVV because they had no faith in a stable, broadly supported coalition with these parties (Koopmans & Gabriëls, 2019c, p. 81). Both informateurs were convinced that the exclusion of parties should have taken place earlier in the process (Gabriëls, 2021, pp. 209–212; Koopmans, 2021, pp. 74–79).

The success of the second attempt to form a government is demonstrated not only by the appointment of the Deputies, but also by the statements made by political parties on the extra-parliamentary construct. Two of the candidate-Deputies were supported by 28 of the 44 members of the Provincial Council present (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, pp. 68–69). During the vote one of the members left the assembly and as a result only 43 members voted on the appointment of the other five candidates (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 69). These candidates were supported by 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31 members of the Provincial Council (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, pp. 70–73). Therefore more than a simple majority of the Council supported the Deputies and thereby the government. In the debate before the appointment of the Deputies several parties expressed their support for the extra-parliamentary construct. The CDA expressed their complete trust in the extra-parliamentary construct and appreciation for the candidate-Deputies (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 8). Even though Forum voor Democratie only discussed the construct briefly, they promised to closely watch the execution of the intentions in the policy agreement (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 10). The PVV stated to be pleased with the new construct (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 12). The VVD especially appreciated the more autonomous role of parliamentary parties opposite other parties (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 16). The SP, however, opposed the “smokescreen” to disguise the coalition between CDA, PVV and Forum voor Democratie and was not convinced the construct would indeed be extra-parliamentary (Provincie

Limburg, 2019a, p. 20). GroenLinks shared the opinion of the SP and deemed it “a bad idea to allow” the construct (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 21), while the PvdA and Lokaal Limburg also labelled the construct a de facto coalition (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, pp. 26 & 29). D66 was positive about the concept of an extra-parliamentary construct, but found the proposed executive to lack independence and uniformity (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 27). PvdD followed the explanation of the construct provided by the executive, but remained sceptic (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 30). The construct embodies “politics as it should be” according to 50PLUS (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 33). During the vote CDA, Forum voor Democratie, PVV and VVD together held 26 seats, as a member of the PVV and Forum voor Democratie party were absent (Provincie Limburg, 2019a, p. 5). Because the vote on the appointment of the Deputies was secret, it cannot be verified which parties voted in favour of the candidates. The voting record of a minimum of 27 votes in favour of all candidates suggests that at least these four parties supported the government.

The extra-parliamentary executive in Limburg consisted of seven people. Three of them had already been Deputy in the period before the 2019 election. Two of them were elected in the Provincial Council for the CDA and one of them was elected for the VVD. Besides these three candidates, the party leaders of both PVV and Forum voor Democratie were appointed as Deputies. The executive was completed by two Deputies from local political parties, one of whom also was a member of GroenLinks. Both Lokaal Limburg and GroenLinks had, however, expressed their opposition to the extra-parliamentary construct. As a result the constellation of the executive aligns with the constellation of the parties that supported the government. Van Leenknecht and Groenleer (2020, pp. 10–11) conclude that the extra-parliamentary executive was bound little to the political parties which supported their appointment, but were bound nonetheless because all parties had supported the principles on which the government was formed and the policy program was written. As such the extra-parliamentary construct in Limburg cannot be labelled a nonpartisan government. That a nonpartisan government had never been the objective of the informateurs or formateurs is confirmed by (in)formateur Koopmans in the interview. He underlined the importance of a sort of bond between the parliamentary parties and the executive, which would have been even looser had a nonpartisan government been appointed (Koopmans, 2021, II. 14–21).

Findings

This thesis tests the different aspects of coalition theory through four hypotheses. Based on the analysis set out above, these hypotheses are either confirmed or rejected. In the following the rationale for the judgement of each hypothesis is presented.

The first hypothesis ‘when the policy influence differential is lower, the benefits of participating in government are more limited and therefore the incentive for political parties to participate in government is smaller’ test the assumption of coalition theory that political parties are policy-seeking entities in the formation process. The analysis shows that in the Provincial Council of Limburg the structure of the committees provides little potential policy influence for opposition parties. The high policy influence differential means that, combined with the benefit of holding office, provides a great incentive for parties in Limburg to participate in government. With the exception of two parties the SP and 50PLUS, with four and one seat respectively, all parties were willing to participate in the Limburg government. Therefore this hypothesis is confirmed for the time being.

The second hypothesis tests the long term objective of political parties to remain in an influential position: ‘The more decisive the election is, the higher the prospective costs of holding office are, which increases the incentive for political parties not to participate in government’. Based on the analysis it has to be concluded that the provincial election of Limburg was decisive to only a small extent. The risk of being punished electorally in or not participating in the government after a next election is therefore limited. As such the prospective costs of holding office are small. Since nine out of the eleven parties with 41 of the 47 seats combined show willingness to participate in a new government, it has to be established that the parties feel little incentive not to join a government. As such this hypothesis is confirmed for the time being.

The third hypothesis tests the impact institutional constraints have on the formation of a coalition or government, in relation to the requirement of a majority, be it simple or oversized: ‘the presence of an investiture vote or a bicameral system increase the urgency for a parliamentary majority to support the government, thusly a government which has the support of the majority of parliament is more likely to be formed’. In the Dutch provincial governing system an investiture is required, while the government is only accountable to the unicameral Provincial Council. This means that the urgency to guarantee the support of the majority before the Deputies are appointed is present. The analysis furthermore shows that the informateurs had been aware of this requirement, with informateurs Koopmans labelling the investiture “an important factor” (Koopmans, 2019, I. 92). Eventually the extra-parliamentary construct was supported by at least a parliamentary majority of CDA, VVD, PVV and Forum voor Democratie. As a result the this hypothesis is confirmed for the time being.

The final hypothesis tests the influence of the party system on the formation of a government: As the level of fractionalisation and polarisation in a party system increase and a larger amount of parties is excluded from coalition formation, a larger number of attempts is necessary for the successful formation of a government, which is more likely to be a nonpartisan government. The analysis of the

constellation of the Limburg Provincial Council showed that the party system is greatly fractionalised and highly polarised. Ultimately two of the seven parties still involved in forming a government, each holding seven seats, were excluded by the three left-winged, or -leaning parties. In their argumentation the three parties named differences in policy positions and lack of stability as the major reasons to exclude the two right-winged parties. The exclusion was therefore a consequence of the polarisation in the Provincial Council. This resulted in the second attempt at forming a government. The second attempt was successful, however, the government formed was extra-parliamentary. It has been established that the government was therefore not completely separated from the parliamentary parties and could therefore not be labelled nonpartisan. Therefore this hypothesis is rejected.

5 Conclusion and discussion

The objective of this thesis was to provide an explanation for the outcome of the government formation by the Provincial Council of Limburg after the 2019 election. In order to do so the research question ‘To what extent do the different elements of coalition theory provide an explanation for the formation of the extra-parliamentary construct by the Provincial Council of Limburg in 2019?’ had to be answered. The current state of coalition theory accounts for deviations from the traditionally expected minimal winning connected coalition and is therefore expected to provide an explanation.

Coalition theory expects political parties to have little incentive to participate in government when the potential policy influence of opposition parties is similar to the influence of coalition parties, because government membership provides little benefits while the expected electoral costs are higher for government parties than for opposition parties. Furthermore it is expected that institutional constraints such as an investiture vote of bicameral parliamentary system provide additional incentives for the parties to form a government supported by a majority of the parliament. Finally, coalition theory expects the formation of a nonpartisan government when the formation of a coalition is too complex as a result of the fractionalisation and polarisation of parliament and the exclusion of parties from (proto-)coalitions.

The empirical analysis shows that coalition theory can provide an explanation for the formation of the Limburg extra-parliamentary construct to a great extent, but not completely. The benefits of government participation in Limburg outweigh the prospective electoral costs and parties do show great willingness to join a coalition. Additionally the requirement of an investiture vote in order to appoint candidate-Deputies has caused the informateurs not to consider minority governments as viable options, which means the support of a parliamentary majority was seen as a necessity. Finally, while the high level of fractionalisation and polarisation of the Provincial Council of Limburg and the exclusion of the second- and third-largest parties by several other parties ordered a second formation attempt, the extra-parliamentary construct cannot be labelled a nonpartisan government. The conclusion of this thesis therefore is that current coalition theory does not fully explain the formation of the extra-parliamentary construct. The crucial aspect which led to this conclusion is concerned with the form of government, not the provincial context of the formation.

Implications

The finding that the provincial setting of the analysed formation did not interfere with the explanation provided by coalition theory, supports the extension of the range of coalition theory. The theory and its refinements over the last years had been based on the analysis of coalition and government

formations at the national level in different Western (European) democracies. That subnational government formation can also to a large extent be explained by this same theory encourages the research field to further develop the theory. A broader analysis of government formation at the intermediary level of government may provide a solid basis to confirm that coalition theory is applicable not only to the national but also to the subnational level. Additional case studies into different provinces or different formations may simultaneously lead to refinement of coalition theory if the presence of other mechanisms is discovered.

The conclusion that the extra-parliamentary construct cannot be accounted for by coalition theory implies that further refinement of the theory is necessary. The extra-parliamentary construct seems to fall in between the categories of a majority coalition and a nonpartisan government. A more extensive study of formations with similar outcomes can provide the empirical support for this addition to coalition theory. The case of Limburg in 2019 suggests that the necessity for the executive to be explicitly supported by a majority of the parliament combined with a highly complex formation as a result of the fractionalisation and polarisation of the party system are conditions for an extra-parliamentary construct to be formed. Additional empirical research is, however, required before this conclusion can be drawn.

Limitations

This thesis attempted to find an explanation for the formation in the Dutch province of Limburg in 2019 through an analysis of the formation process. In order to do so the formation dossiers of the province was subject to content analysis. This means, however, that the personal communication between the actors involved and the informal meetings between parties were not included in the analysis. The outcome of these meetings and contacts were, nevertheless, (partially) mentioned in the minutes of the (in)formation talks. As a result the mechanisms at play during these informal moments could not be included in the analysis and the conclusion drawn. This limitation has been a persistent issue in research on government formations.

Another consequence of this caveat is that the impact of the personal relations between the actors involved in the formation and the Provincial Council remains unclear. Informateur Gabriëls noted the aspect of interpersonal relations and personal considerations as a difficult, but relevant aspect of the formation process (Gabriëls, 2021, ll. 406–415). In future research this caveat could be addressed by participatory observation of a formation, although it seems highly unlikely that this opportunity will present itself.

The interviews with both informateurs have provided an insight in their considerations. Because only the informateurs and not the negotiators of the parties involved were interviewed their perspectives

may have influenced the outcome of the analysis. Although the findings were not solely based on the interviews, future research should attempt to include the perspectives of all actors involved in the process in order to prevent potential biases.

Lastly, the conclusion of this thesis provides a starting point for the further development of coalition theory. While the findings support the extension of the range of the theory, this thesis alone is too limited to accept that the formation process at subnational levels does not differ from the same process at the national level. Therefore additional research into the formation of subnational governments is required. Additionally, this thesis has identified a new white area in coalition theory: the formation of an extra-parliamentary construct. Since current coalition theory could not provide a conclusive explanation, development of the theory is required. The empirical analysis of other cases with a similar outcome should provide the support for the refinement of coalition theory.

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Appendix A. Transcript interview informateurs Gabriëls

Gabriëls: Wat voor een scriptie doe je eigenlijk precies?

Interviewer: Ik doe een politicologie scriptie en het onderwerp is de formatie in Provinciale Staten in 2019. En wat ik heb gedaan is dat ik een causaal model heb opgesteld aan de hand van bestaande theorieën. Het begint met eigenlijk met puur speltheorie en partijen willen in het college komen. Die theorie werd steeds iets aan toegevoegd dus ook partijen zijn op zoek naar beleidspunten, wat is nou de invloed van institutionele aspecten, wat is de invloed van het partijsysteem? Op basis daarvan heb ik zelf een model ontwikkeld dat zou moeten kunnen verklaren waarom een extraparlementair college wordt gevormd en dan is Limburg de casestudie aan de hand waarvan ik probeer aan te tonen of je al model nou of dat enigszins klopt of niet.

Gabriëls: Het is niet zo dat de pers hier allerlei dingetjes uit gaat zitten schrijven?

Interviewer: Nee. Het is wel zo dat de scriptie wordt gepubliceerd in de scriptiebank. Ik begrijp natuurlijk dat er regels zijn rondom vertrouwelijkheid van het proces dus als u op bepaalde vragen geen antwoord kan geven dan snap ik dat. Ik heb de vragen wel zo opgesteld dat het niet specifiek terugslaat op een partij. Het gaat echt meer om het proces en de algemene indrukken.

Gabriëls: Ik denk dat ik gewoon antwoord waarvan ik denk dat het gewoon oké is en vanuit hoe het gegaan is. Het is wel alweer twee jaar geleden hè dus wel echt alles weet. Wat ik nu zeggen zal een samenvatting van wat ik denk nog in mijn hoofd te hebben. En je mag ook gewoon je of jij zeggen.

Interviewer: Dan gaan we dat wel doen.

Gabriëls: Ik had natuurlijk geen duidelijk fractie achter me staan. En de andere informateur die had natuurlijk negen zetels achter zich staan. Hij was eigenlijk een bepalendere factor daarin. Dan ik, bij wijze van spreken. Dat is niet erg, maar het is wel interessant om te kijken. Want ik vond het toen al interessant om te kijken hoe dat allemaal ging. Maar begin maar met de vragen.

Interviewer: Ik wil je als eerste vraag stellen, een open vraag, en daarna een aantal meer specifieke vragen, Waarom jullie Samen gekomen zijn tot dat advies om een
30 extraparlamenteair college te vormen.

Gabriëls: Ik had zelf nog nooit van het woord gehoord en Ik ben zelf ook niet staatsrechtelijk zodanig onderlegd dat ik überhaupt daar opgekomen was. Dus het was ook in den beginnen niet mijn idee, maar toen de andere informateur, Ger [Koopmans, mede-informateur] mij dat vertelde ... dat is wel helemaal achteraan het proces geweest hè. Toen hadden we echt al
35 wekenlang opzitten waarin ik dacht: we gaan richting een normale coalitievorm. Dus laten we zeggen ik had gedacht er komt iets uit van CDA, VVD, Partij van de Arbeid, D66 als basis, want dat was motorblok. Dat was de eerste stap die we hadden gezet. En daarbij een andere partij, waarschijnlijk dan GroenLinks of Limburg-Lokaal of wat dan ook. Dus voor mij was het eigenlijk nog niet zo duidelijk dat de dat het motorblok, of laten we zeggen CDA-VVD, die combinatie
40 dat die op dat moment ook absoluut niet wilde kiezen voor die helft plus één, plus Limburg-Lokaal. Dat was voor mij op dat moment niet duidelijk. Ik dacht dat zou altijd alsnog kunnen. Daar is ook nooit nee tegen gezegd op dat moment. Dus als je vraag is hoe kwamen jullie samen tot dat extraparlamenteaire construct, ja dan in den beginnen kon dat mijn idee niet zijn, omdat ik het woord niet eens kende. Maar toen mij werd verteld, dacht ik ja als dat is wat
45 de meerderheid wil, namelijk vooral het CDA en de VVD, die hadden eigenlijk de richting de helft plus één destijds volgens mij afgesloten.

Interviewer: die wilde breder draagvlak in de Staten?

Gabriëls: Ja omdat het laatste proces daarvoor was dat de Partij van de Arbeid, D66 en GroenLinks, die werd de vraag gesteld kunnen jullie met één van de twee partijen, of PVV of
50 Forum, in een college zitten? Kijk als daar het antwoord 'ja' op was geweest, dan was de kans groot dat er iets anders uit was gekomen. Dan had je weer kunnen kijken plus die vier van het motorblok plus één van die partijen, maar omdat het antwoord van zowel Partij van de Arbeid, D66 als GroenLinks daarop 'nee' was, waarvan ik dacht dat kun je voorspellen, hoewel dat volgens mij een vraag was waarop we het antwoord al wisten. Als je aan de Partij van de
55 Arbeid vraagt van wil je met PVV of Forum in een coalitie dan zeggen zij 'nee'. Vraag je dat aan GroenLinks dan zeggen zij 'nee'. Tegelijkertijd zeiden zij van we gaan niemand uitsluiten dat was het vreemde daarvan. Dus in het begin was het van we sluiten niemand uit, vervolgens werd de vraag gesteld en kan daar toch het antwoord 'nee' uit. Wat ik ook heel begrijpelijk

vind. Toen daar dus het antwoord 'nee' op was, toen dacht ik van 'oh het kan dan nog steeds
60 de helft plus één worden, plus Limburg-Lokaal. Maar omdat ik niet in contact sta of stond, wist
ik niet wat daar dan uit zou komen, wat de meerderheid zou willen. Maar toen is gezegd werd
dat extraparlamentaire construct is ook een mogelijkheid en toen dacht ik als CDA en VVD dat
willen, en de meerderheid wil dat, dus met de PVV en Forum [voor Democratie] en dat was
de meerderheid, dat is niet iets waar ik als GroenLinkser in eerste instantie van dacht daar ligt
65 mijn ideale coalitie. Maar als dat is wat er uitkomt en dat wordt door de informateur van de
grootste partij ingebracht, ja toen dacht ik als het is dan is het dat. Als het advies was geweest
de helft plus één, plus twee, laten we zeggen plus GroenLinks plus Limburg-Lokaal dan was
het ook geweest. Dus ik had op het laatst nog gedacht dat dat nog tot de mogelijkheden zou
behoren en ik had dus ook niet verwacht dat CDA, VVD daar niet voor wilden kiezen. Ik had
70 niet verwacht dat ze eerder het extraparlamentair construct met PVV, Forum [voor
Democratie] zouden kiezen dan voor de helft plus één, plus twee. Kijk de helft plus één dat
wisten we, dat had het CDA van tevoren al aangegeven 'dat vinden we te smal'. Dus alleen
GroenLinks bij het motorblok, dat was te smal. Dat hadden ze aangegeven, duidelijk. Maar de
helft plus één plus twee daar is ook nooit 'nee' tegen gezegd. Dus in mijn hoofd was het dan
75 nog de keuze dat en toen kwam deze van Ger [Koopmans, mede-informateur]. En toen hebben
we dat advies aangeboden. Het was een idee van ons samen, maar omdat ik dat woord niet
kende en staatsrechtelijk niet onderlegd ben, maar als dat het advies is waar de meerderheid
mee kan overweg kan, en dat was dus ook zo op dat moment. Kijk je adviseert niet wat je zelf
wil, je adviseert wat de meerderheid van de Staten willen. Het idee kwam waarschijnlijk vanuit
80 Ger als oplossing voor de impasse. Ik had nog in mijn hoofd als Partij van de Arbeid en D66
wel niet met die twee rechtse partijen willen, dan wordt het waarschijnlijk de helft plus één.
Dus het motorblok van die vier partijen, dus Partij van de Arbeid, D66, VVD, CDA plus
GroenLinks, maar de helft was te weinig voor het CDA, is een alle gesprekken aangegeven, dan
doen ze daar nu Limburg-Lokaal bij dacht ik. Dat zag ik dan nog als optie, maar toen kwam dat
85 advies voor dat extraparlamentaire verhaal en toen dacht ik 'ja als dat is wat iedereen wil, dan
is het dat.

Interviewer: Ik krijg de indruk dat de draagvlak voor extra parlementair dat zal vooral kort
door de bocht gezegd aan de rechterkant van Provinciale Staten en uiteindelijk heb ik die ook
gesteund.

90 **Gabriëls:** Ja die hebben aangegeven dat niet te steunen, dat extraparlamentaire verhaal. En weet je van het is, dat is extraparlamentair, ik hoorde dat afgelopen vrijdag ook weer in de debatten, dat is de naam die je eraan geeft. Kijk, in Weert hebben wij een hele brede coalitie en in heel veel andere steden is dat zo. En is dat nou niet per definitie goed of slecht, dat weet ik niet. Het punt is wel dat er een soort van in de politiek iets gaande is om zoveel mogelijk

95 partijen te betrekken, een soort macht bij de Staten op bij de Raad te leggen, zodat je zoveel mogelijk wisselende de meerderheden kunt krijgen en niet vooraf afgetikte coalities-opposities hebt. Het is in de praktijk wel ingewikkelder, denk ik. In Weert was het zo wij hadden dertien zetels met Weert Lokaal, of twaalf zetels. Wij konden met bijna elke partij een meerderheid vormen. Dus dat was een vraag met wie? Twaalf met vier, twaalf met zes,

100 twaalf met drie, dat als een meerderheid dus met 3 partijen hadden wij dan al een meerderheid. Dan krijg je dat als je een coalitie gaat vormen met bijvoorbeeld die van vier dat dat totaal uit balans is en dat je twee coalitiepartijen en zes oppositiepartijen hebt met heel veel invloed. Het is heel moeilijk om dat samen te houden met een met een partij met twaalf zetels en toen dacht ik ja als het een small kan, in Weert, dan laten we eigenlijk iedereen mee

105 doen. Nou daar kozen twee partijen met in totaal vier zetels niet voor, maar bijvoorbeeld D66, die geen wethouder leverde hebben daar wel voor gekozen en gewoon ondertekend. Dus dat werkte wel en die ook nog steeds best wel sommige dingen ook gedragen vanuit dat collegeakkoord. Het is wel zo dat je ook wel op een gegeven moment vanuit de kern van mensen die wethouders leveren dat dat toch wel een beetje voelt alsof ja dan moet je ook

110 geen oppositie gaan zitten bedrijven op die manier zoals je nu aan het doen bent of zo. En dan lijkt het een goed construct, maar dan krijg je dat mensen zich ook kunnen gaan ergeren. Je kunt dan van de ene kant zeggen van hij is niet die partij en die zit er niet namens het CDA bijvoorbeeld of namens die partij maar volgens mij is dat dan niet zo. Want als je lid bent van die partij en je bent in de Kamer geweest voor de partijen, je bent burgemeester geweest

115 namens die partij, ja dan ben je van die partij. En dan zijn er snellere linkjes naar die partij, dus het is een heel goed construct en ik denk dat het dat ook bewezen heeft omdat er heel veel verschillende, allemaal stukken echt gewoon met wisselende meerderheden zijn aangenomen of unaniem zijn aangenomen, dat is een kant. Aan de andere kant, je kunt mij niet los zien van GroenLinks. Je kunt Ger [Koopmans, mede-informateur] niet los zien van het CDA. Je kunt

120 Housmans [toenmalig leider PVV Limburg] niet los van de PVV, of misschien wel maar ik denk het niet. Toch ook nu nog zijn er allemaal fracties hartstikke enthousiast van een

extraparlamentaire variant en om eerlijk te zijn, stel ik zou als wethouder hier bijvoorbeeld hè, ik wil best naar de fractievergadering van de Partij van de Arbeid of D66 om naar uitleg te geven of daar extra info te geven of uitleg. Dat maakt mij niet uit. Dus ik zou dat in de Staten
125 ook doen. Ik zou net zo goed naar de fractie van GroenLinks gaan als naar de fractie van het CDA. Waarom zou je de grootste partijen zo plotseling geen invloed meer mogen hebben vanwege zaken die gebeurd zijn? Ja daar ben ik het in mindere mate mee eens. Dus ik denk dat die negen zetels ook gewoon voldoen en dat die ook gewoon hun werk moeten doen en ook die informatie zouden moeten kunnen krijgen ongeacht welke bestuurders er zouden
130 zitten. Dus op dat vlak klinkt het weer extraparlamentair. Volgens mij is het op Raadsniveau misschien makkelijk want dat noem je het een Raadsprogramma. En hoe hoger het niveau wordt, hoe moeilijker het wordt om bijvoorbeeld de Staten helemaal hun gang te laten gaan of de Tweede Kamer op dat vlak dat je dus geen coalitie hebt. Want ik heb dat zelf in Weert ook meegemaakt vorige periode met de PvdA en de SP in echt een coalitie vorm. Dat was heel
135 strak, ging heel goed, was heel duidelijk. Dat was eigenlijk heel duidelijk overzichtelijk gezet. Dat is heel goed gegaan. Deze periode is het toch lastiger, omdat er heel veel partijen dan dus meedoen, er allerlei wisselende meerderheden ontstaan. Dus je weet ook niet waar je aan toe bent als bestuurder, of je gaat lukken of het aangenomen gaat worden ja of nee. Dus voor een bestuurder vind ik het minder overzichtelijk, onzekerder. Maar ik weet niet of de raad
140 dat prettig vindt of niet. Volgens mij ook niet heel erg duidelijk. Maar ik heb wel vernomen dat in de Staten mensen wel er wisselend naar kijken, maar er niet on-enthousiast over zijn. Is dat een beetje een antwoord op jouw vraag?

Interviewer: Ik heb bewust willen beginnen met een open vraag om er jouw indruk van te krijgen.

145 **Gabriëls:** Jij vraagt hoe ben je daar opgekomen of zo?

Interviewer: Hoe kom je tot dit advies ja.

Gabriëls: Kijk ik geloof wel in de bredere, meer invloed voor de raad en die is voor mogelijk een minder coalitie-oppositie verhaal. Dat was al langer een idee. Ook in Weert speelde dat. Er zijn meerdere gemeentes waar je dan niet zo'n keurslijf zit of zo, dus dat heb ik duidelijk
150 wil eens over nagedacht. Partij voor de dieren was daar ook wel voor, maar dat ik zelf nou met dit construct zou komen, met een aantal partijen die wel ... want zoiets werkt eigenlijk alleen

als je alle partijen mee hebt. In Weert deden vijf van de zeven partijen mee. Dan krijg je toch een beetje dat die vijf als coalitie bestempeld worden en die twee niet. Begrijp je wat ik bedoel?

155 **Interviewer:** Ja, dat zag je in de Staten ook. Dat de linkervleugel zich meer oppositie rol aanmaten. Ik wil graag door naar de meer specifieke vragen. Die gaan ook al iets meer over dat proces aan de voorkant voor dat advies van de motorblok niet gedragen werd. Kun je iets zeggen over waar partijen nou naar opzoek waren? Ging dat vooral om echt bepaalde inhoudelijke punten binnenhalen? Was duidelijk dat partijen graag een Gedeputeerde wilden
160 leveren? Wat waren de drijfveren van die de partijen in algemene zin?

Gabriëls: Nee, volgens mij kwam wel bij mij over dat iedereen hartstikke constructief was en op de inhoud. Ja het ging goed totdat we op een gegeven moment in de informatie ronden wel echt een groot verschil ontstond tussen Partij van de Arbeid en D66 enerzijds en anderzijds Forum [voor Democratie] en de PVV, volgens mij, ging dat over energie. Daar was wel echt
165 een groot verschil zichtbaar, in het begin was het eigenlijk allemaal best wel ... Iedereen had dezelfde insteek ook echt een 'samen insteek' en ik heb nooit het idee gehad 'oh er moet iemand ergens en een baantje hebben' of zo. Nee dat heb ik niet gehad. Ik zat natuurlijk net iets verder daar vanaf dan bijvoorbeeld Ger [mede-informateur]. Dus Ger [Koopmans] had natuurlijk gewoon twee collega's, Hans Teunissen [toenmalig demissionair gedeputeerde] en
170 Eric Geurts [toenmalig demissionair gedeputeerde] die als enige, laten we zeggen collega's waren en nu misschien in de ene constructie met de helft plus één, plus twee wel hadden kunnen blijven zitten en de andere constructie niet. Ik snap dat dat ingewikkeld is want je bent collega en informateur tegelijkertijd. Dat is iets anders als voor mij. Dat voel je natuurlijk wel. Ik dacht 'ja maar dat zijn huidige collega's. Ga je dan door met zijn allen? Het is toch het
175 motorblok'. Het motorblok was die vier partijen waar die twee Gedeputeerden ook lid dan waren. Maar je ziet ook dat rechts veel gewonnen heeft, dus die helft plus één was ook niet conform de verkiezingsuitslag. Want Forum [voor Democratie] en PVV zijn de tweede en derde grootste partij, die kun je toch niet zomaar te negeren. Dus het was super ingewikkeld. Waarvan je dus dacht 'het motorblok is dat, dan kun je toch wel verwachten dat het motorblok
180 met één van die partijen in zee gaat.' Maar van tevoren zei iedereen 'we sluiten niemand uit', maar toen het eindelijk gevraagd werd gebeurde dat wel.

Interviewer: Welke reden werd daar toen voor gegeven? Welke reden werd daar aangegeven om toch 'nee' te zeggen tegen die partijen?

Gabriëls: Toch dat verschillen op termijn te groot waren en ook, je kunt er op schrijven dat je landelijke zaken, wat er in Brabant nu ook gebeurt, dat je landelijke zaken niet tussen je coalitie laat komen en dat lijkt me dan vooral voor het CDA dan een ingewikkelde discussie intern. Wat ik heel interessant vind, is dat landelijk nu CDA en ook VVD zeg maar ja met GroenLinks is het later moeilijk samenwerken. Dus er ontstaat een discussie en dan denk ik 'waarom zijn die toen niet ontstaan?' Toen zijn die volgens mij wel ontstaan, ook in het CDA is die dagen discussie geweest over samenwerken met Forum [voor Democratie]. We hadden van tevoren vastgelegd in die notitie 'we gaan landelijke zaken niet laten interfereren met provinciale zaken'. En toen vervolgens was het van 'we gaan niet met die partijen in zee want op termijn gaat dat allerlei problemen opleveren en de uitspraken die ze doen, dat past niet bij ons. We kunnen op inhoud nu wel allemaal dingen zeggen, want iedereen heeft hetzelfde document ondertekend, maar toch op termijn en toch ook landelijk uitspraken. En dat zie je nu. Dat is nu ook de waarheid geworden. Forum [voor Democratie] is ook uit elkaar gevallen. Niet één keer maar twee keer, dus eerst in JA21 en vervolgens ook nog eens in Van Haga.

Interviewer: Ja, in Limburg ...

Gabriëls: In drie partijen. Je hebt nog steeds JA21, daar had je de bestuurder van, je had Samen Voor Limburg [Van Forum voor Democratie afgesplitste fractie] en je hebt Forum voor Democratie. Dus je weet het niet meer. Ook niet waar ze voor staan, ze hebben geen partijpolitiek programma. Bij Forum was dat niet duidelijk want er was geen duidelijk verkiezingsprogramma. Het was een totaal nieuwe situatie waarin je ook niet kunt onderkennen dat rechts groot was geworden, dat inwoners van Limburg voor rechts gekozen hadden en dat CDA en VVD daar is oog voor hadden. Wat was jouw vraag eigenlijk?

Interviewer: Nu was mijn vraag: wat dreef die partijen vooral? En daarvan geef je aan dat jij niet de indruk had dat het ging om de baantjes, om de gedeputeerde-post, maar echt kijken of we op inhoud verder te komen. En uiteindelijk bleek toch dat die verschillen te groot waren.

Gabriëls: Ja ik denk dat we sneller en eerder in het proces hadden moeten aangeven van 'we zeggen wel dat we niemand uitsluiten' of misschien hadden we ze dat meteen moeten laten zeggen eigenlijk. Als je dan terugkijkt denk je 'waarom we sluiten niemand uit? Wat betekent

dat dan?’ Op een gegeven moment wordt je de vraag gesteld en dan sluit je wel mensen uit. En ik begrijpt dat. Op een gegeven moment in het proces kwam dat het hele relletje naar voren waarin de heer Baudet via Twitter een filmpje deelde over vrouwen uit Duitsland die verkracht waren en daarna achter dat filmpje kwam dan het beeld van Rob Jetten [toenmalig partijleider D66], Jesse Klaver [partijleider GroenLinks] en Mark Rutte [partijleider VVD] en dat was eigenlijk een soort aanval. Dan kan je toch daarmee niet gaan samenwerken en dat werd dus anders opgevat door het CDA en door de VVD. Die hebben dat niet als reden gezien om niet te gaan voor bestuurders van het extraparlamenteair college van die partij en dan nog een kun je zeggen ‘waarom sluit je niemand uit?’, toch anderzijds waarom stuur je dat soort filmpjes? en op welke manier neem je hier dan afstand van? En uiteindelijk is daar dus op het laatst, toen dus die partijen zeiden ‘nee we gaan niet met Forum [voor Democratie] en met de PVV in zee’, toen was het eigenlijk in een stroomversnelling en toen na een weekend nadenken kwam dat telefoontje en dan schijnt dat idee er te zijn. Toen heb ik gezegd ‘als dat het is, dan is het dat.’

Interviewer: En toen is ook niet meer de een optie van bijvoorbeeld een, nouja een meerderheidscoalities is wel nog verkend, met Lokaal-Limburg, maar die optie werd gewoon niet gedragen door partijen.

Gabriëls: Nee, want als het CDA en de VVD die optie hadden gewild dan had de Partij van de Arbeid, D66 natuurlijk ook ‘ja’ gezegd. Die optie was dus gewoon niet gewild. Het is eigenlijk nooit echt naar voren gekomen. De vraag ‘waarom heeft het CDA en de VVD niet gekozen voor D66, GroenLinks plus Limburg-Lokaal. Dat is de hoofdvraag die ik als journalist eigenlijk zou stellen. Maar dat was niet aan de orde op dat moment want de tweede en derde partij en CDA en VVD gingen dus achter dat extraparlamenteaire college staan. Met ook bestuurders van die partijen. Toen heb ik ook gezegd ‘dan is er voor mij geen rol meer, want GroenLinks staat hier niet achter en als GroenLinks er niet achter staat, ga ik niet die volgende stap in dat proces zetten. Dus eigenlijk was dat voor mij is dat een heel interessante situaties. ik zeg niet dat ik helemaal niet achter de extraparlamenteaire besluit sta. Helemaal niet, want je doet dat samen en al kwam het idee niet van mij, ik kan er wel achterstaan want dat was wat de meerderheid van de fracties wilden. En dat blijkt ook wel want het heeft twee jaar gefunctioneerd.

Interviewer: Je reflecteert in dit gesprek ook een beetje op in je rol en hoe dat proces is gegaan. Had er wellicht eerder hardop uitgesproken moeten ‘wij gaan wel of niet samen met

die partijen'? Hoor ik je zeggen 'er was te weinig ruimte voor deze stap [een coalitie van het motorblok plus GroenLinks en Lokaal-Limburg] om een keer duidelijk aan elkaar te maken
245 Waarom gaat CDA VVD niet voor die alternatieve meerderheidscoalitie?

Gabriëls: Ik had een argumentatie daarvoor graag gehoord en misschien is die er ook wel geweest, dan heb ik hem nu niet paraat. Die optie lag daar natuurlijk. Daar hebben D66 en Partij van de Arbeid, GroenLinks nooit 'nee' tegen gezegd. Die hebben nooit 'nee' gezegd tegen die optie. Die hebben allemaal gezegd 'dat is onze voorkeursvariant, plus Limburg-
250 Lokaal of niet. Maar dat hebben CDA, VVD nooit als reële optie gezien op één of andere manier. En ik snap dat wel, want als je kijkt naar de uitslag van de verkiezingen is dat ook helemaal niet de uitslag die Limburg gestemd heeft. Ook al is het wel de meerderheid plus drie. Maar de grootste vier partijen stonden achter dat construct en dan is de vraag 'waarom stonden die dan niet achter een daadwerkelijk college van die vier partijen?' En dat was dan
255 weer niet haalbaar, blijkbaar. Voor mij was dat een stapje dat ik informateur misschien dan zelf gemist heb. De precieze verklaring waarom dat dan ook geen coalitie kon zijn met de eerste vier partijen en waarom dat die andere variant met de helft plus één plus twee, met Limburg-Lokaal en GroenLinks dan, waarom dat dan die andere twee partijen [CDA en VVD] dat niet wilden. Het was ook niet de logische variant. De nummer twee en drie, dus de twee
260 grote partijen, waarom zou je die dan uitsluiten? Eigenlijk lag de bal bij de combinatie CDA-VVD. Als die met zijn tweeën gezegd hadden 'we gaan voor dat met GroenLinks en Limburg-Lokaal', dan was dat gebeurt. Want we hadden de eerste stap al gezet. Dat motorblok CDA, VVD, D66, Partij van de Arbeid dat was de eerste stap. Daar hoefde nog maar twee partijen bij. Ze zijn allemaal achter dat construct gaan staan ondanks het feit dat GroenLinks, D66,
265 Partij van de Arbeid dat niet wilden. Dat is denk ik de conclusie, blijkbaar wilde het CDA en VVD niet voor die helft plus één plus twee, maar per se voor dit. Nou als dat het is, dan is het dat. En gezien de verkiezingsuitslag.

Interviewer: Ja die verkiezingsuitslag. Dat is ook een volgende vraag: deze partijen zijn het grootste geworden, is dat in die formatie ... heeft dat een belangrijke rol gespeeld? Om de
270 winnaars van de verkiezingen, om die te proberen te betrekken.

Gabriëls: Nee, we wilde sowieso iedere partij betrekken. Het is echt stap voor stap gebeurd. Dus iedereen, Partij voor de Dieren, zat aan tafel tot aan het laatst. Ook echt de inhoud daarvan te verkennen. En dat eigenlijk partijen zich daar dat misschien allemaal heel erg lief

hebben opgesteld naar iedereen ... Iedereen kon ook wel inhoudelijk met iedereen, zodat je
275 dan aanvoelt van wanneer begint nou dat geknetter ofzo? En is er wel genoeg geknetter
geweest? En is daar dan wel voldoende openheid ook geweest? Ik denk het wel. Alles is
transparant geweest, maar ik denk dat het nog wel dat het een belangrijke rol heeft gespeeld
om nader tot elkaar te komen om te kijken of, dat is hoe Ger [Koopmans, mede-informateur]
dat ook wel zo zegt: om het onverenigbare met elkaar te verenigen. Dus zou het lukken om in
280 Limburg bijvoorbeeld partijen die normaal gesproken niet met elkaar door één deur kunnen,
dan toch met elkaar te laten samenwerken? En dat samenwerken was ook geen problemen,
maar om in een college te zitten, dat ging voor die drie partijen wel te ver. Maar ik denk dat
het wel wat belangrijk was om stap voor stap eigenlijk alles achter tassen en dat allemaal
samen goed te doen.

285 **Interviewer:** Maar jij hebt het gevoel gehad dat het enorm belangrijk werd gevonden dat de
partijen die winst hadden geboekt bij de verkiezingen, of die echt groot waren geworden, dat
er een idee was die moeten het sowieso gaan doen?

Gabriëls: Jawel, ik heb wel het gevoel gehad dat zij dachten 'we willen een rol spelen', ze
waren er klaar voor. Dus maar niet dat het sowieso moest. Iedereen heeft nu wel de hoop
290 altijd om mee te kunnen doen, dus om invloed te gebruiken. (31:36). En GroenLinks wilde
graag meedoen, dat was volgens mij ook wel duidelijk. Het was ook een teleurstelling toen
dat niet gebeurde. Maar ik had ook de indruk dat Forum [voor Democratie] en de PVV, en
vooral de PVV ook heel graag willen. Dat voelde ik wel. Stabiele partij, zeven zetels, altijd groot
in Limburg. Waarom niet? Zij waren heel constructief, ook op de inhoud. Ze zijn ook wel
295 constructief maar, ja wat dan het landelijk, bijvoorbeeld wat Wilders [partijleider PVV] er
allemaal uitkraamt, ja sorry hoor daar kan ik niet mee in een college zitten, bij wijze van
spreken. Want waarom ben je lid van die partij? Maar tegelijkertijd is er ook alle respect voor
voor Housmans [toenmalig leider PVV Limburg]. Want wat heeft hij nou helemaal verkeerd
gedaan? Volgens mij is dat gewoon een goede bestuurder. Als wethouder heb ik daar
300 helemaal geen moeite mee gehad. En dat is het lastige een beetje. Dus er zijn allemaal beelden
die van partijen die ik landelijk echt afschuwelijk vind, PVV en Forum [voor Democratie]
bijvoorbeeld, maar als informateur ben je neutraal dus je vindt dat niet. Maar natuurlijk, ik
heb er wel moeite mee landelijk. Maar die mensen aan tafel, ik heb daar gewoon geen moeite
mee gehad.

305 **Interviewer:** Ik heb nog twee vragen, maar dat moet ik wel lukken denk ik. Eén van de
onderdelen van het causaal model is hoe duidelijk in verkiezingsuitslag is geweest en dat heeft
ook te maken met hoe duidelijk de gevolgen van de uitslag aan de voorkant zijn. Misschien
minder vanuit de rol van de informateur, was voor jouw gevoel voorafgaand aan die
verkiezingen al duidelijk wat de mogelijke coalities zijn? Of deze partijen zijn wel geneigd om
310 met elkaar te gaan samenwerken? Of lag het helemaal open, wat er zou gaan gebeuren?

Gabriëls: Ik zit niet in de Staten en ik was ook geen gedeputeerde, dus Ger [Koopmans] had
daar natuurlijk veel meer kijk op, hij is zo'n sociaal dier en zo'n goede politicus die ook al
dingen aanvoelt, dat ik dat niet wist. Maar ik had wel het idee van GroenLinks gaat winnen,
GroenLinks zat in de flow bijvoorbeeld. En ik dacht wel 'dit is wel een kans'. En dat zag je ook
315 in alle provincies. In de laatste provinciale verkiezingen zit GroenLinks er overal tussen. De
grootste in Noord-Holland, de grootste in Utrecht in Drenthe zitten ze erbij, in Groningen
zitten ze erbij. En GroenLinks is heel erg gegroeid met de provinciale verkiezingen, echt
gigantisch gegroeid. Dus ik dacht wel van tevoren 'nou als dat de huidige coalitie, waar de SP
dus uitgevallen was, als daar GroenLinks bijkomt dan is dat geen probleem. Dacht ik. Dat is
320 mijn perceptie geweest. Dus ik zag het wegvallen van de SP en dat vervangen door GroenLinks,
zag ik als een hele duidelijke optie. Maar toen PVV en Forum [voor Democratie] dan toch
gewoon de tweede en derde partij werden, dan is de vraag 'in hoeverre kan CDA zich
verbinden. CDA is wat dat betreft ook wel een ingewikkelde partij. Ze noemen zichzelf een
middenpartijen, maar ze kiezen nooit voor links. Dus de vraag is eigenlijk 'wat had het CDA
325 voor ogen voor de verkiezingen? Hebben ze GroenLinks daar dan ooit bij gewild?' Ik denk dat
CDA gewoon open gestaan heeft, altijd al, voor een samenwerking met alle partijen, dus ook
met de SP dus toen, maar ook met de PVV en Forum [voor Democratie] op bestuursniveau. En
dat is geen slechte zaak, het is alleen zo dat als je op een moment komt dat het niet werkt,
bijvoorbeeld in Brabant, en het valt allemaal uit elkaar en dat zorgt toch voor stevige
330 uitspraken, dan moet je ook als partij durven te zeggen van 'nou we gaan daar denk ik niet
meer achter staan. Ik probeer zo genuanceerd mogelijk te spreken. Dus ik had niet vooraf al
dingen vastgelegd waren. Ik had wel toen GroenLinks en Partij voor de Dieren groeide dat ik
dacht 'ja dan is het wel logisch dat GroenLinks nu ook gaat deelnemen in een College in
Limburg.' En of dat nou vooraf speelde, ik denk dat dat altijd speelt. Want je zit mijn college
335 met Partij van de Arbeid en D66 en VVD en ik denk die altijd wel denken 'kunnen we samen

verder? Dus ik denk dat het ook wel klap was toen bleek van het motorblok zijn die vier partijen, maar dat wordt aan de kant geschoven eigenlijk en dan komt een nieuw construct. Waar eigenlijk die partijen van het motorblok geen zin in hadden, D66 en Partij van de Arbeid.

Interviewer: Het is een ingewikkeld proces. Volgende vraag: op provinciaal niveau moeten natuurlijk expliciet vertrouwen worden uitgesproken in de individuele gedeputeerde voordat die geïnstalleerd kunnen worden. Heeft die factor, dat er dus aan het begin van het college een echt in meerderheid nodig was, heeft dat een rol gespeeld, een grote rol gespeeld in die keuze, dus bijvoorbeeld niet de keuze voor een minderheidscollege maar deze extraparlamentaire vorm?

Gabriëls: Je bedoelt omdat er voorafgaand gestemd moest worden? En toen hebben ze ook tegenstemmen gekregen natuurlijk, van de linkse oppositie blijkbaar. Ja oppositie... Het is een extraparlamentaire vorm, maar dan zie je meteen al dat de gedeputeerden of wethouders de steun krijgen van die partijen die achter het construct staan en die andere partijen zijn daar tegen, dan heb je toch eigenlijk wel een oppositie-coalitie-rol? Maar als dat spelletje dan voorbij is en ze hebben gestemd, volgens mij is het daarna gewoon genormaliseerd. Daarna zijn de zaak goed gegaan en is ook contacten gehad met alle fracties. Volgens mij is dat even door de zure appel heen bijt, maar altijd bij elke vorming van elk college, wie er ook uitvalt heb je dat. Je kunt dat nooit 100% ergens aan werken, het kan ook zomaar met personen te maken hebben, het kan soms met gevoelens te maken hebben op wie het meest te zeggen heeft, dat die toevallig een andere rol kiest. Stel nou dat het CDA eigenlijk van oudsher al een goede band met GroenLinks zou hebben, dan was de kans groter geweest dat er gewoon je helft plus één, plus twee uit was gekomen. Maar dat is dus blijkbaar niet. Ik denk dat je op dat moment, als je dan gaat staan en je ziet zoveel tegenstemmen en zoveel voorstemmen, dan zie je al welke partijen voorgestemd hebben en welke tegen. Dan is de toon gezet. Maar vervolgens is dat, volgens mij, ook geparkeerd en hebben ze gewoon nog op alle vlakken goed samengewerkt. Dus ook dat is niet zwart-wit te verklaren denk ik. Het is sowieso denk ik een interessant experiment want ook landelijk, je ziet steeds meer mensen boos zijn ook op hoe het nou zit met macht en tegenmacht en coalitieafspraken en kun je nog wel jezelf zijn als Kamerlid terwijl dat je in een coalitie zit waarin je toch is soms moet gedragen, tussen aanhalingstekens. Ik ben er zelf nog niet over uit wat ik daar zelf van vind, maar ik kan me

voorstellen dat in het begin dat men dacht 'die stemmen tegen, die stemmen voor, nou de toon is gezet'.

Interviewer: Maar in de overweging om te komen tot dat advies van extraparlamentair daarvan heb jij niet de indruk dat dat moeten stemmen over gedeputeerde, in die keuze een
370 belangrijke rol heeft gespeeld?

Gabriëls: Kun je dat herhalen?

Interviewer: dat er gestemd zou moeten worden over gedeputeerde, je hebt niet de indruk dat dat een belangrijke gooit gespeeld in het advies voor extraparlamentair ten opzichte van eventueel een minderheidscollege?

375 **Gabriëls:** Nee want er moet altijd gestemd worden. De gedeputeerden worden altijd benoemd door Staten. Dus er moet ook in een coalitie altijd gestemd worden voor of tegen een kandidaat.

Interviewer: Dan heb je het dus over een meerderheidscoalitie. Maar die optie van minderheid die heeft dus eigenlijk niet op tafel gelegen?

380 **Gabriëls:** Daar heb ik nog nooit met hem [Ger Koopmans, mede-informateur] over gehad. Er is nooit iets geweest van 'we gaan met zijn vieren door met het motorblok zonder meerderheid bijvoorbeeld'. Terwijl dat achteraf misschien best een interessante optie geweest had kunnen zijn. Gewoon het motorblok, die vier partijen die er al zaten CDA, VVD, Partij van de Arbeid en D66. Maar dat was wel raar geweest, want waarom zou je dan de
385 partij met vier zetels of met zeven zetels niet betrekken? Die andere partijen die daarin zaten hadden verloren. D66 drie, Partij van de Arbeid ging naar drie. Dat waren kleine partijen. Waarom zou je dan GroenLinks niet uitnodigen? Waarom zou je de winnaars, GroenLinks en Forum [voor Democratie] niet uitnodigen? Waarom zou je de PVV met zeven zetels niet uitnodigen? Dat zijn allemaal vragen die dan opkomen. Dus ik denk dat dat ook een rol
390 gespeeld heeft bij het CDA om te kijken, en ook bij de VVD, wat is daar eigenlijk die uitslag geweest? We gaan toch niet zomaar twee ook rechtse partijen passeren, omdat niemand met ze wil samenwerken? Dus eigenlijk is de vraag geweest 'CDA en VVD hebben de samenwerking met die partijen niet uitgesloten en die anderen hebben gezegd dat ze dat niet deden, maar hebben dat wel gedaan. Dat leidde ertoe dat die vier niet meer samen konden dan staat er
395 ook niks meer in de weg voor de grootste vier om achter zo'n extraparlamentair construct te

gaan staan. En om dan toch een beetje de verhouding een beetje lokaal te maken, hebben ze dan ook nog die lokale, Dritty [toenmalig wethouder, later gedeputeerde] uitgenodigd en Carla Brugman [voormalig GroenLinks Statenlid en toenmalig wethouder].

[onverstaanbaar]

400 **Gabriëls:** Wat gaat er eigenlijk met het opgenomen gebeuren? Het gaat wel alleen gebruikt worden voor jouw scriptie?

Interviewer: Ja het wordt alleen gebruikt voor mijn scriptie. Ik maak een transcript en ik gebruik het als materiaal dat ik analyseer om te komen tot mijn conclusies ten aanzien van de hypothesen. En ik analyseer de berichtgeving in de media en de stukken die openbaar gemaakt
405 mochten worden van de formatie. Die analyseer ik en dus dit gesprek.

Gabriëls: Ik je wel meegeven: dit zijn allemaal dingen je die met modellen en theorieën en bestuurskunde en wat dan ook kunt proberen te bevatten, en dat heb ik altijd een beetje met dit soort analyses, maar het blijft toch mensenwerk. Het is ook gevoel en ook dingen die je niet kunt vatten soms en modellen. Dat mag je ook best een je scriptie opnemen dat ik dat
410 gezegd heb. Want je kunt hier nog zes keer een model op maken of een iets over schrijven en de zevende keer gebeurt toch in dezelfde zelf situatie toch weer anders. Omdat er iemand anders is wiens gevoel toch eigenlijk meer is van 'ik wil meer vrouwen erin'. Ik zeg wat, en het feit dat er in die partij geen vrouw zit is al zoiets. Er zijn altijd factoren die stiekem op de achtergrond spelen, dat je denkt dat gevoel zit niet mee of dat Statenlid trekken we niet. Er
415 speelt altijd van alles

Interviewer: Dankjewel. Ik werk het interview uit. Ik ga mijn scriptie afmaken. Als het goed is, is die 24 juni af. Als je leuk vindt dan stuur ik na afloop stuur ik een kopie op en dan kun je hem ook rustig nalezen, los van je eigen inbreng ook wat het model zegt en waarom dat wel of niet aansluit bij hoe het in Limburg gelopen is.

420 **Gabriëls:** Ik hoop dat je er iets aan gehad hebt en heel veel succes met afstuderen.

Appendix B. Transcript interview informateurs Koopmans

Interviewer: Ik begin met een open vraag en daarna gaan we de meer specifieke vragen in. Waarom hebben jullie als informateurs uiteindelijk geadviseerd om een extraparlamenteair college te vormen?

5 **Koopmans:** Omdat dat het uiteindelijke resultaat was van de informatie. Ik ben de informatie begonnen met de woorden 'het onverenigbare verenigen'. Vanaf dat moment hebben wij formele brieven geschreven en in die formele brieven staat precies de weg die wij elke keer neergezet hebben. En de conclusies die wij getrokken hebben. Uiteindelijk was de conclusie en die heb ik elke keer ook onderbouwd. Ik heb de stukken nu niet bij me maar dat was de
10 onderbouwing waarom we tot extraparlamenteair kwamen.

Interviewer: Er was geen andere optie meer?

Koopmans: Dat was de optie waar we bij uit kwamen ja. Er zijn altijd nog meer opties mogelijk. Er had ook nog een zakenkabinet gekund. Nee, we kwamen bij dit uit.

Interviewer: Waarom dan de keuze voor extraparlamenteair en niet een zakenkabinet?

15 **Koopmans:** Omdat dat weer een andere variant is. Daar zijn we niet bij uit gekomen. Ik geloof niet dat we ooit een zakenkabinet echt overwogen hebben. Dat is een nog lossere variant van het parlement. En we hebben natuurlijk extraparlamenteair. Daar zit de verbinding in allereerst het collegeprogramma waarin acht uitgangspunten zaten die vanuit alle partijen, op een zin na, zijn onderschreven. Dat was natuurlijk van groot belang. Dat was een enorm fundament
20 om toch zoiets als een extraparlamenteair college te kunnen adviseren. Want er was een verbinding. Er was wel iets van een band, namelijk die acht uitgangspunten.

Interviewer: In die informatierondes, in die gesprekken, wat kwam daaruit naar voren? Wat was belangrijk voor de partijen? Wilde ze op de inhoud dingen bereiken? Vonden ze het belangrijk om zelf een Gedeputeerde te leveren? In algemene lijn.

25 **Koopmans:** Dat kun je precies uit de verslagen halen. Het meest belangrijke dat wij moesten doen was in de eerste plaats die partijen elkaar laten leren kennen. Eric Geurts [toenmalig demissionaire gedeputeerde, lijsttrekker PvdA] zei die avond: ik ken die partij niet eens, dat Forum [voor Democratie], ik ken die mensen niet eens. Toen heb ik gezegd: ja, maar die kennen jou ook niet. En we hebben dus die informatiefase vooral gebruikt om elkaar te leren

30 kennen. Om elkaars standpunten te leren kennen. Om de mensen te leren kennen. Dat was cruciaal in mijn ogen. En daarna zijn we gaan nadenken over ‘hoe zou je dan kunnen gaan samenwerken?’

Interviewer: Dat was die pre-informatiefase?

Koopmans: Nou, die pre-informatiefase was nog eerder. Dat was de eerste week. De eerste
35 dag. Nee de informatiefase was wat ik net zei. De pre-informatiefase was ‘wie mag aan de gang gaan?’ Ik ben toen begonnen en in de pre-informatiefase heb ik het idee bedacht om samen met Geert [Gabriëls, mede-informateur] aan de slag te gaan. En daarmee ook uitstralen dat ik een bredere aanpak wilde. Want het was natuurlijk evident dat na de verkiezingen, PVV en Forum [voor Democratie] beide groot, CDA de grootste, dat wij een belangrijke taak
40 hadden om dat te verbinden met het andere deel van het parlement. Waar heel veel onuitgesproken teksten waren over ‘wij willen niet samenwerken met’. Dat was naast elkaar leren kennen ... ging het daarover: zijn er partijen die elkaar uitsluiten. Daar hebben we zes weken over gedaan, bij wijze van spreken. Ik ken het exacte aantal niet. Totdat drie keer is gezegd ‘nee, nee, nee, we sluiten niemand uit’ en op het einde gebeurde het toch.

45 **Interviewer:** Waar kwam dat door? Dat het zo lang duurde voor partijen om elkaar uit te sluiten?

Koopmans: Formeren is altijd een proces waarbij de schilletjes er langzaam af gaan. Dat moet je ze zelf vragen. Dat wilde ze niet vertellen, want dan zetten ze zichzelf buiten spel. Ik denk dat er partijen waren die uiteindelijk de strategie hadden, dat zij dat niet wilde vertellen,
50 omdat zij er vanuit gingen dat het Geert [Gabriëls, mede-informateur] en mij toch niet zou lukken. En dat daarna een andere variant aan de orde zou moeten komen.

Interviewer: Je noemde net al dat Forum [voor Democratie] en PVV groot werden. Hoe belangrijk was het voor jullie als informateurs, maar ook voor de andere partijen om die winnaars van de verkiezing een plek te geven.

55 **Koopmans:** Ik heb dat geformuleerd in brieven. Voor mij is het altijd van belang dat de volksvertegenwoordiging zich zoveel als mogelijk moet herkennen in het bestuur. Daar hebben we een hele precieze formulering voor gebruikt, daarvoor moet je echt de formulering uit die brieven kiezen.

Interviewer: Dus niet zozeer de winnaars? Dat werd anders geformuleerd.

60 **Koopmans:** Er wordt altijd snel over winnaars en verliezersgesproken, maar *in the end* en in de kern gaat het gewoon over zetels. Het is de politieke praktijk in Nederland dat er colleges komen die steunen op een coalitie die uit een meerderheid bestaat. Dat is een gangbare situatie, maar die was nog niet zomaar te organiseren. Ten minste, als je ook nog die verkiezingsuitslag een plek wilde geven in die samenstelling.

65 **Interviewer:** Het parlement raakt versplinterd: een nieuwe partij, veel partijen. Was er vooraf een duidelijk beeld 'het volgende college gaat of deze kant of die kant op?'

Koopmans: Nee. Bepalend is gewoon de verkiezingsuitslag. Verkiezingen kunnen altijd alle kanten op gaan.

Interviewer: We hadden het net al over het uitsluiten van partijen. De eerste poging werd
70 daarmee onmogelijk?

Koopmans: Nou, het is een combinatie. Het CDA had gezegd 'de helft plus één, dat willen we niet'. Dus daarmee was CDA, VVD, PvdA, D66 en GroenLinks geen optie. Dat had gekund. Dat wilde het CDA niet omdat één zetel sowieso ingewikkeld is. Iedereen heeft dan de rode knop in de hand. Dat was toen wel reden om te zeggen 'nee'.

75 **Interviewer:** Die formele uitsluitingen, die kwamen laat.

Koopmans: Heel laat. Veel te laat.

Interviewer: In het model speelt het uitsluiten van partijen een belangrijke rol in hoe complex een formatie wordt. Dus ik ben op zoek naar hoe doorslaggevend het is.

Koopmans: Ja het uitsluiten en het niet vertellen dat je ze wilt uitsluiten, of laat vertellen. Dat
80 is zeer bepalend geweest.

Interviewer: Hebben jullie overwogen om een minderheidscollege te adviseren?

Koopmans: We hebben in onze gedachtenvorming alles overwogen, altijd. Na elk gesprek hebben we alle uithoeken van alle redeneringen in onze gesprekken aangeraakt. Maar dat is iets anders dan overwogen. Alles is bekeken.

85 **Interviewer:** Waarom zijn jullie niet gekomen tot dat voorstel?

Koopmans: Dat was niet de conclusie die we trokken na die gesprekken.

Interviewer: Daar was te weinig draagvlak voor?

Koopmans: Een minderheidscollege begint al met dat er een minderheid is. Nee dat is helemaal geen optie geweest. Dat kan ik me niet herinneren. Ongetwijfeld is er wel een naar
90 gekeken, maar overwogen niet echt.

Interviewer: Wat was daarbij de rol van de stemming op het moment dat het college [van Gedeputeerde Staten] geïnstalleerd moet worden?

Koopmans: Dat is natuurlijk een belangrijke factor.

Interviewer: Nog even terug naar de tweede vraag. De vraag was: wat dreef de partijen in dat
95 formatieproces? Je antwoord was: het ging vooral om elkaar leren kennen, om elkaars standpunten te leren kennen.

Koopmans: Nou, nee. Wij [informateurs] hebben georganiseerd dat zij [Statenfracties] dat gingen doen. Dat de partijen dreef, kun je uit de verslagen lezen. Ik pas altijd de volgende methode toe. Mensen mogen in het gesprek alles vertellen, dan maken we een verslag.
100 Daarna sturen we dat verslag op en dan mogen ze veranderen zoveel ze willen. Dus als ze zeggen 'ik werk graag met de PVV samen en wij schrijven dat op, dan mogen ze in het verslag opschrijven 'wij werken nooit met de PVV samen'. Dat mag.

Interviewer: Dankjewel. Ik denk dat ik alles heb.

Appendix C. National results of the provincial elections 2015-2019

Political party	seats won in 2015	seats won in 2019	Difference
VVD	89	80	-9
CDA	89	72	-17
D66	67	41	-26
PVV	66	40	-26
SP	70	35	-35
PvdA	63	53	-10
GroenLinks	30	61	31
ChristenUnie	29	31	2
PvdD	18	20	2
50PLUS	14	16	2
SGP	18	14	-4
CU-SGP	2	1	-1
Local**	15	16	1
DENK	*	4	4
Forum voor Democratie	*	86	86

National results of the Provincial Council elections in 2015 and 2019 (*Source: Kiesraad, n.d.-b, n.d.-e*).

* Did not participate in this election.

** Local shows the aggregated results of the all local parties which won seats in the election.

Appendix D. Results of the Limburg provincial elections 2007-2019

Political party	Seats won in 2007	Seats won in 2011	Seats won in 2015	Seats won in 2019
CDA	18	10	11	9
SP	9	6	8	4
PvdA	8	6	4	3
VVD	7	8	5	5
Groenlinks	2	3	2	4
PNL	1	*	*	*
PvdD	1	*	1	2
D66	1	2	4	3
PVV	*	10	9	7
50PLUS	*	2	1	1
VPL	*	*	1	*
LL	*	*	1	2
Forum voor Democratie	*	*	*	7

Results of the election of the Limburg Provincial Council 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 (*Source: Kiesraad, n.d.-h, n.d.-d, n.d.-c, n.d.-f*).

* Did not participate in this election.

Appendix E. Average party position on the Left/Right scale

Political party	Average left-right position 0-10 scale
GroenLinks	2.4
SP	2.9
PvdA	3.4
PvdD	3.6
D66	4.4
50PLUS	5.1
CDA	5.5
VVD	6.3
PVV	7.4
Forum voor Democratie	7.2
Lokaal-Limburg	5*

Average left-right position 0-10 scale June 2019 (*Source: Van Heck, 2021*).

* Lokaal-Limburg was not