

Very preliminary version!

Do Parliamentary Governments Control the Legislative Agenda? The Case of Norway

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ABSTRACT

Often it is claimed that in parliamentary systems, the government controls the legislative agenda. Thus, the situation is one of executive dominance. The government introduces almost all bills, and very few of them are rejected by the parliamentarians. In this paper I use data from Norway, a country which has been governed by minority cabinets for more than two-thirds of its parliamentary history, to qualify the standard executive dominance thesis. The Norwegian parliament plays a significant role in the legislative game, mainly because the government lacks strong agenda-setting instruments. I show that the MPs tend to be more inclined to amend government bills the less seats parties in government control, and the closer one gets to the next general election.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the literature on executive-legislative relations it is often argued that in parliamentary systems, the government controls the agenda. Martin (2004: 446), for instance, emphasizes that «it is the government, not the legislature, that determines the timing and substance of major policy initiatives». In a review article, Obler (1981: 127) even says that «legislators do not legislate. Executives legislate». When, he continues, «it comes to initiating and enacting policies that regulate public behavior and allocate scarce resources, few legislators have much independent authority». Blondel (1990: 241) finds legislatures of Western European parliamentary systems to be «rather docile»; «governments can normally control the assembly». As a result, Blondel observes, governments «can see to it that laws are passed in the shape which they wish these to have». Thus, parliaments can scarcely exercise the constitutional powers they have. According to Tsebelis (2002: 93), every parliamentary government «is able to impose its will on parliament». Governments are supposed to be able to control the legislative agenda by such means as monopolized proposal power, the possibility to use closed or restricted rules, gate-keeping power, «final offer» authority in parliamentary voting processes, and, of course, the threat of resignation and dissolution of parliament.

Simple statistics similarly indicates that in parliamentary systems, governments typically introduce more than 90 percent of the bills. Very few bills are rejected, although some may be amended by the MPs. Most private members' bills are however voted down with large margins.

In my view the situation is far more complex. First, parliamentary systems are quite diverse when it comes to institutional details (cf. Tsebelis 2002: 99-114 on variations in agenda power). These systems share some basic properties with respect to government

formation and resignation, in particular the principle that against the will of a majority of parliamentarians (usually the lower house under bicameralism), no government can remain in power. But even this principle is institutionalized in a «positive» (e.g. Germany, Hungary, and Spain) and a «negative» version (e.g. the Scandinavian countries) throughout Europe.¹ Only some governments have a relatively unrestricted right to call new elections (Strøm and Swindle 2002: 577, Rasch 2004). Furthermore, agenda-setting rules and the structuring of amendment activity vary enormously, and it is no reason to expect that the obvious institutional diversity is inconsequential. Government *control* of the legislative agenda should be expected to vary accordingly (cf. Döring 1995, Powell 2000: 31-42). Second, the relationship between government and parliament in a parliamentary system is often very close, and the introduction of a bill by the government in many cases is the result of a «signaling-process» involving parliamentary committees or the plenary in some form or the other. Thus, it turns out not to be easy to interpret the simple statistics I mentioned earlier.

I will use legislative activity in the case of Norway to indicate important limits on the agenda control of parliamentary governments. Norway, as well as the two other Scandinavian countries, may have an executive-legislative balance that deviate from most of the other multi-party, parliamentary systems in Europe. Several authors have noticed that the Scandinavian legislatures tend to be quite «strong» and rather activist (Damgaard 1994, Arter 1999). A very high frequency of minority governments points in the same direction: The greater the potential influence of opposition groups in parliament, the less the benefits of governing and the less tempting governmental offices become (cf. Strøm 1986, 1990).

The remainder of this paper is divided into four sections. In the next section, I take a closer look at the final stages of the legislative process. Section 3 presents various types of amending activities in the Norwegian parliament. In section 4, time series data on the

¹ See e.g. Bergman (1993), Bergman et al. (2003), de Winter (1995) and Rasch (2004b) on the characteristics of positive and negative forms parliamentarism.

inclination of MPs to amend government bills is analyzed. Section 5 contains some concluding remarks.

2. AGENDA CONTROL AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Agenda *control* refers to the influence an actor—i.e. the agenda setter—may have over the outcome of a decision-making process (see e.g. Feld et al. 1989). In our context, this does not necessarily mean that the agenda setter has total control over the policy outcome. If the government really has control over the legislative agenda, at least it implies that the parliament will accept bills which do not reflect the wishes of the median MP, and the parliament will remain silent even if the government does not introduce bills the parliament deems necessary. The potential power of the agenda setter is illustrated in Romer and Rosenthal (1978), who formulate a «setter model» with two players—a proposer and a veto player—and two stages of decision-making. In the first stage, a committee—in our case a parliamentary government—sets the agenda by introducing a proposal to the parliament. Then, in the second stage, the parliament votes on whether or not to accept the proposal. If the parliament uses its veto and the proposal is rejected, *status quo* prevails. The parliament as a second stage actor is not allowed to amend the government or first stage proposal. Thus, the decision of the parliament is severely restricted, and actually reduced to a take-it-or-leave-it choice. If the ideal points of the government and the legislative assembly (median legislator) deviate, the agenda control which is described above makes it possible for the government to move the status quo towards its own ideal point.

The agenda setter in Romer and Rosenthal's (1978) model has both *positive* and *negative* agenda power (cf. Cox and McCubbins 2004). Positive agenda power is the

authority to propose changes to the status quo, and to ensure that these proposals are brought onto the legislative agenda. Negative agenda power is the ability to prevent proposals from entering the legislative agenda (gatekeeping power), the ability to delay considerations of proposals (a weak form of gatekeeping), or the ability to block changes of the status quo (veto power). In the setter model, the first mover has proposal and gatekeeping power. The second mover can neither introduce proposals nor make amendments. In the vetoing parliament, proposals are considered under a closed rule rather than an open rule, meaning that no amendments are allowed. Obviously, the agenda setter *controls* the agenda in a strict sense. Any proposal or amendment that the agenda setter deem unacceptable is kept off the legislative agenda. In this way, the agenda setter also controls policy changes; «no proposal should be forthcoming unless the proposer prefers the vetoer's ideal point to the status quo» (Heller 2001: 785).

Formally at least, the government in a parliamentary system can hardly be described as a gatekeeping proposer interacting with a parliament without any positive agenda power. If the government does not have other means to obtain control, such as the right to propose amendments to parliamentary amendments, which Heller (2001) calls last offer authority, we certainly have to conclude that the government does not really control the legislative agenda.² I will argue that this is not mere formalities. Thus, the following simple observation:

HYPOTHESIS 1: The (Norwegian) government does not control the legislative agenda, even though most of the bills considered by the parliament are drafted by the government.

² According to Heller (2001:780), «the authority to make 'last offer' amendments protects the government from losing control of legislative content and being forced to watch bills it dislikes become law». This probably indicates that governments without last offer authority easily get rolled; they do not have full control of the legislative agenda. In Heller's

Figure 1: Final stages of the law-making process.

Table 1: Overview...

Figure 1 illustrates a simplified version of the final stages of the lawmaking process in Norway, and, in fact, many other parliamentary systems.³ The government may make a proposal or not. If a bill is sent to the parliament, the legislators may accept, change or reject it. If the government does not act, the parliament may either remain silent or draft a bill itself (Private Member Bill). The figure makes it clear that the government lacks gatekeeping power. In parliament, proposals are considered under an open rule (although some mild restrictions exist). On this latter stage, the process in practice often is rather complicated. Each bill is discussed in a standing committee. The committee reports both supporting and opposing views. All amendments to the bill—whether the bill originates in government or parliament—can also be found in the committee report. In this sense, the committees have an important agenda function when it comes to formal amendments.⁴ Voting on bills often is article by article or section by section, partly depending on the nature of the feasible amendments. Typically, the voting agenda moves from more to less extreme proposals, in the view of the majority, and, as a consequence, only centrist alternatives will have a real chance of adoption (cf. Rasch 2000). In cases of conflict over which voting order to chose,

sample of 15 Western European countries, 40 percent of them have some form of last offer authority. Several of the last offer instruments are however rather weak, and hardly sufficient to move the outcome away from the median legislator.

³ When it comes to (non-financial) legislation, the Norwegian parliament operates in a bicameral manner. Bills are introduced to the lower section—the Odelsting—and are then discussed in the smaller upper section—the Lagting. Both sections need to consent before a bill becomes law. The Odelsting and the Lagting mirror each other (and the entire Storting) with respect to party composition. The most significant arena with respect to floor deliberation and amendment voting is the Odelsting. The Lagting almost always votes the Odelsting outcome up or down, often without any debate and without reintroducing amendments that were rejected in the Odelsting.

⁴ A Norwegian MP has one—but only one—committee membership. If an MP wants to put forward an amendment for voting on a bill handled by some other committee than his or her own, this is possible provided the amendment reaches the relevant committee before the deadline of the committee report. This is mainly relevant for small parties who do not have representation in every committee.

the matter is settled by the floor majority (on the basis of suggestions from the Presiding Officers). This voting practice more or less robs the government of any advantages at the final stage of the law-making process. In other words, if the government bill is a Condorcet-winner, it will succeed on the floor. If instead one of the opposition amendments is a Condorcet-alternative or at the median of an underlying policy scale, the government proposal most likely will be rejected.

The parliamentary system of government is one in which the members of parliament determine the formation of the cabinet and where any majority of the same members at virtually any time may vote the government ministers out of office. Thus, legislative majorities have control over the government. Appointment procedures vary, and so do the location of governments relative to legislators in policy space. Majority governments as well as most minority governments should however be expected to comprise the median legislator on important issues or dimensions. Furthermore, even if the government is some kind of preference «outlier», it will normally be in its interest to propose policies which are in line with the wishes of the parliamentarians to avoid being removed from power.

Neither is it in the interest of the parliament to grant strong agenda setting power to governments. Majority governments do not necessarily need this instrument to get their proposals through parliament. Minority governments on the other hand will need extra help—for instance from agenda mechanisms—to enact outlying policies (provided the government is non-centric). In Norway, the legislature controls the legislative procedures, and 65 percent of the governments after 1884 have been in minority. Gradually, the parliament has removed most of the agenda setting means that the King and his Council controlled (Congleton 2001). The forced introduction of parliamentary government formation—without changing the constitution—was in itself an important step in the process

of weakening the executive. Given this situation, there is no reason to assume that parliamentary majorities at any time should implement institutional means which undermine the policy-making role of the parliament, unless, of course, came to the conclusion that minority governments did not function adequately. Most of the procedural norms of relevance to this discussion are found in the Storting's *Rules of Procedures*, and these provisions can be amended by ordinary majorities.

Table 2 gives an impression of how the parliamentarians themselves view these matters. In year 2000, all the MPs were interviewed, and one of the questions was whether the power or position of the government was too weak vis-à-vis the Storting. Most of the MPs (64 %) disagreed with the assertion that the government was too weak compared to the Storting. In the Labor Party and among the Conservatives the views are far more balanced. About one half of these legislators agree with the claim. Disagreement is particularly high in the ranks of the right-wing Progress Party. This party, and the Socialist Left Party, has no experience with cabinet participation at all.⁵

Table 2: How parliamentarians view the government

What are the constraining factors in law-making processes as the parliamentarians themselves see it? Table 3 indicates some answers. In particular, a majority of the MPs points to various forms of resource constraints. They feel that they lack sufficient staff resources to take care of all the daily analytical and administrative tasks. As expected, representatives from the opposition parties feel these constraints somewhat stronger than the government supporters.

⁵ Norwegian MPs similarly answered a questionnaire on executive-legislative relations in 1996. About two-thirds of those who responded said that the balance between the Storting and the government was just about right. Most of the respondents claimed that the parliament still was too weak compared to the government. Only 2 percent said that the parliament was too strong. See Nordby (1996).

Table 3: Constraint in legislative work...

A further illustration is the many constitutional proposals which have been introduced to strengthen the government, but which have never succeeded. For instance, some form of dissolution power for the government has been put forward 46 times since 1814, and 30 times after the independence from Sweden in 1905. Only once (in 1972), did a constitutional amendment gain a majority of votes, but not the two-thirds required for constitutional change.

3. AMENDMENT ACTIVITIES

Let us move to some data on various amendment activities in the Norwegian parliament. Legislative (non-financial) output from 1901 until today is shown in Figure 2. In the period after World War II, about 100 laws have been adopted each parliamentary year. A large amount of the laws are short «amendment laws», some of which nevertheless can be quite important. We may note that the last 7 peaks in the figure concur with election years (last parliamentary year in the fixed term).⁶ Before 1973, any electoral cycle of this type is not clearly visible.

Like most other established, parliamentary democracies, almost all of the laws are based on bills drafted and introduced by the government. During the entire period under consideration, almost no government bills were rejected in its entirety (on average less than one per year). Clearly, governments avoid introducing legislation they expect not to pass.

⁶ Election terms have always been fixed, with no possibility of early elections. Four year terms was introduced in 1936. Before that, it was three years between elections.

Figure 2: Legislative output

The Norwegian MPs (actually Members of Odelsting) do not introduce many bills themselves. As can be seen from the lower line in Figure 3, a total of 34 Private Member bills is the maximum in a single parliamentary year (1997-98). During the entire period from 1949 until today the yearly average is slightly above 9 bills. Very few of them have been supported by a sufficient number of legislators. More than 99 percent of them have lost on the floor. Nevertheless, in some of these cases, the rejection in reality is temporary. The government takes the message; it works out more carefully drafted legislation and reintroduces the issue to the parliament. Early on in major law-making processes, the government also often issues a white paper («stortingsmelding»). Signals and viewpoints in the Storting debate on the white paper are important input to the governmental drafting process. Around 40 to 50 such documents have been issued on a yearly basis in recent years, and as many as every fourth or fifth of them can be considered as first steps in major legislative reform processes.

Figure 3: Proposals from MPs

A smooth legislative process with the parliament in a leading role presupposes a high level of information on policy preferences and wishes of legislators in the government offices. Some of the parliamentary activity, thus, is aimed at signaling positions and wishes. Perhaps the most dramatic instrument of this kind is instructions to the government («anmodningsvedtak»). There has been a dramatic increase in the use of instructions over the last decade. It used to be less than a handful of instructions each year, but this changed from the late 1990s. The average number of instructions over the last five years has been 176. The

majority of them are rather insignificant, but some are highly important and visible interventions in (what earlier was considered) government affairs. A small amount leads to initiation of more or less extensive legislative processes, and eventually drafting of new government bills.

Other private members' initiatives serve a similar purpose. The upper line in Figure 3 shows the frequency of private members' proposals («Dok. 8-forslag») beginning in the early 1970s. Some of the proposals—even some of the rejected ones—results in some kind of government action, although the overwhelming majority of them does not. Still another source of information on legislative preferences is the committee reports. Figure 4 gives an impression of this type of activity over the entire period after World War II. Many of the remarks lead to formal amendments on the floor, but some of the dissenting opinions in reality is more future-oriented statements. Opinions which are unanimous or supported by a majority, might serve as signals to the government. Generally, too many wishes are voiced, but the government will at least act on some of them.

Figure 4: Dissenting remarks in committee reports

The parliament has reformed and refined systems of information gathering to mitigate agency problems and other difficulties in executive-legislative relations for more than a hundred years. Instructions, debate on white papers, private members' proposals and amendments are formal instruments. Perhaps more important is the various—often more informal—meetings between ministers and standing committees. Ministers meet regularly with committee factions consisting of members of the government party or parties in the respective committee. On each bill, the committee appoints at least one rapporteur. The rapporteurs also interact directly with the ministers and top bureaucrats *before* bills leave the

government offices. In fact, one third of the rapporteurs said in the 2000 Storting interviews that they had discussed aspects of «their» bill before the government introduced it. All of them said that they wanted to collect information, but 42 percent also said that they in addition had tried to influence the wording of the bill during the drafting process. This was mainly done on behalf of the committee or a major committee faction.

Those who had been rapporteurs recently also were asked about the influence of their committees—and by implication the parliament—on the particular issue they dealt with. Answers are shown in Table 4. Half of the MPs who had had rapporteur-responsibilities said that their committee had «very strong influence», and another third said «fairly strong influence». The difference between government and opposition representatives is not dramatic.

Table 4: Committee-influence...

4. CHANGES TO GOVERNMENT BILLS

The government has no possibility to protect an introduced bill from being amended, other than by a threat of resignation. In many cases such threats will not be credible, and the government typically will have to be reluctant to invoke this instrument to exercise control over legislative outcomes (cf. Huber 1996). Ten times since 1884 the government has threatened to resign and lost the vote, but only twice on government law proposals (i.e. in the Odelsting, in 1924 and 1931). Still it is to some extent possible that the vote of confidence procedure shapes parliamentary behavior even if it is not employed. It is, however, at least equally likely that the threat of motions of no confidence affect government behavior, in particular, the actions of minority governments.

Legislative decision-making is intricate and complex. Nevertheless, two kinds of bargaining processes seem to dominate the picture (cf. Froman 1967). The first one is *anticipated reactions*, which is a kind of implicit bargaining where the parties' offers and counters are not known or remain vague. The government needs to anticipate the preferences of the parliament, and to draft and introduce bills accordingly. If this mechanism works successfully, every government bill will be adopted without changes and all private members' bills will be rejected. A government which lacks agenda control or similar means will have to lean heavily on anticipated reactions in its day to day proceedings. The second process is a more traditional form of bargaining, where the purpose is to attract a majority by such mechanisms as persuasion, problem solving, compromise, side-payments or logrolling. In this case, the government introduces a bill, negotiations of some sort takes place in corridors and behind closed doors in standing committees, and, eventually, often an amended version of the bill get sufficient support on the floor.

Amendments to government bills generally are of three kinds (Heller 2001:786). First there are *friendly amendments*. They are intended to correct flaws and omissions in government proposals. More technical correction of errors and non-substantial editing of language are not of interest here.

The second type is *credit-claiming* or *advertising* amendments (see also Mayhew 1974). These amendments help parties to signal their policy commitments and legislative efforts to voters and party members. Typically, amendments of this kind are not really designed for adoption, and those who introduce the amendments expect them to fail on the floor. A majority of all amendments probably fall into this category. They only get support from a single party. Most of them are put forward by left-wing or right-wing parties (or parties who may be more or less extreme on other policy dimensions than the left-right scale). And they almost always are voted down by large margins.

The third kind of proposals is *opposition* amendments. In the most dramatic cases, these amendments are intended to kill the government bill. If successful, status quo is preserved or, alternatively, replaced by a law proposal drafted by the opposition. This seldom if ever happens in Norway. Opposition initiatives instead are motivated by a wish to alter the government bill in more or less significant ways. In practice we find two variants. First, opposition parties may introduce amendments which will compete with the government bill on the floor. If an amendment wins, the government loses. Changes are made against the will of government parties. Second, a compromise has been reached in the committee, and the bill as altered by the committee factions, not the original government bill, participate in the final floor voting process. The government bill again is altered, but not against the votes of government parties (but still in a sense against their will). In the voting records, these cases will look similar to cases altered by friendly amendments.

Figure 5 illustrates to what extent the Storting changes government bills. Purely technical or editorial changes, i.e. changes of the text without any political significance, are not included in the data. The upper curve shows the total number of government bills. As can be seen from the figure's lower line, there are a substantial amount of changes to government bills each parliamentary session. On average, each year a quarter of the government bills do not pass the Storting unaltered (varies between 11 and 46 percent of government bills). The highest yearly percentages are from recent years, but there are some quite high observations (in the range 30-35 percent) in earlier periods also. How can we explain this pattern? Let me point to some preliminary results.

The percentage of government bills which are amended against the votes of government supporters has increased (not shown; I get the data soon). In recent years, a majority of the changes can be counted as voting defeats for the government. This probably

means that amendment activities have turned more adversarial over the years, or that compromises in the amending process have become less common.

We also note that many changes take place in situations where majority governments are in power (i.e. before 1961, 1965-71, and 1983-85); successful amendments are obviously not confined to minority administrations. Majority governments nevertheless should be expected to be in a more advantageous position—both with respect to bargaining and anticipation—than minority governments. In particular, the larger the government, the larger its faction in each standing committee become. Thus, the power to persuade and the strength in bargaining processes tend to increase, as well as the ability to collect and send adequate policy signals to the government. Therefore:

HYPOTHESIS 2: The fewer parliamentary seats the government controls, the more susceptible to change its bills become.

Amendments can be used as tools of credit-claiming and as tools for opposition influence on policy. The same to some extent can be said about government bills. A defeat in parliament can be useful for the government to the extent it signals policy commitments to supporters, and provided the defeat do not damage carefully drafted legislation significantly. This strategic approach—with an eye on the electoral arena—of course can not be used too often.⁷ But it is an approach that should be more readily available to single party governments than coalitions, be they in a majority or minority. This is simply because each of the parties in a coalition government is a veto player (cf. Tsebelis 2002). Therefore:

⁷ Data reported in Rommetvedt (2002, 2003) indicate a relatively high number of governmental voting defeats in recent years. In 1990-96, the government was in the minority 5,3 times per month on average (voting on all kind of single amendments or proposals). In 1996-97, Prime Minister Torbjørn Jagland's Labor (minority) government experienced as much as 19,6 defeats per month.

HYPOTHESIS 3: Bills that are introduced by single-party administrations are more susceptible to change than bills from coalition governments.

The importance of the electoral mechanism hinted at above should be expected to vary over time. Norway has fixed four years electoral terms, which means that—contrary to most other parliamentary systems—all the politicians know exactly when the next election takes place. As the election approaches, both the government and parties in opposition will be more inclined to utilize the law-making process for credit-claiming and signaling purposes. Therefore:

HYPOTHESIS 4: Government bills are more susceptible to change the closer the next parliamentary election.

Table 3: Variables and correlations

Table 4: Explaining changes to government bills

In Table 3, I have specified a set of variables (and correlations), and Table 4 shows a first test of the hypotheses. The reasoning I have presented seems to be supported. All of the expected effects are present in all four models. The size of government backing in the parliament affects the level of change in government bills negatively. Closeness to election has positive effect. It is more turbulent on the parliamentary arena in the last year of the fixed term, even though ministers and MPs certainly know each others' preferences and positions better later in the term than earlier. We also tend to observe fewer changes in years

with coalition governments. Party fragmentation (fractionalization) in parliament has no significant effect. (Note however that the sign is negative.)

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Scholars so far has paid too little attention to the role of parliaments in legislative processes (cf. Martin and Vanberg 2005). This is not surprising. In the literature, governments in parliamentary systems often are regarded as actors which are able to control the legislative assemblies that gave them birth. Various means of agenda control are assumed to be central to the dominant position of governments.

In this paper I have argued that parliamentary systems differ in important ways, not least with respect to agenda setting power. Some governments as a consequence are weaker vis-à-vis their respective parliaments than others. Norway is such a case. The government is equipped with relatively few agenda setting instruments, and ministers are unable to control the legislative agenda in any strict sense. Anticipated reactions play a very significant role in executive-legislative relations.

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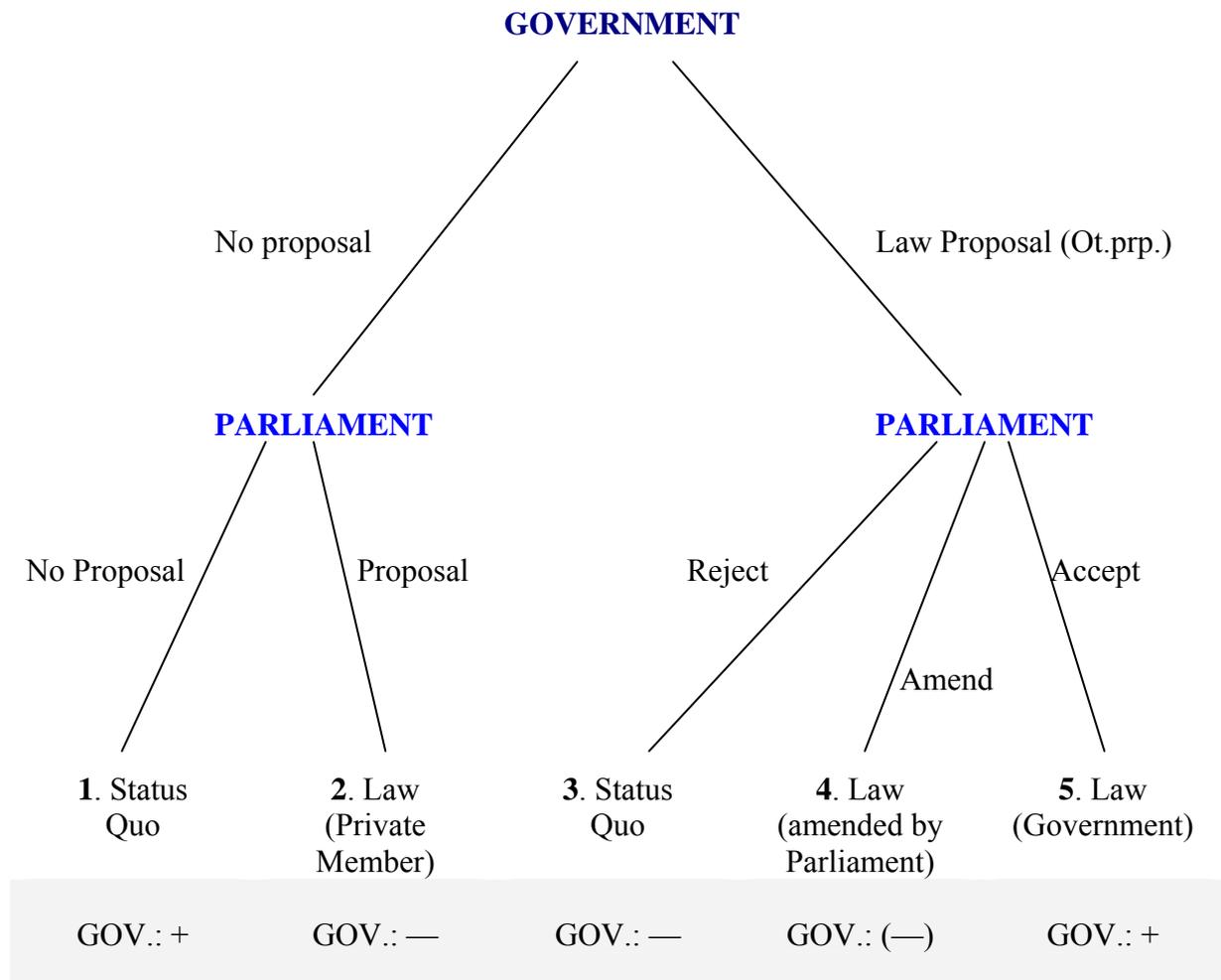


Figure 1: Final stages of the law-making process.

Table 2: Overview of the discussion

	SETTER MODEL	STANDARD PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM
GOVERNMENT	<p>Proposal Power</p> <p>Gatekeeping Power</p>	<p>Proposal Power</p> <p>ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTS: Threat of Resignation (Confidence Vote) Dissolution Power Last Offer Authority</p>
PARLIAMENT	<p>Veto Power (Closed Rule)</p>	<p>Proposal Power</p> <p>Amendment Power (Open Rule)</p> <p>ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTS: Threat of Removal (No-Confidence Vote)</p>
Implications:	<p>Government Monopolized Agenda Power (Agenda Control)</p>	<p>Government Agenda Power Significantly Constrained</p>

Table 2: How the parliamentarians view the power of the government in relation to the parliament. Interviews with members of the Storting in 2000. (N=133 out of 165.)

	«The power of the Government is too small compared to the power of the Storting»		
	Fully or Partly Agree [Weak Government]	Fully or Partly Disagree [Strong Government]	Total
Socialist Left Party (never in government)	38 % (3)	62 % (5)	100 % (8)
Labor Party	52 % (29)	48 % (27)	100 % (56)
Center*	22 % (8)	78 % (28)	100 % (36)
Conservatives	47 % (8)	53 % (9)	100 % (17)
Progress Party (never in government)	6 % (1)	94 % (15)	100 % (16)
Total	37 % (49)	63 % (84)	100 % (133)

* Center includes the Center Party, the Christian Peoples Party and the Liberal Party.

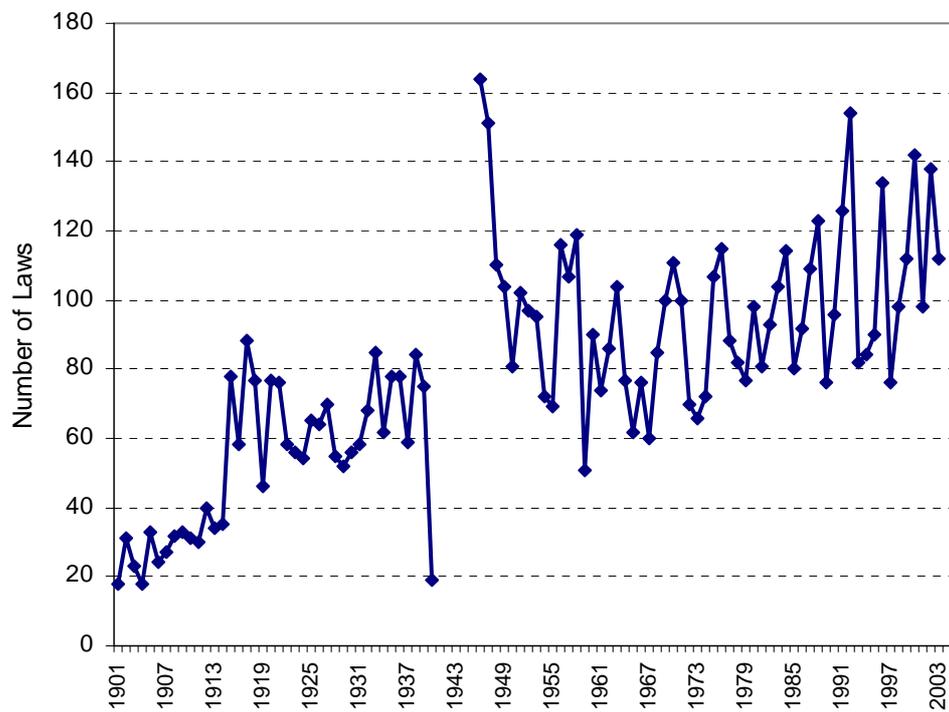


Figure 2: Legislative output (number of «new laws» and «amendment laws») each parliamentary year 1901-2004.

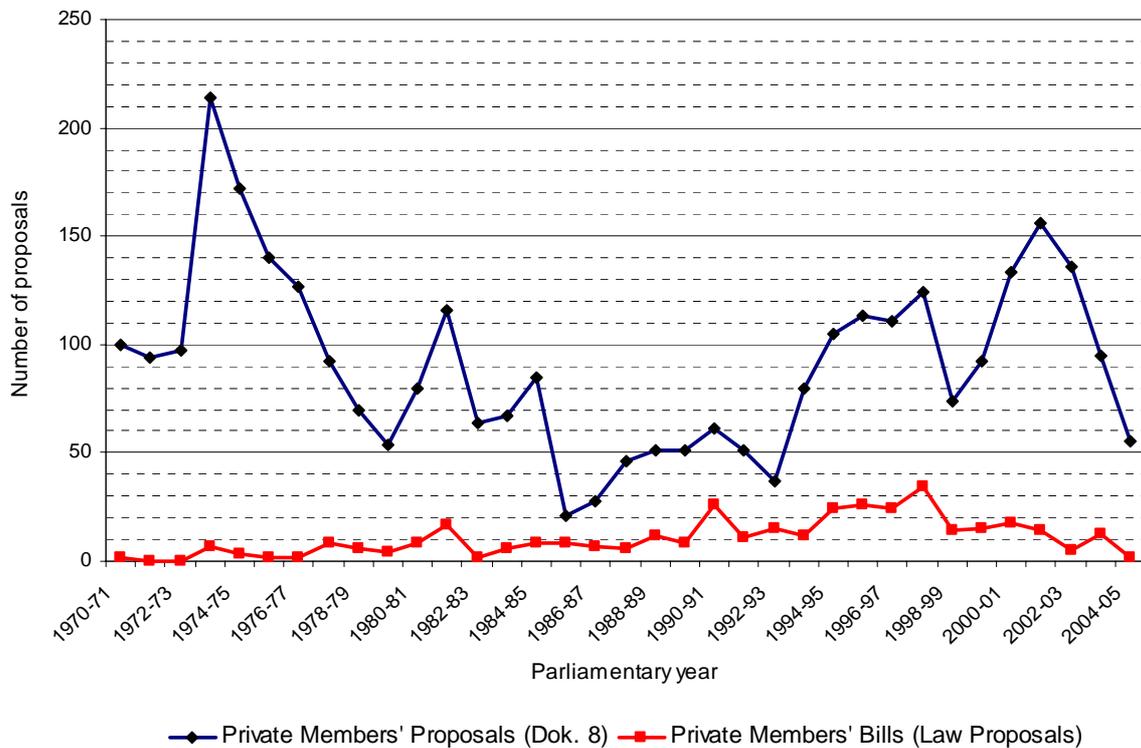


Figure 3: Proposals from MPs 1970-2004. Private members’ proposals (the upper line) include several types of decision-making initiatives, also bills (the lower line), which formally are put forward by members of the Odelsting only.

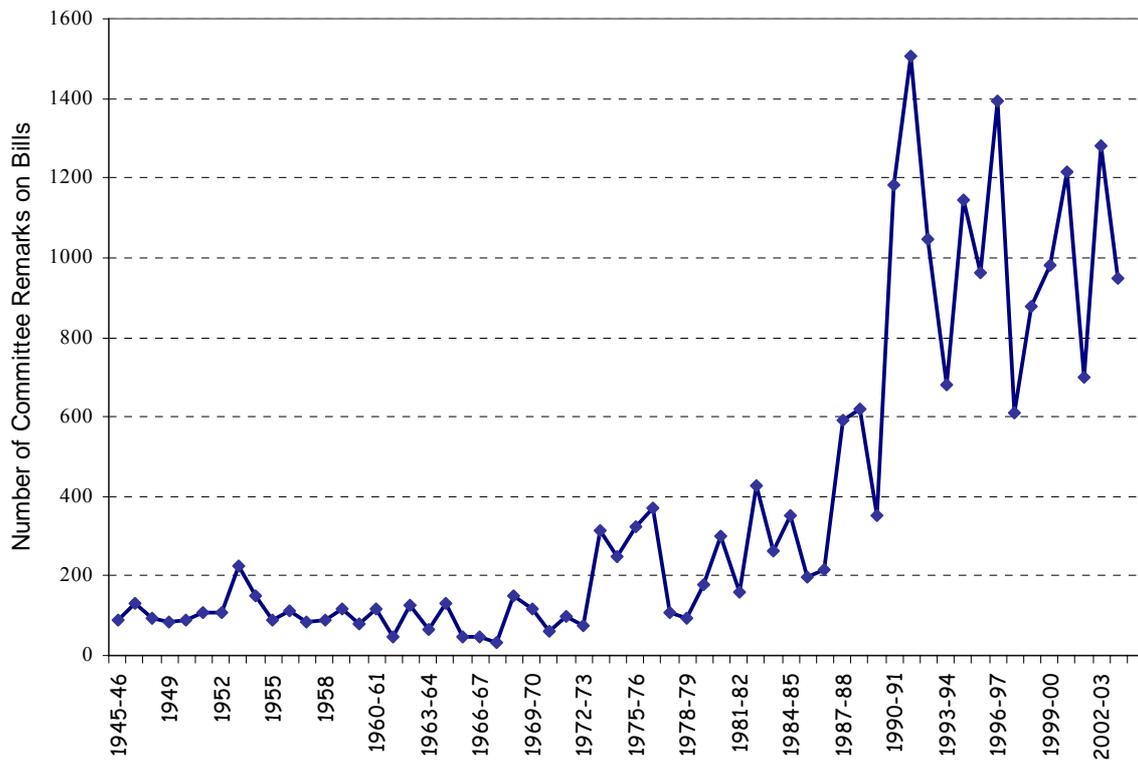


Figure 4: Number of dissenting remarks in reports from standing committees to the Odelsting, 1945-2004. All bills are scrutinized by the committees, and committee recommendations together with opposing remarks are given in separate reports for each bill. Some of the remarks result in proposals on the floor.

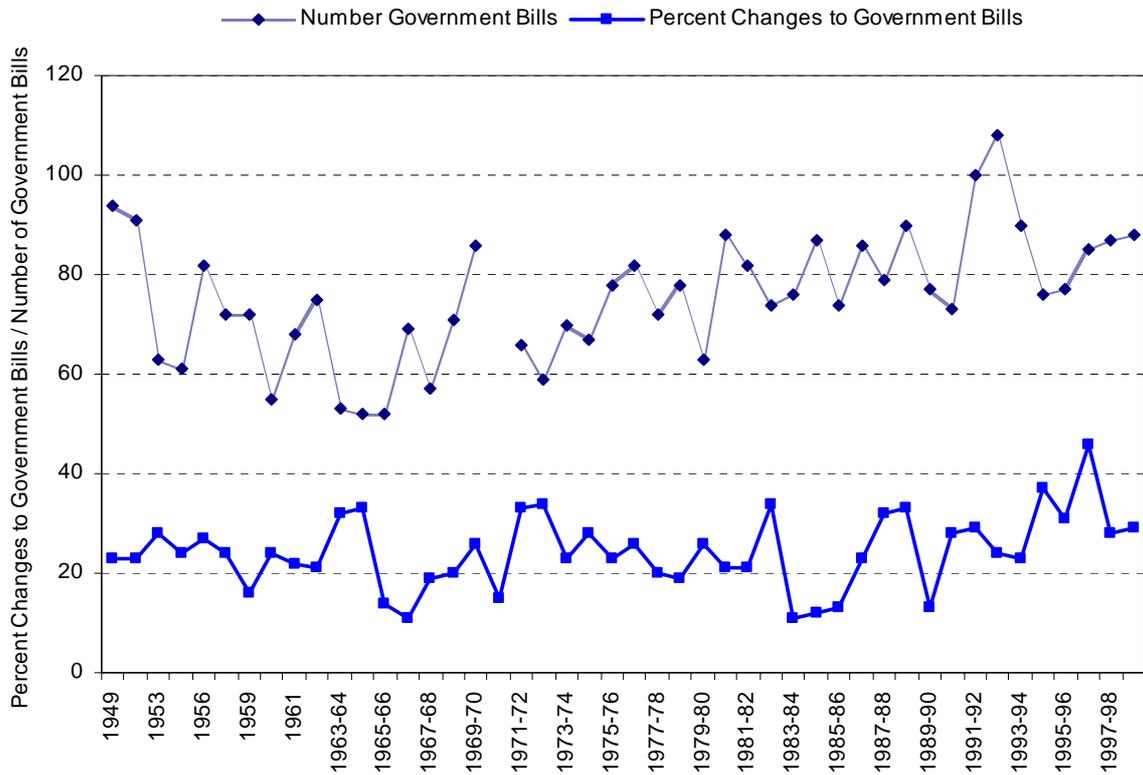


Figure 5: Number of government bills (Ot. prp.) and percent of government bills which are amended by parliamentary majorities, 1949-1999.

Table 3: To what extent MPs feel constrained in their work as legislators. Interviews with members of the Storting in 2000. (N=138, out of 165 MPs.)

Type of Constraint:	Significant Constraint	Some Constraint	Minor Constraint	No Constraint At All	Total	Correlation with Government (1) – Opposition (0) Party (Pearson's <i>r</i>)
Information Overload	17 % (23)	39 % (54)	27 % (37)	17 % (23)	100 % (138)	0,148*
Parliament Lack Capacity for Research and Analysis	34 % (46)	38 % (53)	15 % (20)	13 % (18)	100 % (138)	0,174**
Not Sufficient Administrative Resources	41 % (57)	34 % (48)	12 % (17)	11 % (15)	100 % (138)	0,183**
High Level of Party Conflict	4 % (5)	26 % (36)	34 % (46)	36 % (50)	100 % (138)	0,039

* = $p \leq 0,10$ ** = $p \leq 0,05$

Table 4. To what extent MPs feel that their committees have been influential. Interviews with members of the Storting in 2000. (N=125, out of 165 MPs.)

	I Members of Opposition Parties	II Members of Government Party (Minority Labor Government)	Total
Committee very strong influence	47,9 % (35)	58,8 % (30)	52,4 % (65)
Committee fairly strong influence	35,6 % (26)	27,5 % (14)	32,3 % (40)
Committee minor influence	12,3 % (9)	9,8 % (5)	11,3 % (14)
Committee no influence at all	4,1 % (3)	3,9 % (2)	4,0 % (5)
Total	100 % (73)	100 % (51)	100 % (124)

Table 5: Variables and correlations (Pearson's *r*). N = 46 Parliamentary Sessions, 1949-1999.

	Closeness to Election	Coalition Government	Party Fragmentation	Government Support
Coalition Government	-0,123 (0,414)			
Party Fragmentation	-0,151 (0,317)	0,048 (0,753)		
Government Support	0,161 (0,286)	-0,007 (0,962)	-0,628*** (0,000)	
Amended Bills	0,323** (0,029)	-0,409*** (0,005)	0,190 (0,205)	-0,427*** (0,003)

* = $p \leq 0,1$ ** = $p \leq 0,05$ *** = $p \leq 0,01$

VARIABLES:

- Closeness to Election:** Year in legislative term (1 = First, 2 = Second, 3 = Third, 4 = Fourth)
- Coalition Government:** Single-party government = 0; coalition government = 1
- Party Fragmentation:** Rae's F (0→1; higher values indicate more fractionalized party system in parliament)
- Government Support:** Percent of parliamentary seats controlled by government
- Amended Bills:** Percent of government bills that are amended by parliament

Table 6: Explaining Changes to Government Bills (OLS estimates with t-values in parenthesis).

Dependent Variable: <i>Amended Bills</i>	Model I (1949-99)	Model II (1949-99)	Model III (1949-99)	Model IV (1961-99)
<i>Government Support</i>	-0,45*** (-3,92)	-0,42*** (-4,31)	-0,51*** (-4,15)	-0,49*** (-3,57)
<i>Closeness to Election</i>	2,65*** (3,20)	1,92*** (2,73)	1,84** (2,60)	2,67*** (2,75)
<i>Coalition Government</i>		-5,83*** (-3,35)	-5,70*** (-3,29)	
<i>Party Fragmentation</i>			-27,88 (-1,20)	
Constant	38,15*** (7,06)	39,49*** (8,70)	63,34*** (3,10)	39,62*** (6,18)
R ²	0,34	0,46		0,35
Adj. R ²			0,29	
Durbin-Watson	1,81	1,81	1,82	1,88
<i>Number of Observations</i>	46	45 (without 1996-97)	45 (without 1996-97)	38

* = p≤0,1 ** = p≤0,05 *** = p≤0,01