

## Comparative Politics Speaker Series

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present



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### **"Live for Today, Hope for Tomorrow? Rethinking Gamson's Law."**

The empirical phenomenon termed Gamson's Law is well known but not least because it lacks firm theoretical foundations. In fact, Gamson's Law is a real puzzle as most models of coalition bargaining suggest that bargaining strength should determine the division of portfolios, which, in turn, suggest that portfolios should rarely be allocated in proportion to the parties' seat share. I propose a theory of portfolio allocation that goes some way towards explaining Gamson's Law. The theory emphasizes the need to maintain, rather than simply to form, coalitions. The desire to maintain the coalition provides the parties with radically different incentives, i.e., instead of maximizing their share in the short run they face a trade-off; taking too much of the pie for oneself means that one's coalition partner can be bought off rather easily. Thus, the problem of forming a stable coalition requires making it sufficiently expensive to buy off each party in the coalition. While this logic is in many respects similar to the logic of the standard coalition bargaining model it differs in important ways as a new coalition may form at any time, i.e., the opposition parties can always propose to form a new coalition. I test hypotheses derived from the model with data on portfolio allocations in coalition cabinets across Europe.

**Thursday, February 19th, 2015  
SSB 107 at 12:30 p.m.  
Lunch provided**