Retrieving True Majoritarianism
On Mapping and Theorizing Parliamentary Democracies

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The confusion of ideas here is great.... In a representative body actually deliberating, the minority must of course be overruled; and in any equal democracy ... the majority of the people, through their representatives, will outvote and prevail over the minority and their representatives. But does it follow that the minority should have no representatives at all?

John Stuart Mill

Proportional representation per se ... should no longer be seen as necessarily conducive to consensus democracy. Instead, as compared with first-past-the-post, PR fosters true majoritarianism."

Jack H. Nagel

As Mill pointed out, and political scientists have since forgotten, proportional [election] systems allow more voices to be publicly heard, but they do not make government proportional.

Adam Przeworski

1 Introduction

This paper starts with the following puzzle: John Stuart Mill long ago argued that true majoritarian democracy required the combination of an electoral proportionality principle with a legislative majority principle. Influential contemporary empirical political scientists seem well aware of Mill’s point (Lijphart 1997; 1999: 289-293; Powell 2000: chapter 1) but nonetheless fail to grant true majoritarianism a systematic place in their analysis. They equate the majoritarian model with the power concentration vision of the Westminster model (i.e. legislative and electoral majority principles); and they suggest that there is only one alternative ideal type, which combines electoral and legislative proportionality, the latter being implemented through various types of minority vetoes (esp. Lijphart 1999: chapter 1; but see also: Powell 2000: 5-6). Hence “true” majoritarian democracy seems like a mixture of contradictory design principles rather than a distinct and coherent model of democracy. But true majoritarianism is not only denied the status of a coherent type or model, it often seems to completely escape political scientists’ attention. The above-cited warnings of Jack

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1 Mill (1958 [1861]: 103).
Nagel and Adam Przeworski make this clear (see also Grofman 2000; Kaiser et al 2002). Nagel asks his fellow political scientists to pay “[c]loser attention” to “majoritarian democracies properly understood” (Nagel 2000: 124), and Przeworski suggests that the confusion about majoritarian democracy lamented by Mill has, if anything, increased.

Indeed, there is a widespread tendency in political science to ignore or blur the distinction between countries that combine proportional representation (PR) with legislative majority rule and those that combine it with institutionalized minority vetoes of various kinds. This is unfortunate for two main reasons. First, the performance of these two types of democracy—their instrumental quality—may differ. While it is worth knowing that the Westminster model shows no superior performance (Lijphart 1999, Powell 2000), we would also like to distinguish the performance of true majoritarianism from systems with legislative (and quasi-legislative) minority vetoes. Second, even if all alternatives to the Westminster model had a similar performance, a strong normative argument can be made for the intrinsic superiority of true majoritarian democracy, since it best embodies the basic democratic value of political equality (Christiano 1996).

The goals of this paper are threefold. First, focusing on the seminal work of Arend Lijphart, I want to locate the reasons for the lacking distinction between true majoritarianism and other forms of “consensus democracy”. I identify two basic problems in Lijphart’s conceptual and methodological approach which I consider to be of more general importance for institutionalist analyses.

1) Lijphart’s thinking about what makes combinations of political system characteristics coherent is inadequately formalistic. He assumes that coherence is a matter of purity, and this assumption justifies his use of factor analysis. I argue that majoritarian democracy can only be recognized as a coherent type if we think about coherence in substantive terms. If we do, the case for using factor analysis disappears. I also show that the use of factor analysis creates severe problems.

2) Lijphart mixes formal rules and elite behavior in problematic ways. At the conceptual level, he defines the majoritarian model in terms of formal rules and his consensus model in terms of behavior. This asymmetry is carried over
into the empirical analysis and reinforced by his use of factor analysis. He tries to include—on the Executives Parties-Dimension (EP-Dimension)—behavioral patterns of elite behavior (esp. cabinet types and executive dominance) into the measurement, but due to the necessities of factor analysis he has to choose indicators that have little to do with the underlying concepts. Instead, they are essentially different measures for the effective number of parties. This causes the conflation of distinct types of democracy at the empirical level. Lijphart cannot anymore, on this dimension, distinguish between multi-party politics with and without institutionalized minority vetoes.

The second goal of the paper is to propose an alternative measurement approach and apply it to parliamentary democracies. This approach eschews factor analysis and tries to keep rules and behavior analytically distinct. The resulting two-dimensional measurement of democracies combines the disproportionality of the electoral system with a modified and extended index of legislative and quasi-legislative veto points. This measurement can be regarded as a synthesis of the approaches of Lijphart (1999), Powell (2000) and the literature on institutional veto points. I will argue that, at least for (pure) parliamentary systems, this measurement is based on a consistent two-dimensional conceptualization. The basic question is: The support of how many of $N$ voters is needed to securely change the legislative status quo? This conceptualization highlights the distinctiveness of truly majoritarian democracy and can be linked directly to central debates in the normative theory of democracy.

The third goal is to relate the measurement of parliamentary democracies to (rational) actor theories like Tsebelis’ veto player theory. The possibility of this linkage is another advantage of the proposed measurement approach. Veto player theory suggests that it is the interaction of the electoral and legislative systems that influences the behavioral patterns of political elites. An extended form of veto player analysis also enables us to systematically analyze the difference between joint or divided re-

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4 I will not enter into discussions about definitions of parliamentarism and the various variants of semi-presidentialism. Instead, I follow Lijphart’s (1999: 116-24) own approach. First, I treat most instances of “semi-presidentialism” in established democracies as parliamentary. Second, I treat France as parliamentary only during cohabitation. However, due to a partial lack of data, my empirical analysis (so far) neglects France. I treat Switzerland has a hybrid that should nevertheless be included because the executive is selected by the legislature.
sponsibility of representatives for policy outputs—a difference strongly highlighted by Lijphart (1999; 2003), following Goodin (1996). The analysis shows that when combined with electoral proportionality, legislative majority rule does not necessarily lead to antagonistic behavior. On the contrary: Under some background conditions it can foster behavioral patterns generally perceived as consensual. The so-called “instability” of majority rule can provide incentives to build broad governmental or legislative coalitions; and the power which majority rule hands to the agenda setter can act as a counterweight to electoral veto incentives of particular (opposition) parties.

The paper is set out as follows. Sections 2 and 3 analyze the problems of Lijphart’s conceptual and methodological approach. Sections 3 and 4 sketch the proposed alternative. Section 5 links the measurement of parliamentary democracies to veto player theory and shows that legislative majority rule may be conducive to “consensual” behavior patterns. Section 6 discusses the pros and cons of a focus on parliamentary democracies. Section 7 summarizes the main results.

2 A critique of Lijphart’s conceptual approach

In this section I criticize basic features of Lijphart’s conceptual and methodological approach. This approach is well known. Lijphart 1) abstractly defines two models of democracy, 2) “derives” ten specific observable implications of these models, 3) selects indicators for these implications, 4) uses factor analysis to test whether and to what extent indicators are correlated with one another, 5) merges the highly correlated indicators into two dimensions of democracy, and 6) explores the associations between these two dimensions (especially the EP-Dimension) and various indicators of desirable outcomes such as economic growth or voter turnout. This section discusses what I consider to be the two fundamental problems of Lijphart’s approach.
2.1 The ambiguities of “majoritarian” democracy: Mixing formal and substantive coherentism

At a conceptual level, one of Lijphart’s research tasks can be understood as the task of defining coherent models of democracy. Which characteristics of political systems fit together and support each other? Lijphart (1984: 211) states that “the majoritarian and consensus models of democracy are rational and logically coherent models”. In this section I show that Lijphart relies on two contradictory ways of thinking about coherence and that this leads to an inconsistent specification of the “majoritarian” model of democracy. I also show that if a consistent specification of this model is desired, the use of factor analysis lacks a conceptual rationale. Let us start by characterizing two different ways of thinking about the coherence between a political system’s characteristics.

1) Formal coherentism: There are general design or decision principles from which specific system characteristics can be logically derived. A political system is perfectly coherent if all relevant characteristics are derived from the same general principle. Coherence is a matter of purity.

2) Substantive coherentism: Specific principles and characteristics have to be combined to optimally achieve one substantive value or a mix of substantive values. Coherence is a matter of purposeful combination of characteristics.

Normative political theory, almost by definition, adopts substantive coherentism. Two variants can be distinguished, depending on whether political systems are thought to produce or embody the relevant value or mix of values. The first variant may be called instrumentalism: the aim is to combine characteristics so as to optimally achieve a certain outcome. A good example of this thinking is Polybios’ (ca. 200-120 BC) theory of constitutions. His main goal was stability, and he believed that this goal could be optimally achieved by combining three pure constitutions: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy (Gallus 2004: 27).

The second type of substantive coherentism tries to combine characteristics so that the substantive value of interest is intrinsically realized by the political system. The major example of this thinking is the modern normative theory of majoritarian democracy as most systematically developed by Christiano (1996; 2004). From this perspective—which is similar to that of Dahl (1989)— democracy embodies the basic value of political equality (equal consideration of interest) and is thereby rendered intrinsically valuable. The characteristics of political systems should be combined so
as to maximize this intrinsic quality. This generally requires majority rule at the legislative stage because minority vetoes unduly favor those representatives favoring the status quo or default outcome (cf. Lijphart 1984: 2, 4); it also requires proportional representation at the electoral stage because only this guarantees that the fair treatment of representatives translates into the fair treatment of voters (Christiano 1996: 224-42). Following Nagel (2000), I shall call this type of democracy true majoritarianism. Given the value of equal representation of interests, true majoritarian democracy maximizes substantive coherence by combining different decision principles at the electoral and the legislative stage.

Now, the first problem of Lijphart’s approach is that he (eventually) adopts formal coherentism. He starts out by defining the two models of democracy abstractly, in terms of an answer to the following question: „who will do the governing and to whose interest should the government be responsive when the people are in disagreement and have divergent preferences?”. His answer for the majoritarian model is: “the majority of the people” (Lijphart 1999: 1-2). This answer might be interpreted as a commitment to substantive coherentism of the type Christiano endorses. In the next two paragraphs, however, Lijphart also embraces formal coherentism. First, he equates his majoritarian model with the Westminster model, which allows power to be concentrated in the hands of a popular plurality. Second, he states:

Ten differences with regard to the most important democratic institutions and rules can be deduced from the majoritarian and consensus principles. Because the majoritarian characteristics are derived from the same principle and hence are logically connected, one could also expect them to occur together in the real world; the same applies to the consensus characteristics (Lijphart 1999: 2, my emphasis, S.G.).

I take this to be an adoption of formal coherentism. Lijphart claims that there is something like a general majoritarian “principle” and that full and coherent implementation of this general principle requires realization of all specific majoritarian characteristics.\(^5\) It is precisely this purity—especially the combination of the electoral and leg-

\(^5\) One objection to this interpretation could be that Lijphart really embraces substantive coherentism of a different sort. He repeatedly states that his “majoritarian” model is about the concentration of power (e.g. Lijphart 1984: 208; 1999: 2), and this concentration might be instrumental for achieving good outcomes such as high economic growth or greater congruence of outcomes with the preferences of the median voter (cf. Powell 2000). Yet Lijphart does clearly not embrace this type of coherentism consistently. If he did, he would have had to call his model something like
islative majority principles—which allows popular pluralities to rule in the Westminster model. I will call Lijphart’s majoritarianism *untrue majoritarianism*.

Hence there is an obvious inconsistency. Lijphart seems to embrace both formal and substantive coherentism, deriving both true and untrue majoritarianism. There are two ways out of this inconsistency. The correct way, in my view, would be to abandon formal coherentism and specify ideal-type democracies in terms of their intrinsic or instrumental *values*. However, this would have two far-reaching consequences for Lijphart. First, he would have to conceptually distinguish between untrue and true majoritarianism and thus add at least one further type to his conceptual discussion. Second, the theoretical rationale of using factor analysis in the empirical analysis would vanish.\(^6\) This rationale is stated in the second sentence of the above-quoted passage and is predicated on formal coherentism.\(^7\) Lijphart (1999) avoids these consequences by choosing the second way out of the inconsistency: In contrast to his initial definition of the majoritarian model, he settles on the specification of this model as untrue majoritarianism. The consequence is that true majoritarianism is given little attention at the conceptual level. I will show in the next section that the same is true at the empirical level. To understand why, we first have to understand the second basic conceptual problem: the mixing of formal rules and behavioral patterns.

\(^6\) Factor analysis tries to detect structure in the relationships between variables and to reduce the number of variables by combining several (highly) correlated variables into one new variable.

\(^7\) As is well known, Lijphart’s (1984; 1999) empirical analysis has also clearly disconfirmed his *conceptualization* of political systems in terms of a *one-dimensional* continuum between the polar types of “majoritarian” and “consensus democracy”. I’ll return to the problems of his factor analysis in the next section.
2.2 The ambiguities of “consensus democracy”: mixing formal rules and behavioral patterns

Lijphart’s definition of the consensus model is also ambiguous, but for a different reason. His answer to the above-stated question — „who will do the governing...” — is: “as many people as possible” (Lijphart 1999: 2). He states that the consensus model accepts majority rule as a minimum requirement, but: “it seeks to maximize the size of these majorities” (Lijphart 1999: 2). By adopting this definition, Lijphart mixes formal rules and behavior patterns. Since the majoritarian model was defined in terms of a formal majority requirement, a symmetric definition of the consensus model would have to entail a formal supermajority requirement (i.e. minority vetoes of some kind). But no such definition is given. Instead, the consensus model merely requires that majorities of maximal size are sought.

This asymmetry is problematic. Conceptually, Lijphart avoids a clear answer to the very question he posed, which is at the heart of democratic theory: Which rules should apply if disagreement persists after the search for consensus? Given the fact of persisting disagreement on issues of law, policy and justice in modern societies, answering this question is of major normative importance. Under what conditions are minority vetoes compatible with political equality? Empirically, the problem is that Lijphart effectively conflates two very different institutional types of parliamentarism: 1) truly majoritarian systems (PR plus legislative majority rule) in which the search for consensus may emerge as an equilibrium outcome in the context of majoritarian legislative rules and 2) “supermajoritarian” democracies in which the search for consensus is required by institutionalized minority vetoes.

3 Critique of Lijphart’s operationalization and measurement

The two main problems of Lijphart’s conceptualization translate into problems of operationalization and measurement. I have argued above that if we reject formalist thinking about the coherence of political system characteristics, there is no theoretical rationale for using factor analysis, and I have shown that Lijphart blurs the distinction between formal rules and behavioral patterns. In this section I show how these
problems are related and come to the fore at the empirical level. I will discuss the Federal Unitary-Dimension (FU-Dimension) and the EP-Dimension in turn.

3.1 The FU-dimension

The FU-Dimension is a sort of veto point index, consisting of the following five variables: federalism and decentralization, strength of bicameralism, difficulty of changing the constitution, strength of judicial review, and central bank independence. It provided a major stimulus for the development of the literature on institutional veto points (Huber, Ragin and Stephens 1993; Schmidt 1996b; Kaiser 1997). However, this literature departed from Lijphart by emphasizing two potential features of veto points: additivity and functional equivalence. Different veto points may cumulate and they may substitute each other. Both possibilities, but especially the second, are difficult to square with the use of factor analysis. For if different veto points can have similar effects, there is little reason to believe that countries have similar positions on different veto point dimensions. Consider four ways to establish supermajority requirements in the legislative system: 1) a general supermajority requirement in a unicameral parliament, 2) strong bicameralism, 3) a very activist constitutional court, which can be overruled only by changing the constitution, and 4) the availability of a referendum initiative to strike down parliamentary bills. Each of these features can function as a veto point and provide strong incentives for governing parties to seek broad coalitions if they want to change the legislative status quo. Precisely for this reason, these four types of veto points do not necessarily have to be expected “to occur together in the real world” (Lijphart 1999: 2).

That Lijphart nevertheless formulates this expectation and thus uses factor analysis, has two consequences. First, for those variables actually included into the FU-Dimension, the correlations are not very high, at least not as high as for the EP-Dimension (Taagepera 2003). Second, to get a “clean” factor-analytic solution, unusual veto points have to be omitted. One example is the Swiss referendum initiative, which had been included in Lijphart’s earlier study but was unrelated to the other
veto points (Lijphart 1984: 214-15). Another example is supermajority rules in Finland. Until 1992, one-third of all members of parliament (Eduskunta) could postpone the final adoption of an ordinary law until after the next election (Sundberg 1993: 420; Raunio and Wiberg 2003: 302); and a number of authors considered these rules to be “coequal to a retraction of a bill” (Jungar 2000: 107). Lijphart (1999: 103) cites supermajority rules as one reason for Finland’s tendency to form oversized cabinets but does not include these rules in his FU-Dimension. This seems inconsistent with Lijphart’s inclusion of, say, bicameral veto rights (both suspensive and absolute). Now, my point is this: Had Lijphart tried to include these more unusual types of veto points into the FU-dimension, he would not have found a “clean” factor-analytic solution. But since such a solution is not to be expected in the first place, it seems more sensible to give up the factor-analytic approach rather than to exclude unusual types of veto points.

3.2 The EP-Dimension

The EP-Dimension includes the following five variables: the disproportionality of the electoral system, the effective number of parties (ENP), the frequency of certain cabinet types (MW/OS), cabinet stability (as a proxy for executive dominance), and interest group pluralism/corporatism. With respect to this dimension the problems of

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8 It is no coincidence that Switzerland scores high on constitutional rigidity (and the other institutional veto points Lijphart includes) but low on the strength of judicial review. The reason, put bluntly, is that the people, rather than the courts, are supposed to have the final word in Switzerland. It might therefore be misleading to say that “the absence of judicial review is the only majoritarian characteristic in an otherwise solidly consensual democracy” (Lijphart 1999: 229-30). The absence of the judicial review does not make the Swiss model less coherent because as checks on the parliamentary majority veto points can be substitutes for one another. The absence of judicial review actually makes Swiss democracy more coherent with respect to a design dimension that Lijphart’s analysis does not capture, i.e., “constitutionalism” versus “populism”. See Jung (2001).

9 In support of this interpretation, Jungar (107, n. 40) cites various publications, in Finnish, of Voitto Helander. The perceived strength of the supermajority provisions also comes out in Sundberg’s (1993: 421) claim that “September 1 1992 [the date when the postponement mechanism was repealed, S.G.] can therefore be seen as the date on which a long period of extreme consensual parliamentarism in Finland came to an end” (my emphasis, S.G.).
using factor analysis are even more severe, because they combine with the other problem discussed in section 2: the mixing of formal rules and behaviors patterns.

Let me start by discussing the necessity and possibility of distinguishing between formal rules and behavioral patterns. Given that Lijphart defines the consensus model in behavioral terms, this involves two main institutional variants: one in which the search for broad majorities emerges as an equilibrium solution against the background of legislative majority rule and one in which this search is “required” by supermajoritarian legislative rules (i.e. strong and/or many veto points). Distinguishing between these two cases is not only important in normative discussions but also in empirical analyses. For if we want to build positive theories of how institutions affect behavior, we have to deal with the fact that causal mechanisms associated with particular institutions do not translate directly into observable behavioral patterns. For one thing, behavioral patterns generally result from the interaction of different mechanisms. For another, there are often several plausible explanations for the same behavioral pattern. Therefore, it is crucial that we systematically separate institutions and behavior. If we do not, inferences are threatened by circularity of the following kind: Consensual institutions are defined as institutions producing consensual behavior, and the consensual behavior is explained by the consensual institutions (cf. Barry 1975).

The distinction between rules and behavioral patterns is not an easy one to make because the relationship between them often goes in both directions. A classical example is the complex and context-dependent relationship between electoral systems and party systems (Nohlen 2004). In my view, therefore, the distinction has to be made pragmatically, i.e. in terms of the precise structure of the explanatory questions we ask. This is best shown by an example: Activist constitutional judges reveal a certain pattern of behavior. If our aim is to explain this pattern, we will, among other things, look at the formal rules that influence the incentive structure of judges. If, by contrast, we want to analyze how governments and parties respond to activist judges, we can usefully treat the behavior of the latter as part of the “institutional” context of the former. Where we draw the line between institutions and behavior depends on
our precise explanatory question – on how we want to carve up the social world into
different alternatives in order to gain analytical leverage.10

[Figure 1a/b]

So let us look at the causal structure analyzed by Lijphart (Figure 1a). There are two
crucial differences between his dimensions. As suggested above, the FU-Dimension

10 Whenever we ask a precise explanatory question – a Why-question or a What-if-things-had-
been-different-question – we take for granted certain background conditions as well as (often)
specify specific alternatives to the observable outcomes. This comes out most clearly in the phi-
losophical literature on the pragmatics of explanation (Van Fraasen 1980; Garfinkel 1981; Woodward
2003: 226-33). For an example of how careful attention to pragmatics can avoid sterile ontological
and epistemological debates between “rationalism” and “constructivism” in international rela-
tions, see Fearon and Wendt (2002). For a similar discussion of the differences between historical
and rational choice-institutionalism, see Manow and Ganghof (2005).

11 The FU-Dimension is not institutional in the sense that Lijphart’s coding relies exclusively
on the actual texts of normal or constitutional laws. It is heavily influenced by his interpretation of
(the literature on) behavioral patterns (see, e.g., Lijphart 1999: 190, 225). However, given the ex-
planatory structure of Lijphart’s analysis, this mixture of institutions and behavior seems rather
unproblematic.
It is theoretically counterproductive because formal rules and behavioral patterns are mixed in highly problematic ways. The patterns of cabinet formation and dissolution as well as interest group intermediation can be expected to reflect, at least partly, the strategic responses of governments, parties, and interest groups to the institutional environment; and this environment is constituted by the combination of electoral/party systems and institutional veto points. Hence if behavioral patterns are included into the measurement of one of the two dimensions, a systematic analysis of these patterns is impossible. Put differently, it is not true that “the joint-power and divided-power aspects of consensus democracy are conceptually ... distinct dimensions” (Lijphart 1999: 252-53). Strøm (2000: 280) makes exactly this point against Tsebelis (1995) when he states that “parties and the institutions in which they operate are not mutually independent, but rather highly interdependent.”

The most severe problem of including behavioral patterns of collective actors in policy-making into the EP-Dimension is that it becomes impossible to allow for different combinations of causal mechanisms to produce similar behavioral patterns. Consider an example: Lijphart’s proto-type of a consensual cabinet type is an oversized coalition. Yet as discussed above, there are two types of such a coalition. If it is “backed” by supermajoritarian legislative institutions, it may not be oversized in any real sense and all cabinet parties may be actual veto actors. By contrast, if legislative rules are strictly majoritarian, some or all cabinet parties are merely influential actors that can be outvoted (cf. Strøm 2000). As noted above, the distinction between both cases is very important but cannot be made within Lijphart’s approach.

This is surprising given that the most important analytical narrative of the emergence of consociational democracy in Switzerland—Lijphart’s prototype of consensus democracy—strongly highlights the strategic response of collective actors to a changed institutional environment (Neidhart 1970; Kobach 1993; Jung 2001; but see Bollinger and Zürcher 2004): After the introduction of the referendum initiative in 1874, the opposition parties used it to obstruct government legislation. The governing liberals (Freisinn) therefore first included the Catholic-Conservatives (today: CVP) into the government, later (1921) the farmers and rural manufacturers (today: SVP) and still later (1959) the Social Democrats. In addition to the referendum the resulting permanent four-party coalition has also been stabilized by decentralized federalism and strong bicameralism (Armingeon 1999: 470). In short: the Swiss cabinet type can be
understood as a strategic equilibrium, given a certain combination of electoral and legislative institutions (as well as, of course, certain societal structures). To acknowledge this fact, behavioral outcomes such as cabinet types should not, in my view, be lumped together with electoral rules and party systems in order to measure democratic “structures”.

But including behavioral patterns into the EP-Dimension is also empirically futile, for the following reason. We have seen that the EP-Dimension constitutes a long causal chain (Figure 1a), and all we know about the social world suggests that at each causal node in this chain a number of important intervening variables enter the picture, which can put countries on different causal paths. This strongly suggests that the correlations along the EP-Dimension should weaken more or less continuously as we move from basic electoral institutions to patterns of cabinet “dominance”. In what follows I argue that this would in fact be so if Lijphart had operationalized variables in line with the underlying theoretical concepts. Yet as others authors have noted, this is not the case. Especially Lijphart’s indicators for “cabinet types” and “executive dominance” have been recognized as ad hoc and highly problematic (see especially: Mainwaring 2001; Tsebelis 2002). I will show, however, that these operationalizations have to be chosen in order to reach a factor-analytic solution. Theoretical concepts are in effect operationalized so as to reflect the effective number of parties (ENP). In a sense, rather than capturing what is specific about “cabinet types” and “executive dominance”, Lijphart measures the effective number of parties in three different ways.

Consider first the indicator for cabinet types (abbreviated as: MW/OP). As Lijphart (1997) himself acknowledges, given his conceptualization of consensus democracy the prima facie most plausible indicator of cabinet types would be “popular cabinet support” (PCS), i.e., the combined vote share of the governing party or parties. Yet Lijphart dismisses this indicator because he does not like the data patterns it would produce. Empirically, the obvious problem is that PCS is not highly correlated with ENP, since a high number of parliamentary parties can both lead to very high cabinet support (as, e.g., in Switzerland) and very low support (as, e.g., in the Scandinavian countries with their frequent minority governments). Theoretically, the data patterns do not fit to Lijphart’s favored explanation of behavioral patterns. Lijphart thinks that PCS paints a wrong picture, because he considers it self-evident that behavioral pat-
terns in Scandinavia are “closer to the give-and-take bargaining and accommodationist styles of the power-sharing democracies than to the adversarial and confrontational spirit of the Anglo-American majority-rule democracies” (Lijphart 1997: 157). Instead of taking the data patterns produced by PCS as an empirical constraint that might prompt conceptual and theoretical reconsideration, he eschews using the indicator. He seems not willing to reconsider the close tie he sees between (legislative) majority rule and “adversarial and confrontational behavior”.

This is unfortunate. For what the pattern on PCS does show is that a general conceptual focus on cabinet types as being “close to the essence of the distinction between concentration of power and the joint exercise of power” (Lijphart 1999: 245) is ill-advised. The basic allocation of political power results from the combination of electoral and legislative institutions, while the allocation of power achieved in cabinet-making is rather superficial. One example, given above, is oversized coalitions not backed by supermajority rules (Strom 2000: 280). The other example is minority governments. After all, what distinguishes Scandinavian countries from Great Britain is that governments that have only the support of a clear plurality of voters cannot possibly have the institutional power to change the legislative status quo on their own. In short: The fact that the theoretically plausible indicator of cabinet types does not lead to the “right” patterns in the data, should not lead us to construct a different indicator, but rather to focus on the electoral and legislative allocation of political power.

Lijphart chooses another indicator for cabinet types, which is highly correlated with ENP. However, the correlation is predicated on the systematic neglect of what is specific about cabinet types, namely the aspects that do not follow from the format of the party system. What is arguably most specific about cabinet types is the allocation of governing responsibility between the parties in parliament, in other words the minority and majority status of governments. This status seems especially important given that Lijphart’s (1999; 2003) own theoretical discussion of the difference between “joint” and “divided” policymaking emphasizes the joint or divided responsibility of legislative parties vis-à-vis voters (cf. Goodin 1996). This emphasis notwithstanding, Lijphart groups cabinet types in a way that highlights the format of the party system rather than government status. He sees one-party majority governments as majoritarian phenomena, oversized coalitions and multi-party minority governments as consensual phenomena, and minimal winning coalitions and one-party minority gov-
ernments as somewhere in between (Lijphart 1999: 91). Theoretically, there are good reasons to regard this operationalization as „puzzling“ (Mainwaring 2001: 172). Empirically, however, it is precisely the operationalization that leads to a high correlation between cabinet types and the effective number of parties. As a result, the difference between multi-party minority governments such as in Denmark and oversized coalitions such as in Switzerland do not show systematically in the data. Ignoring this difference is highly problematic, however, because formal legislative rules differ greatly in both countries. In Switzerland, de facto-supermajoritarian legislative rules would typically require „oversized“ legislative coalitions even if cabinets were minimum winning. In Denmark, by contrast, absolute legislative coalitions are typically sufficient to pass legislation, regardless of cabinet types. This difference matters greatly for the allocation of political power but must be ignored, if a clean factor-analytic solution is to be found.

Lijphart makes additional adjustments for particular countries, all of which have the effect of increasing the correlation between MW/OP and ENP. One problem is Austria, which has a relatively low score on ENP but had many minimum winning coalitions (Lijphart 1999: 88). Since Lijphart does not accept the thus painted „majoritarian“ profile of Austria (Lijphart 2000: 230), he deliberately changes the measurement: minimum winning coalitions with more than 80 percent legislative support are counted as „oversized“. Another problem is Japan, which scores relatively high on ENP but was frequently governed by one-party majority cabinets. Lijphart therefore counts LDP majority cabinets between 1976 as 1993 as minority governments as they allegedly behaved like such governments (Lijphart 1999: 108).

Given the operationalization of the cabinet types-indicator, its strong relationship with ENP and its status as the strongest element in the EP-Dimension is hardly surprising (Lijphart 1999: 245; Taagepera 2002). Taagepera (2002: 234) is exactly right when he sees MW/OP as just another instrument to “visualize” the “meaning” of the effective number of parties.

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12 The majoritarian profile of Austria in Democracies (Lijphart 1984) also provided the stimulus for including the interest group system into the EP-Dimension (Lijphart 2000: 230).
Essentially the same is true for the next variable on the EP-Dimension’s causal path: executive dominance (see Figure 1a). As Tsebelis (2002: 109-11) argues, cabinet stability is a bad indicator for the theoretical concept of cabinet dominance vis-à-vis parliament—and Lijphart (1999: 129-32) gives no argument for this operationalization. The indicator also does not work well empirically, especially for presidential systems, so that 11 of 36 countries are given impressionistic values. A theoretically plausible indicator would be the institutional agenda-setting power of the government (Döring 2001; Tsebelis 2002: 111-14). Lijphart (1999: 101, 304) discusses agenda-setting instruments in various places but does not consider agenda-setting power as an indicator of executive dominance. Again, this might simply be explained by the search for a factor-analytic solution, as government stability—in parliamentary systems—is influenced by the party system (Gallagher, Laver and Mair 2001: 368-69).

3.3 Conclusion

We have seen that the two basic problems of Lijphart’s conceptual approach are carried over into the empirical analysis. The use of factor analysis—which lacks a theoretical rationale—and the conflation of institutions and behavior reinforce the result of the conceptual analysis: “majoritarian” democracy is equated with pluralitarian democracy, and truly majoritarian countries (PR plus legislative majority rule) are systematically conflated with supermajoritarian countries (PR plus supermajoritarian legislative rules).

Since Lijphart does not systematically distinguish formal rules from behavioral patterns of parties, governments and interest groups, he is, strictly speaking, unable to make empirically founded claims about the contingent relationship between rules and behavior. This problem comes to the fore when Lijphart (1999; 2003) thinks about causal mechanisms in order to justify the inclusion of interest group pluralism and central bank independence into the EP- and FU-dimensions, respectively. Lijphart draws on Goodin’s (1996) distinction between joint action and responsibility versus divided institutions and responsibility. This distinction, Lijphart suggests, is congruent with the distinction between the EP- and FU-dimensions. The former is characterized by „multiparty face-to-face interactions within cabinets, legislatures, legislative
committees, and concertation meetings”, the latter by “institutional separation” (Lijphart 1999: 5).

I am not convinced by this reasoning (Ganghof and Bräuninger Forthcoming). Minority governments, too, are characterized by the fact that veto actors do not share responsibility vis-à-vis the voters. The fusion between government and parliamentary majority is weakened, so that the “classical” institutional separation of power, the “old dualism”, becomes more important. Conversely, there are plenty of “multiparty face-to-face interactions” in bicameral systems, both within and between the two chambers. I find it misleading, therefore, to see “institutional separation” in, say, Australian bicameralism but not in the case of Swedish minority governments. The relevant institutional difference between the two cases lies merely in the fact that additional support of opposition parties must be sought in different chambers. Goodin’s (1996) conjecture that the need for opposition parties’ support of legislation may make a change of the status quo less likely—regardless of policy positions—because joint responsibility is lacking, generally applies to both cases. Yet the difference between minority and majority governments was largely ignored in Lijphart’s treatment of cabinet types. Hence Lijphart’s theorizing about causal mechanisms and his operationalization of concepts do not fit together, and the actual causal mechanisms sketched by Gooding remains unanalyzed.

To avoid the problems of Lijphart’s approach, I proceed as follows (compare Figure 1b). First, I do not use factor analysis and omit observable patterns of elite interaction from the measurement of democratic structures (Section 4). This will allow me in a second step to analyze patterns of elite behavior within an actor-theoretic framework and without the factor-analytic straight-jacket. (Section 5).
Institutional types of (parliamentary) democracy: conceptualization and measurement

4.1 Conceptualization

My discussion starts from Nagel (2000). He points out Lijphart’s equation of “majoritarian” and pluralitarian democracy most forcefully and suggests an alternative. He asks: How many of N voters support the governing or legislative coalition? The resulting variable can take values from 1 (dictatorship) to N (unanimity). Empirically relevant are the three roughly distinguishable types already discussed above. In a majoritarian democracy, the value lies around N/2 +1, in a pluralitarian democracy it is significantly lower, in a supermajoritarian democracy significantly higher. As an empirical indicator Nagel suggests popular cabinet support (PCS) and, in the case of minority governments, popular legislative support (PLS).

Nagel’s conceptual proposal is extremely helpful but, in my view, inherits three problems from Lijphart’s approach. First, it is one-dimensional. Second, it focuses on observable behavior (the type of democracy changes with every government, or, in case of minority governments, with every legislative coalition). Third, it is inconsistent. For minority governments Nagel wants to focus on legislative support, rather than cabinet support, because he is well aware that the support sufficient for getting into government is not necessarily sufficient for changing the status quo. Yet we have seen that the same may be true for majority governments (in a narrow sense) in the presence of supermajoritarian legislative rules. This shows once more that a focus on the cabinet level is generally misleading, because the basic (numeric) power structure of a democracy is determined by the combination of electoral and legislative institutions. If we wanted a consistent behavioral measurement of types of democracies, we should generally focus on the (average) popular support of actual legislative coalitions. In what follows, however, I want to focus on institutional requirements. In addition, I distinguish two conceptual dimensions, which can be added (Figure 2).

13 “Coalition” here includes one-party governments.
On the vertical dimension we ask: What is the *minimum* number of voters parties need in order to gain an absolute majority of seats in the representative chamber of parliament? The resulting variable $G$ ranges between 0 and $N/2 + 1$. Theoretically possible electoral systems in which more than an absolute majority of votes would be needed for an absolute majority of seats are ignored. (Empirically, of course, the range $G$ is also constrained downwards.) On the horizontal dimension we ask: How many *additional* votes are required for a legislative coalition to change the status quo securely. The resulting variable $L$ ranges from 0 to $N/2-1$. Given this stylized conceptualization, the institutional variant of Nagel’s “extended spectrum of democracies” lies diagonally in Figure 2. In an ideal-type majoritarian democracy the institutional *minimum requirement* of voter support lies at $N/2 + 1$, in a pluralitarian democracy significantly below, in a supermajoritarian democracy significantly above that level. In principle, there would many different ways to implement majoritarian democracy depending on how the total vote requirement for changing the status quo ($N/2 + 1$) is divided between the requirement for coming into office and the additional requirement for changing the status quo.

The two dimensions of Figure 2 link directly to central debates in the normative theory of democracy, most notably to the tradeoffs between the *intrinsic* and *instrumental* qualities of democracies. On the vertical dimension, it has been persuasively argued that intrinsic quality (related to the value of political equality of citizens) requires maximum proportionality, which is most directly achievable with list-PR (Christiano 1996: 224-42; see also Miller 1996: 210; van der Hout and McGann 2004). Allowing for “manufactured” legislative majorities is difficult to justify with respect to political equality or some other basic democratic value. However, this preference for proportionality is always traded off to some extent against the instrumental quality of democracy (i.e. its ability to achieve good outcomes), which may suffer from

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14 “Securely” is added to allow activist judicial review to enter as a quasi-legislative veto point. If this type of judicial review exists, supermajorities might be necessary to prevent bills from *ex post-*nullification.

15 It has been argued that political equality (as equality of means in the decisionmaking process) does not imply a particular electoral system (Beitz 1989: chapter 6). However, this argument looks at the electoral stage in isolation. If the election of representatives is seen as the first stage of a two-stage process which is ultimately about influencing legislation, it can be shown that equality (anonymity) requires proportional representation (see Christiano 1996: 224-42).
highly fragmented parliaments (e.g., Gallagher 2001: 570). Similarly, a plausible justification of pluralitarian (power-concentration) democracy will also most likely be instrumental (Lijphart 1999: chapter 15-16).

On the horizontal dimension, as noted above, it is widely believed that political equality requires legislative majority rule as the general decision principle (e.g., Dahl 1989: 139-41). Lijphart (1999: 31, 282) emphasizes the value of political equality but neglects this argument for the intrinsic quality of true majoritarianism. True, one may object that political equality rather requires the implementation of a legislative proportionality principle, hence treating legislative decision-making as an issue of *fair division* rather than *aggregation* (Hyland 1995: 99; Lijphart 1999: 31; Weale 1999: 130). However, it is well-known that adequate implementation of fair division methods is associated with a number of formidable problems (see Jones 1983: 181; Risse 2004: 50, 60-61). A practicable way around these problems is formal minority veto rights, but such rights seem to violate political equality (e.g. Powell 2000: 92). Therefore they can only be defended in the presence of “persistent minorities” (Christiano 1994). The argument, very roughly, is this: Equality is best understood as *equal consideration of interest*, which under normal circumstances is best specified as equality of decision-making *resources*. However, if we have knowledge that basic interests of certain societal groups are violated by legislative majority rule, equality of resources is not anymore sufficient to achieve equal consideration of interest. Under these circumstances, minority vetoes might be considered a requirement of political equality: they can still “be seen as limits to democratic rule but need not be seen as a challenge to the basic ideal of democracy” (Christiano 1994: 189).16

Minority vetoes might also be justified instrumentally. For instance, one may value consensual behavior in its own right and believe that veto rights are conducive to this behavior. Or one may believe that supermajoritarian legislative rules (broadly conceived) or activist constitutional courts produce morally better outcomes (e.g., Arneson 2004).

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16 Even under these circumstances, however, I think it would be preferable, if possible, not to base special treatment of minorities on *constitutionalized* veto rights. The simple reason is that such vetoes, once established, are difficult to abolish even if societal conditions have changed or would
4.2 Operationalization and measurement

A number of reasons make it impossible to find precise numerical indicators for the two theoretical variables, \( G \) and \( L \). However, rough measurement of both dimensions is straightforward. In fact, we will see that a two-dimensional measurement boils down to a combination of the approach of Powell (1989: 113; 2000: 39) and the quantitative veto point-approach (Huber, Ragin and Stephens 1993; Schmidt 1996b; Kaiser 1997). The variable \( G \) is shaped by electoral rules. One could opt for a purely institutional measurement, using either an ordinal index of proportionality (e.g., Powell 2000: 39) or effective magnitude/threshold (Taagepera 2003). Since \( G \) is also influenced by societal factors, measuring the observed (average) disproportionality, as Lijphart does based on Gallagher (1991), seems reasonable. I choose this option, partly in order to make results comparable with those of Lijphart (1999). In fact, I will use his data for the period from 1971 to 96.

\( L \) could also be measured in two main ways. Powell (1989: 113; 2000: 39) focuses on the potential of opposition influence provided by legislative committees (see also Weale 1999: 30, 213), while also taking account of “opposition” influence provided by supermajoritarian rules (e.g., Finland),\(^\text{17}\) second chambers (e.g., Australia) and presidencies (e.g., France). By contrast, veto point approaches generally ignore both the committee system and supermajoritarian rules but otherwise include a wider range of potential veto points. I choose a mixture of these approaches. I focus on institutional veto points which effectively increase the majority requirement for changing the status quo securely, but I also include supermajoritarian rules within the representative legislative chamber. I think it is necessary to weight the role of particular veto points on a theoretical basis (Ganghof 2003: 5-7). In addition, for some veto points it seems necessary to focus only on their “strong” realizations. For instance, constitutional courts practicing strict judicial self-restraint are not “weak” quasi-legislative veto points but none at all. Instead, they guard the rule of the game and have changed in the absence of the veto (cf. Wilkinson 2000; Shapiro 2003). A political system may thus get “trapped” (Scharpf 1988; McGann 2004b).

\(^{17}\) Powell (2000: 38) focuses on special requirements for tax laws (by now also abolished). In fact, however, taxation was the only area of ordinary legislation in which there was an easy way around the suspensive minority veto, because one-year tax laws could be passed by a simple majority (cf. Ganghof Forthcoming).
see to it that legislative majorities do not violate the very value – namely political equality – on which their legitimacy is built (Christiano 2004). On the other hand, some courts (e.g., the German) can be considered as quasi-legislative veto points, to which parties and governments have to respond strategically.

The focus chosen here is more specific than Lijphart’s (1999). The goal is not to describe all major forms of division of power in states but to capture the main institutional constraints on the central government majority, given its constitutionally fixed domain of power (cf. Powell 2000.). Hence I account for federalism only to the extent that it constrains the power of the central government majority – either directly (by requiring regional government consent for the implementation of policies) or indirectly (by giving opposition parties influence in a second chamber with veto power). This focus is analytically fruitful and also coheres well with Lijphart’s focus on the central government level on the EP-Dimension.

The veto point index used is based on the following premises:

- **Federalism and bicameralism**: I only account for strong bicameralism and decentralized federalism in the sense of Lijphart (1999). Since the effect of bicameralism on G is more direct, it is weighted more strongly. Since both veto points are not independent, they will not be added; decentralized federalism only matters in the absence of strong bicameralism. Strongly bicameral countries get a value of 1, other countries with decentralized federalism a value of .5 and all other countries a value of 0.

- **Judicial review**: “Strong” review gets a value of 1, “medium” review a value of .5 and both weak and non-existent review a value of 0 (Lijphart 1999: 227).

- **Popular initiatives**: I consider their institutionalization, distinguishing between “qualified” (.5) and “non-qualified” (1) initiatives (Jung 2001: Chapter 5).

- **Supermajority rules (minority vetoes)**: Such rules are rare (for ordinary legislation). The Finnish rules (described above) get a value of 1, the rules in Belgium a value of .5 (Rasch 1995). The availability of data on this variable limits the set of countries covered.

Of course, one can always question particular coding rules or the treatment of particular countries. This is unavoidable, partly because the numerical effect of veto points differs over time, type of legislation, issue area etc. All we can hope for, in my view, is a rough mapping of (parliamentary) democracies.
Figure 3 shows the resulting two-dimensional map. Note that it covers only part of the theoretical space of Figure 2 (the Southern and Eastern parts are omitted) and that there is no common metric for the two dimensions. Great Britain represents pluralitarian democracy, Sweden majoritarian democracy, and Switzerland supermajoritarian democracy. A country like Australia is a more difficult case, but the conceptualization adopted here suggests that it might well represent a different—much less straightforward—form of majoritarianism. While the Australian House of Representatives is elected by Alternative Vote, the Senate (which is a partisan rather than a federal chamber) is elected by Single Transferable Vote. Hence policy-making in Australia often resembles policymaking under minority governments in countries like Sweden or Norway: one or two-party governments have to make compromises with smaller opposition parties in order to get their legislative program passed. The difference is that bargaining and compromise in Australia happens in a different institutional venue.\footnote{Bach (2003) rightly emphasizes that the Australian system works much better than widely believed and that it strikes a delicate but good balance between Westminster-style centralism and USA-style decentralism. However, he does not discuss the instrumental or intrinsic merits of the Australian system in comparison to “true” majoritarian parliamentarism.}

Note that some countries are positioned quite differently than in Lijphart’s (1999) analysis. For instance, Finland seems extremely “majoritarian” on Lijphart’s FU-dimension because Lijphart neglects supermajority rules within the Eduskunta. Austria and the Netherlands appear less supermajoritarian in Figure 3 because their weak forms of bicameralism and (in Austria) federalism get no weight. As noted, there will likely be reasonable disagreement about the adequacy of the details of the proposed coding scheme. The following discussion is unaffected by this.

5 Explaining behavioral patterns of elite interaction

The two-dimensional, institutionally focused measurement of (parliamentary) democracies allows us to systematically build a bridge between the work of Lijphart and others on the one hand and (rational) actor-theoretic approaches like that of Tse-
belis (2002) on the other. For if we omit the patterns of cabinet formation and dissolution from the measurement of democratic structures, the difference between the two approaches lies mainly in the part of the overall causal field on which they focus. Tsebelis begins his rational choice analysis where the institutional mapping of democracies ends: with partisan and institutional veto actors and their institutionally defined resources and incentives. This section demonstrates this connection. Most importantly, it takes an important causal mechanism discussed by Lijphart (1999) and Goodin (1996) seriously and analyzes how this mechanism may interact with others—i.e. how its workings may depend on the institutional context. The result of this analysis confirms the need to treat “true” majoritarianism as a type of its own rather than some mixture of (untrue) “majoritarianism” and “consensus democracy”. I will first compare oversized and then undersized coalitions in majoritarian and supermajoritarian democracies.

5.1 Oversized coalitions in majoritarian and supermajoritarian democracies

In section 4 I measured institutional structures of parliamentary democracy on the basis of the voter support needed to get into office and to change the legislative status quo. Now we have to start at a later stage of the causal chain: “[V]otes do not form coalitions, only seats do” (Taagepera 2002: 234). Consider the simple conceptualization in Figure 4. The horizontal axis shows the minimum number of seats (S) necessary to securely change the legislative status quo. Values can range from S/2+1 to the theoretical extreme of S (unanimity). The vertical axis shows the actual legislative support of the governing coalition. We can distinguish four types of governments. The horizontal line divides majority and minority governments in a narrow sense; minority governments in a narrow sense do not have an absolute majority of seats. The diagonal line divides majority and minority governments in a broad sense; minority governments in a broad sense do have an absolute majority of seats but not the majority required to securely change the status quo.

[Figure 4]

Figure 5 shows an empirical snapshot for the beginning of the year 2000. The horizontal axis reproduces the veto point index of Figure 3 (reflecting the institutional
changes of the 1990s). The vertical axis shows the actual percentage of seats held by the members of the governing coalition. The figure highlights the difference, discussed above, between two types of oversized coalitions. The Finnish “Rainbow coalition” (1995-2002), which included post-communists and Conservatives and had 70 percent legislative support, was not “backed” by supermajoritarian decision-rules (anymore). This shows that oversized coalitions may be an equilibrium result under majority rule. In fact, one may argue that, given PR and a certain structure of the party system, legislative majority rule itself may be conducive to forming oversized coalitions. *Formateur*-parties may have an incentive to seek broad governing coalitions in order to achieve more stable decisions (McGann 2004b: 74). Some of the considerations in the formation of the Rainbow coalition may be interpreted in this way, especially given the deep economic crisis Finland was in at the time (Jungar 2000: Chapter 6, esp. 288-317). Something similar may be true for the formation of legislative coalitions. In Denmark there is a long tradition of seeking broad consensus on basic reforms even if narrow majorities would be sufficient. The fundamental restructuring of the Danish income tax system in the 1980s, for instance, was based on a compromise with the oppositional Social Democrats even though their support was not numerically necessary (Ganghof Forthcoming).

If the party system is multidimensional, majority rule may be conducive to “consensual” behavioral patterns because minorities have a chance of becoming part of the majority in the future (Miller 1996). To maximize this chance, they have to offer their cooperation to low costs (McGann 2004: 71). The development of Green parties is a case in point. These parties did not have a constitutional veto right to prevent the usage of nuclear energy, and this has probably contributed to their movement into the centre of the policy space on many other issues. Only in this way could they hope to become part of a majority coalition that ends nuclear energy usage. It is not too surprising, therefore, that the Finnish Greens were ready to make extreme concessions on almost all issues except nuclear energy (Aarnio and Pekonen 1999; Jungar 2000: Chapter 6).

Hence (truly) majoritarianism institutions are generally compatible with consensual behavior. However, if disagreement between the actors runs too deep to allow broad
majorities, the search for consensus may be stopped, thus avoiding deadlock and preserving political equality. For example, the Social Democratic-led majority coalition in Denmark (1993-94) could pass its tax reform without broad consensus, and the Finnish Rainbow coalition could, in 2002, outvote the Greens in order to pass a fifth nuclear energy plant (which caused the Greens to leave the coalition).

In addition, in “consociational” democracies with majoritarian constitutions consociational practices could weaken over time. In the Netherlands the consociational model (societal segmentation and elite cooperation) does not exist anymore, and the patterns of consensus-building largely follow the necessities of majoritarian countries: “Parliamentary majorities might be necessary, but this did not imply all-party governments” (Koole and Daalder 2002: 40). Austria was recently governed by rather narrow majority coalitions which have, in part, actively sought to weaken “consensual” forms of interaction (e.g. Pelinka 2002: 154).

The important difference between majoritarian and supermajoritarian democracies also shows in the political economy literature. Consider first two examples for the potential confusion invited by Lijphart’s conflation of these two types in his EP-Dimension. Berggren and Karlson (2003: 116-7) argue—in line with Buchanan/Tullock (1962) and Riker (1982) – that supermajoritarian types of democracy (not their term!) are superior. As empirical evidence they refer to Lijphart’s performance tests, which focus mainly on the EP-Dimension, and write: “consensus democracies (which in most respects corresponds to Riker’s liberal-democracy type) outperform majoritarian democracies of the Westminster type.” This statement is misleading because some of the best-performing “consensus democracies” on the EP-Dimension are truly majoritarian and hence have little in common with Riker’s preferred type of democracy. Similarly, Cohen (Forthcoming: 19) reads Lijphart’s results as suggesting that “consensual democracies” show stronger political representation for women, greater economic equality, and stronger welfare states:

Of particular relevance is the not-wildly-implausible … claim that consensual institutions are associated with a strong welfare state and greater economic equality because those institutions, which demand broad political coalitions, foster a more solidaristic and inclusive ethos. (Cohen Forthcoming: 19, my emphasis, S.G.)

This statement, too, is ambiguous and potentially misleading. For the results that Cohen cites refer only to the EP-Dimension and are to a significant extent driven by
truly majoritarian democracies. “Consensualism” on the FU-dimension (i.e. decentralization and institutionalized minority vetoes) actually has, if anything, the opposite effect (Huber, Ragin and Stephens 1993; Lijphart 1999: 299-300; Huber and Stephens 2001). Iversen and Soskice (2003) make an argument that avoids the misunderstanding which Lijphart’s approach invites. They argue that proportional representation has tended to favor centre-left coalitions, thus leading to welfare state expansion. However, this argument only holds, they claim, if the coalitions demanded are not too large, i.e. if the political right does not have an institutionalized veto, such as in Switzerland.

5.2 The division of responsibility and non-accommodating behavior in majoritarian and supermajoritarian democracies

The difference between majoritarian and supermajoritarian democracies is also important when we analyze “antagonistic” behavior of parties. As shown above, Lijphart tends to associate such behavior with “majority rule”. At the same time, he suggests that Goodin’s (1996) distinction between “joint” and “divided” responsibility of actor’s for legislative acts is congruent with his two empirical dimensions of democracy. In this section I want to suggest, rather, that it is majority rule itself that allows for consensual behavioral patterns even in the presence of divided responsibility.

Goodin (1996: 331) argues that if actors that do not share responsibility vis-à-vis the voters have to agree on policy change, their electoral interests may prevent agreement even if their substantive policy preferences do not. His reference point is divided government in the US (e.g., Sundquist 1988; Quirk and Nesmith 2000), but similar arguments have been made for minority governments in a broad sense in parliamentary systems (on German bicameralism, see Scharpf 1997: 315-18). Opposition parties may eschew agreement with the governing parties in order to hurt them electorally— or to avoid being hurt themselves. If this is the causal mechanism, it should also apply to minority governments in a narrow sense (cf. Huber 1999; Ganghof 2003). Whenever the actual legislative support of the government is below the required legislative support, we have a form of divided government in parliamentary systems. As
Figure 5 shows, the first cabinet of Bondevik in Norway only controlled around a fourth of all seats in the Norwegian Storting.

Hence if we avoid a biased interpretation of behavioral patterns in Scandinavia and take Goodin’s conjecture seriously, we are left with a puzzle: If divided responsibility may provide opposition parties with strong incentives to behave in a non-accommodating way and eschew compromises with the government, why do we observe “consensual” patterns of behavior in Scandinavia? One answer is that legislative majority rule itself may be conducive to observed “consensual” behavior patterns. More precisely, majority rule and the power it gives to the agenda-setter can counterweight antagonistic incentives of opposition parties. To develop this claim, I combine arguments made by Tsebelis (2002) and Ganghof/Bräuninger (Ganghof and Bräuninger Forthcoming). I will start by briefly reviewing the basic spatial model.

[Figure 6]

Figure 6 displays a two-dimensional policy space. The points G and O1-O3 represent the ideal points of a government party and three opposition parties. SQ is the legislative status quo. We first focus on the non-dashed indifference curves of the standard model. The basic assumption is that all actors try to move legislation as close as possible to their own ideal point. Hence they prefer all points within their indifference curve to the status quo. This set of points is called preferred-to-set. The intersection of all actors whose consent is required for changing the status quo under a certain decision rule is called winset.

Figure 6 allows us to explain the importance of one form of agenda-setting power: proposal power. Assume that government G has minority status and each of the three opposition parties Oi has a sufficient number of seats to help the government to an absolute majority. Under majority rule, G can pick its favorite partner, in this case O1. G has proposal power if it can confront O1 with a take-it-or-leave-it proposal („closed rule“). In this case, G can freely choose a policy within the intersection of its preferred-to-set and the set of O1. In the example, G can choose within its own preferred-to-set and thus pick its own ideal point.

Tsebelis (2002: 111-4) argues persuasively that agenda-setting power is one – perhaps the – crucial source of “executive dominance”. The main instruments are the ability to
link a substantive issue to a vote of confidence (Huber 1996b) and the ability to make the “last” amendment (Heller 2001). Tsebelis also argues that the situation depicted in Figure 6 is in many ways typical for (one-party) minority governments, so that these governments do not generally have to make (significant) compromises. In other words, one-party minority governments can essentially govern like one-party majority governments. He acknowledges, however, that the usefulness of proposal power depends on the veto player constellation and hence indirectly on the type of democracy. Figure 6 makes this clear. If we increase the majority requirement so that the government needs two of three opposition parties to change the status quo, the government is not able to get its own ideal point. It can make a deal with $O_1$ and $O_3$ or with $O_1$ and $O_2$, but its own ideal point is not acceptable to either $O_2$ or $O_3$. Of course, things get worse for the government if we move to a unanimity requirement. The government’s proposal power is now completely worthless, because the winset, within which the government could choose freely, is empty.

Now, Ganghof and Bräuninger (Forthcoming) extend the standard model in a very simple way in order to capture the ideas of authors like Goodin or Scharpf (see also Ganghof 2003). They formalize the following idea: Due to their electoral and office-related interests, actors do not only care about how much they gain in policy terms by replacing the status quo with some alternative but also about how far this alternative is still away from their actual ideal point. Each actor, depending on its institutional role in the policymaking system, reveals some eagerness to achieve policy change and some sensitivity for policy sacrifices. Ganghof and Bräuninger show that the balance of these two orientations can be expressed in terms of a sacrifice ratio specifying how close the status quo replacement must be to their own ideal point before they agree to replace the status quo. Opposition parties will only help the government to implement its legislative agenda if this does not leave them worse off in electoral terms. As a result, their sacrifice ratios and preferred-to-sets tend to shrink. The dashed indifference curves in Figure 6 visualize the argument. The preferred-to-sets of all three opposition parties are reduced. They only agree to proposals that are at least 50 percent closer to their own ideal points than the status quo. In the terminology of Ganghof and Bräuninger, all three opposition parties are “non-accommodating”. The preferred-to-set of the government is assumed to remain unchanged.
The consequence of non-accommodating behavior of opposition parties is intuitively clear. Since the agreement between parties becomes more difficult, the flexibility of the government in choosing its support party becomes even more important. In Figure 6 this results in the fact that even if supermajority requirements are below unanimity, no agreement can be found. The government would need either $O_2$ or $O_3$, in addition to $O_1$, in order to reach a sufficient majority but is unable to make a sufficiently attractive offer to these non-accommodating parties. The result is a type of strategic disagreement. Things look different under majority rule, however, since the government can rely on the support of $O_1$ alone. While this party is just as non-accommodating as the other parties (sacrifice ratio of .5), the location of its ideal point is such that the government can offer sufficient policy gain. If the government has proposal power, it proposes policy $e_1$ and $O_1$ accepts.

Hence, if we take Goodin’s conjecture seriously, we may have to modify the conclusions of both Lijphart and Tsebelis. On the one hand, Tsebelis underestimates the bargaining power of opposition parties because he neglects the ways in which their electoral incentives may provide them with a credible threat to reject certain proposals that are closer to their ideal point than the status quo (but not close enough). This threat is a counterweight to the government’s proposal power. On the other hand, Lijphart underestimates the possibility that consensual behavior patterns may be the result of majoritarian instead of supermajoritarian institutions. Majority rule gives the government the flexibility to choose the most “favorable” support party and thereby acts as a counterweight to non-accommodating behavior of opposition parties. (This fact may in turn prompt the other opposition parties to adopt a more accommodating stance, thus further decreasing the likelihood of strategic deadlock.)

To the extent that this argument is along the right lines, it can explain seemingly unrelated observations: that we do frequently see non-accommodating opposition party behavior in the case of minority governments in the narrow sense (Ganghof and Bräuninger Forthcoming); that actual cases of obvious strategic deadlock seem to be nevertheless rare in majoritarian countries; and that strategic deadlock is a major (political science) issue in supermajoritarian countries with minority governments in a broad sense, such as Germany (e.g., Scharpf 2000).
Note also that the analysis highlights interaction effects between Lijphart’s variables that have to be ignored in his approach: First, whether or not there are oppositional (potentially non-accommodating) veto players does not only depend on the cabinet type (minority government in a narrow sense) but also on the number and strength of veto points (minority government in a broad sense). Second, the non-accommodating behavior of opposition parties can be a counterweight to executive dominance (agenda-setter power). Hence this seems to be a case where “non-consensual” behavior is conducive to a “consensual” characteristic, namely executive-legislative balance. Third, the extent to which this is true depends on the size of the winset and hence indirectly on the type of democracy. Just as the credible veto threat of the opposition parties is a counterweight to the government’s proposal power, majority rule is a counterweight to the opposition parties’ veto threat.

6 Limits and Potential

This section discusses the limits and potential of the suggested approach. Both issues are closely connected to the focus on parliamentary systems. On the one hand, the two-dimensional, institutionally focused measurement of democracies can certainly be extended to presidential systems. In fact, other authors have already developed approaches along those lines (Powell 1989; 2000; McGann 2004a) (see also Gerring, Thacker and Moreno 2004; Gerring and Thacker Forthcoming). On the other hand, the resulting increase in institutional heterogeneity necessarily dilutes the conceptual basis of the measurement. It also complicates the normative discussion. For if there is more than one chain of delegation from voters to legislators, things get more complicated (Cohen no date). For instance, one may argue that once you have presidentialism, PR is a bad idea because it increases the likelihood of divided government and hence deadlock (e.g., Cox 1998). Hence whatever intrinsic quality PR might have, its instrumental qualities might render it unattractive under presidentialism.19

19 Somewhat surprisingly, Christiano (1996) does not discuss the difference between presidentialism and parliamentarism. However, his normative conception of intrinsically just democracy clearly implies a preference for PR-parliamentarism with strong parties. Hence parliamentarism
Again, I think that the resulting tradeoff between increasing sample size and increasing unit homogeneity can only be decided pragmatically, i.e. depending on the research question at hand. If our goal is to make large-N comparisons, we have to choose indicators that can be easily and consistently applied across a large range of political systems (Gerring, Thacker and Moreno 2004; Gerring and Thacker Forthcoming). However, if our goal is to unify our empirical and normative understanding of parliamentary systems, an improved typology and measurement of such systems might be very useful.20

Consider oversized cabinets as an example: As noted above, Lijphart (1999: 103) discusses the fact that oversized coalitions may be partly induced by supermajority rules. In fact, there is the so-called Lijphart/Sjölin-conjecture according to which oversized coalitions are formed in order to secure majorities in (strong) second chambers (cf. Lijphart 1984; Sjölin 1993). As explained above, this type of strategic adjustment of cabinets to legislative rules cannot be analyzed systematically in Lijphart’s (1999) approach. By contrast, in the approach suggested here, a fruitful engagement with specialized literatures becomes possible. For instance, Volden and Carruba (2004) test the Lijphart/Sjölin conjecture as one of several hypotheses about the formation of oversized cabinets in parliamentary democracies (including Switzerland) but find no empirical support. If we consider the potential additivity and functional equivalence of veto points, however, this result may not be surprising. Rather than looking at one type of veto point in isolation, it might be necessary to look at an adequately constructed veto point index (and possibly interact it with other variables such as the effective number of parties).

Finally, a focus on parliamentary democracies may allow us to do the opposite of what Lijphart did: Rather than moving from one-dimensional conceptualization to two-dimensional measurement, we can use the two-dimensional conceptualization to motivate a one-dimensional measurement, namely the rough approximation of the

may be seen as having greater intrinsic quality than presidentialism. However, under some conditions, presidentialism may be instrumentally preferable (e.g., Shugart 1999).

20 It is also widely acknowledged that many existing approaches, including that of Lijphart, fail to convincingly bridge the differences between parliamentary and presidential systems (Kaiser 1997: 431; Taagepera 2003: 15).
diagonal in Figure 2 above. This is much more difficult to do if presidential and parliamentary systems are mixed. The development of the veto point literature makes this very clear. For presidential systems it is plausible to treat single-member district electoral systems as an additional veto point/access point for interest groups (Huber, Ragin and Stephens 1993) because one main instrument to enforce party discipline, the vote of confidence procedure, is lacking (Huber 1996a; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998). For parliamentary systems the opposite is plausible (Schmidt 1993: 387): PR may be considered a quasi-veto point insofar as it tends to increase the number of parties. If both regime types are mixed, consistent coding is difficult. Therefore, the electoral system has disappeared from many indices (Schmidt 2000: 352-3; Huber and Stephens 2001: 372, Fn. 10). If we focus on parliamentary systems, a rough index that includes the electoral system can be interpreted as an indicator of an extended spectrum of democracy (cf. Nagel 2000).

7 Conclusion

This paper has developed three main arguments. First, Lijphart’s approach to the measurement of democratic structures suffers from two basic problems: a) the use of factor analysis (which is based on an inadequate formalist understanding of the coherence between political system characteristics) and b) the insufficient distinction between formal rules and behavioral patterns.

Second, there is an attractive alternative approach which partly draws on the work of Lijphart (1999), Powell (2000) and Nagel (2000) as well as the literature on institutional veto points and which focuses (as much as possible) on formal rules. Democratic structures are measured by the disproportionality of the electoral system, on the one hand, and institutional veto points (understood as quasi-supermajority rules), on the other. This approach has a rather clear conceptual basis, the basic question being: The support of how many of N voters is needed to securely change the legislative status quo? The measurement distinguishes three main types of democracy, thus highlighting the distinctiveness of “true” majoritarian democracy (Nagel 2000). It links to normative debates on democracy, especially about the tradeoffs between the intrinsic and instrumental qualities of democracies.
Third, the measurement allows for the possibility that similar behavioral patterns are explained by different combinations of causal mechanisms. It also enables us to build a bridge between the approach of Lijphart (and others) and the work of rational choice theorists like Tsebelis. Veto player theory suggests that it is the interaction of the electoral and legislative systems that influences the behavioral patterns of political elites. Extended veto player analysis also enables us to systematically analyze the effects of joint or divided responsibility of representatives for policy outputs (Goodin 1996)—a difference strongly highlighted by Lijphart (1999).

The two most important substantive results of this paper also concern the widely neglected type of truly majoritarian democracy. From a normative perspective, the most important variant of this type—which combines the electoral proportionality principle with the legislative majority principle—is the most straightforward institutional embodiment of the basic democratic value of political equality. It privileges neither an acting minority nor a blocking minority of the people. In positive terms, the analysis shows that legislative majority rule, if combined with electoral proportionality, does not necessarily prevent behavioral patterns generally perceived as consensual. To the contrary: Under some background conditions it can contribute to them. The so-called “instability” of majority rule can provide incentives to build broad governmental or legislative coalitions; and the power which majority rule hands to the agenda setter can act as a counterweight to electoral veto incentives of particular (opposition) parties. To better understand the background conditions under which majority rule can have these effects, is an important task of comparative political science. Yet this task can only be fulfilled if formal rules and behavioral patterns are separated analytically.
**Figure 1a:** Lijphart’s approach

![Diagram](image1)

**Figure 1b:** The alternative proposal

![Diagram](image2)
Figure 2: Theoretical types of parliamentary democracy

Notes: The diagonal lines between the three main types are merely included to aid interpretation. The conceptualization implies a continuum of “types” of democracies (see Nagel 2000).
**Figure 3: Two-dimensional mapping of parliamentary democracies, 1971-96**

Sources: Disproportionality: Lijphart (1999), veto point index: see text.

Notes: Reference lines = means.
Figure 4: Theoretical cases of divided government in parliamentary democracies

Typically required legislative majority to securely change the status quo

Notes: See text.
**Figure 5:** Empirical cases of divided government in parliamentary democracies, 1.1.2000

Sources: Legislative cabinet support: data set of Hendrik Zorn, veto point index: see text.

Notes: Reference line = 50% legislative support.
Figure 6: Coalition-building with varying decision rules and levels of accommodation.

Notes: See text.
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