Politicising Parliamentary Influence.
A Comparison of 18 Western European Legislatures.

Olivier Rozenberg
Sciences Po – Paris, CEVIPOF

European consortium for political research Joint Sessions,
Granada, 14-19 April 2005

Workshop n° 7. Evaluating, Comparing and Classifying Legislatures

Olivier Rozenberg
63 rue Blomet
F - 75015 Paris
phone: 1 33 47 34 13 02
e-mail: orozen@hotmail.com
Introduction

This paper proposes a discussion of existing and possible criteria for the classification of the lower houses of 18 Western European parliaments (AUT, BEL, DEN, FIN, FRA, GER, GRE, ICE, IRE, ITA, LUX, NET, NOR, POR, SWE, SWI, SPA, UK, see at the end for abbreviations). With the exception of Switzerland, political systems of Western European countries are all parliamentary: each government is accountable to parliament or to the lower house of parliament. However, institutional variations between parliaments can be observed and explain that some houses are more influential than others. In his famous differentiation between a majoritarian and a consensus model of democracy, Arend Lijphart opposes for instance: “Executive-legislative relationships in which the executive is dominant versus executive-legislative balance of power” (LIJPHART 1999: 3). France, Greece and the United Kingdom that belong to the Westminster model should have a more dominated parliament than representatives of the consensus model as Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland (Ibid: 312). Thus, the existing literature proposes different classifications of the parliamentary influence based on constitutional rules (WOLDENDORP et al. 2000), institutional procedures (DÖRING 1995a) as well as the type of cabinet: the duration of ministerial teams (LIJPHART 1999), the parliamentary base of the executive and the number of parties represented in the government (WOLDENDORP et al. 2000).

The argument of this paper is that those different types of classification express rather restrictive conceptions of parliamentary influence. More precisely, three critics can be addressed to the existing literature:

1. Short-term influence is preferred to median and long-term influence. Existing studies concentrate on the parliamentary influence over day-to-day legislation. Since the production of public policies is far from being the only element of a given political system, the efficiency of a parliament over other areas should be estimated.

2. Formal rules are preferred to informal rules. The institutional framing of the parliaments tends to be considered in a narrow constitutional perspective to the detriment of informal practices and norms that characterise a given political system.

3. An adversative conception of the relation between the executive and the legislative power supports, more or less explicitly, the conception of parliamentary influence. Grounded in Montesquieu’s philosophy, this conception asserts that the more a government is influential the less a parliament is powerful. Since MPs and ministers control each other in a parliamentary system and since they all belong to the same political parties, they are some doubt that a simple linear relation associates the two powers. Moreover, the
highlight on the conflict between parliaments and governments tends to underestimate
other elements of conflict characteristic of a political system, between parties and between
individual ambitions.

The conception of parliamentary influence should be politicised in the sense that the
power of a parliament depends on politics and not only policy considerations. After examining
the difficulty to compare parliaments (1) and the existing classification based on the type of
governments (2) and institutional rules (3), this paper develops a critic of the mainstream
implicit conception of parliamentary influence (4) and proposes exploratory variables based
on a middle-term (5) and a long-term (6) perspective. It should be strongly emphasized that
the proposed measures are cumulative and not alternative instruments. The different variables
are thus compared in a last section (7).

1. The difficulty to classify Western European legislatures

The comparative literature, specialised or not in legislative studies, seems very
reluctant to classify European parliaments according to their influence. Cautiously, Philip
Norton hierarchies as follows European parliaments according to their capacity to influence
public policies (NORTON 1998: 197, see also NORTON 1996: 146):

ITA > NET = SWE = FIN > GER > BEL = UK > IRL = FRA.

Based on a specific expertise of each case study, this kind of classification requires to be
grounded on common comparative criteria. The strength of the assemblies hardly ever
constitutes an element of differentiation between European countries for two reasons: each
system is parliamentary and each parliament is weak. As stated by A. Lijphart, European
governments “are responsible to the legislature in the sense that they are dependent from
office by a legislative vote of no-confidence or censure” (LIJPHART 1984: 68). A
government cannot remain in office without the consent of a parliamentary majority – or to be
more precise: a government cannot remain in office if an explicit majority wants to defeat
him. Variations between Constitutions tend to be insignificant compared with this specific
Jaap Woldendorp, Hans Keman et Ian Budge have built a scale of the relation between the
executive and the legislative taking into account the attributions of the Parliament, the
government and the head of State regarding the vote of investiture, the vote of confidence and
the right of dissolution (WOLDENDORP et al. 2000: 50-58). A synthetic index has been
developed from those different variables. Table 1 presents the result for the lower Chambers of seventeen West European parliaments. A positive score implies dominance of parliament over the executive power (the government and the head of State), a negative score implies a domination of the parliament and the author estimates that “the closer the score is to 0 the more balanced the relationship […] is assumed to be” (Ibid: 57).

Table 1. The Constitutional relation between the Executive and the Legislative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0,5</td>
<td>ITA, GER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>DEN, GRE, IRE, LUX, NET, NOR, POR, SPA, SWE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0,5</td>
<td>AUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>BEL, FIN, ICE, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1,5</td>
<td>FRA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WOLDENDORP et al. 2000: 56-57. Note: 0 = Balanced; - = toward government; + = toward parliament.

Variations regarding cabinet inauguration and no-confidence votes are far from being anecdotic (BERGMAN et al. 2003: 146-167). Constitutional rules may or may not favour for instance minority governments. However, as more than half of the parliaments are positioned at the same level, we can infer from Table 1 that the constitutional structure does not provide a relevant criterion in the differentiation between parliaments, with the exception of the French Fifteenth Republic.

The second reason for the scarcity of the classifications between legislatures is the weakness of legislative power. Backbenchers MPs in Europe tend to be dominated by the leaders of their party and those leaders tend to occupy cabinet position when in the majority. In other words, MPs that belong to the governing coalition are controlled by the executive power and opposition MPs do not really participate to the making of the legislation. Obviously the level of domination is not equivalent in each European parliament. The cohesiveness of the parliamentary groups, the discipline of the MPs, the capacity of the whips, the strength of the committees structure and the clarity of the cleavage between the governing coalition and the opposition vary. However, most of the legislation examined by the MPs originates from the cabinet rather than the parliament and the defeat of a government bill is an exception. As pointed by David Olson: “In most nations […] the 90 percent rule

1 The index is made of three elements:
   a. The parliamentary prerogatives regarding the existence of the government: is the vote of investiture necessary condition to govern? Is the vote of confidence necessary condition to continue to govern?.
   b. The prerogative of the government towards the parliament: can government ignore losing a vote of confidence? Can the government or the Prime minister dissolve Parliament?
   c. The extent to which the Head of State can influence the composition and the existence of a government: is the Head of State directly involved in the formation of government? Can she dissolve Parliament? Does she have executive power?

A score is given to each question (0,5 or 1) and the index is calculated as follows: (a – (b + c)).
seems to apply: 90 percent of legislation is initiated by the executive, and 90 percent of what the executive wants, the executive gets” (OLSON 1994: 134; see also OLSON 1980: 174). Likewise, P. Norton considered that the policy-making power of seven European parliaments (ITA, NET, SWE, GER, UK, FRA, IRE) was modest: the houses may reject or modify a bill but they cannot propose alternative policies (NORTON 1990: 4-5). The dominance of the cabinet in the making of the law has even led some specialists as Christian Henning to propose a model of law production by government as a natural monopoly (HENNING 1995). Mark Crain, Randall Holcombe and Robert Tollison argued indeed that in parliamentary systems the government “is the single producer of political decisions [...] analogous to the single firm in a natural monopoly” (CRAIN et al. 1979: 54)².

Apart from “[giving] assent, on behalf of a political community that extends beyond the executive authority, to binding measures of public policy” (NORTON 1990: 1), European parliaments essential role consists in selecting a team of ministers in charge of the day-to-day policy-making. Backbenchers MPs may control the government and scrutinise its policies as a principal controls its delegate (STRØM 2003). However they are not supposed to implement directly their own legislative agenda. In that perspective, European MPs are less influential then American Congressmen (OLSON 1994: 133) or even members of the European Parliament (LORD 2003). Yet, even if variations of power between European parliaments are less significant than variations between them and the Congress or the European Parliament, they do exist. Some lower chambers are more active and influential than others. In some countries, governments have sometimes to resign due to an (anticipated) deficit of parliamentary support whereas the situation never occurs in others. The involvement in European affairs of the national parliaments of the European Union’s member States constitutes a relevant example for such variations: the Folketing can enact binding mandates of negotiation for the Danish minister in the Council whereas most of the parliaments of Southern Europe have found difficulties to obtain the right to give a facultative opinion (BERGMAN 2000; RAUNIO, WIBERG 2000).

2. Existing classifications based on the stability of the cabinet

Legislatures of Europe worth being compared and classified on a macro quantitative perspective but such a measure is delicate to establish given both their similarity and their weakness. This characteristics explains that some authors have decided to detect the

² Quoted by DÖRING 2004: 144.
parliament influence out of the strength or the weakness of the governments. Cabinets are easier to compare. They can be composed of various groupings of political parties from single-party cabinets to coalition ones. A more or less large parliamentary base from minority cabinets to national union governments supports them. They have a specific duration: a particular event like a resignation, a vote of no-confidence or an electoral defeat explains their replacing. The principle of the various indexes that can be found in the literature is twofold:

1. A durable and/or single-party and/or majority cabinet is more powerful than a short and/or coalition and/or minority cabinet.

2. The more a cabinet is powerful, the less influential the parliament is supposed to be.

Thus, A. Lijphart uses cabinet duration as an indicator for his *Index of executive dominance* (LIJPHART 1999: 130-133). Cabinet durability is supposed to give an account of the balance of power between the executive and the legislative. In the building of his index, A. Lijphart combines two measures of cabinet duration, one based on the change of the partisan composition of the cabinet and one more classically based on the political events affecting the life of a cabinet (general elections, change in Prime ministership or of the parliamentary base of the cabinet). The first column of the Table 6 in appendix presents the Lijphart’s index of executive dominance for the period 1971-1996. Austria, Germany, the Luxembourg and the United Kingdom experienced the longer cabinets (more than five years) whereas the durability of the Italian, Finish or Belgian governments do not last more than two years.

Regarding the partisan composition of the governments, two series of variables can give an account of the strength of the parliament. The first element is the opposition between single-party and coalition governments. The government is supposed to take a better account of the parties’ positions if they make part of the government. As those parties are present in the Parliament, the frequency of coalition government may be an indicator of the strength of the Parliament. The second element opposes minority to majority government. The assumption is that the Parliament is more influential when he can threaten the existence of the government. In that case, taking account of attitudes and opinion of a large number of deputies becomes a necessity for the government. Even if major bargaining can still take place outside of the Parliament, the deputies may be more influential since they personally possess a part of the capacity to censure the cabinet. Table 2 presents the proportions of

---

3 A. Lijphart realised two adjustments of his index, attributing “impressionistically” the value of 1 for Switzerland (the chairmanship of the Federal Council changes each year) and the maximum value of 5.52 for France because it “must” be so (LIJPHART 1999: 134).
minority cabinets, coalition cabinets and single-party minority cabinets per country. The average level of support of the government in the lower houses and the proportion of cabinets defeated due to a lack of parliamentary support have been added⁴.

Table 2. Minority governments and coalition governments by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUS</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEL</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEN</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICE</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRE</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITA</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUX</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POR</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWE</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>80.95</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWI</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98.9</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources and notes:
- Support in Parliament 1945-1998 % of cases: WOLDENDORP et al. 2000: 79. Support is measured through the percentage of seats held by parties supporting the government.
- When the current regime is of more recent regime origin than 1945, only this period is covered. For instance, German case begins in 1949, France in 1958 with the Fifth Republic (except for columns 5 and 6), Portugal in 1976 and Spain in 1978.

The column “single-party majority cabinets” proposes an association of the measures related to the parliamentary base of the cabinet and its partisan composition. J. Woldendorp and his colleagues have generalised such a calculation building a Type of Government index.

⁴ Lieven de Winter based his calculation of the proportion of cabinets defeated due to a lack of parliamentary support on the data of J. Woldendorp and his colleagues. Those latter indicate that “they have counted every instance when parties either withdrew support from government, or there occurred a (successful) vote of no confidence (or similar parliamentary action)”. Cf DE WINTER 1995 138; WOLDENDORP et al. 2000: 17.
(WOLDENDORP et al. 2000: 17-18 and 79-80). Their scale in six positions is made as follows: type 1 includes single-party majority cabinets; type 2 minimal winning coalitions; type 3 surplus coalitions; type 4 single party minority governments; type 5 multi-party minority governments and type 6 caretaker governments. The second column of the Table 6 in appendix presents the medium score for each Western European countries. This score has been calculated associating each government between 1945 and 1998 to one of the six types. This index establishes that British and Austrian governments are the more stable of the sample as opposed to cabinets in Denmark, Italy and Finland. In Denmark and Sweden most of the governments are supported by a parliamentary minority. In Belgium, Iceland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, governments are always or almost always made of several parties.

As established among others by A. Lijphart, single party cabinets tend to last longer than coalition cabinets (LIJPHART 1999: 138). In other words, the two selected indices have a rate of correlation 0.533 (0.623 without France) as shown at Table 7 in appendix. The level is rather high but not as much as expected since the two indexes are supposed to measure the executive strength. Some countries offer specific configurations: Austrian and French governments are usually made of several parties and do not change often, Greece being in the opposite position. Table 2 also makes clear that the cabinets defeated by the parliament due to a lack of parliamentary support are more frequently minority cabinets than coalition cabinets. Those observations let think that data relative to the stability of the cabinet are imperfect proxy for the estimation of the strength of a parliament. Regarding coalition cabinets, we know since Maurice Duverger that the number of parties of a political system largely depends on the electoral rules chosen (DUVERGER 1954). The formation of coalition cabinets thus depends of factors exterior to the balance of power between parliaments and governments. Regarding minority cabinets, Kaare Strøm has established that they form for varying reasons (STRØM 1990). Some leaders may decide to establish a minority cabinet form a position of weakness because no alternative is offered but in other situations, parties sometimes can choice and prefer to form minority cabinets. Some institutional prerogatives enable to govern without a parliamentary majority. Such institutional variables can also be taken into account in order to evaluate the relative strength of a given parliament.

Thus, each score is calculated on the basis of the number of governments and not of their duration. A shorter period has been chosen for the countries that experienced more recently democracy (GRE, POR, SPA). As the index adds unfortunately France’s IVth and Vth Republic, the measure is of little interest in that case.

On the required caution in the interpretation of the correlation rate, see note at Table 7.
3. Existing classifications based on institutional parliamentary rules

If European parliaments obey to the same major constitutional logic, they are framed by different institutional rules, written in the Constitution or not. Those rules give to each house more or less autonomy vis-à-vis the government when legislating and when scrutinizing. Herbert Döring and his colleagues have closely studied the existing rules and their effect on the passage of legislation during the eighties in the 18 Western European democracies ([DÖRING 1995a, DÖRING HALLERBERG 2004a]. H. Döring particularly established an Index of agenda control based on seven measures related to the authority of the government to determine plenary agenda (1), on the financial parliamentary initiatives authorised (2), on the existence of a plenary procedure before the committee stage (3), on the authority of committees to rewrite government bills (4), on the control of the timetable in legislative committees (5), on the curtailing of debate vote before the final vote of a bill in the plenary (6) and on the maximum lifespan of a bill pending approval after which it lapses if not adopted (7) (DÖRING 1995b). In order to develop simple comparative measures, I have added only the first, the fourth and the fifth of those factors in the building of an institutional index. The first element has been selected given the strategic significance of the capacity to determine the order of the day as a preliminary stage to the decision. The two other elements refer to the influence of the committee stage on the legislative process. If specialists of legislative studies differ on the role of this stage, they all agree that committees - that is limited transparty groups of MPs concentrated on a specific field often endowed with specific prerogatives and often meeting privately - play a central part in Parliament daily business (MATTSON STRØM 2004). According to P. Norton, the capacity of a parliament to influence public policies mainly depends on the degree of institutionalisation of the house understood as the existence of a structured system of committees (NORTON 1998). K. Strøm has detailed different criteria relative to the significance of committees, for instance the adequacy between the committee system and ministerial departments (STRØM 1990). The two measures of H. Döring seems particularly relevant since they focus not only of the strength of the committee but on the level of control of its activities by the government. Table 3 presents the three measures (first factor at the first column, fourth factor at the second column and fifth factor of the third column) and their addition for the building of an institutional index7. The George Tsebelis’s index of agenda control has been added in order to

7 As the first scale has seven levels and each of the two others four levels, the institutional index gives nearly the same importance to the control of the plenary agenda (column 1) and to the committee system (columns 2 and 3).
check the relevance of the institutional index (TSEBELIS 2002: 104). Based on the same source, the index adds the H. Döring’s seven measures and balances them according to their respective weight.

Table 3. The classification of Western European Parliaments according to different institutional rules (lower houses).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority to determine plenary agenda 1-7</th>
<th>Authority of committees to rewrite gover. bills 1-4</th>
<th>Control of the timetable in legislative committees 1-4</th>
<th>Institutional index (I) 3-13</th>
<th>Tsebelis index of agenda control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United King.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources and notes:
- Authority to determine plenary agenda: DÖRING 1995b: 225, Table 7.1.;
- Authority of committees to rewrite government bills: DÖRING 1995b: 236, Table 7.4.;
- Control of the timetable in legislative committees: DÖRING 1995b: 238, Table 7.5.;
- Tsebelis index of agenda control: TSEBELIS 2002: 104, Table 4.1.
- The data covers the eighties.

The index built as the G. Tsebelis’s index both position favourably the legislative power in Sweden, the Netherlands and Italy. Those three parliaments are endowed with institutional tools that favour their own control over their agenda whereas the British, Irish and French parliaments are the most controlled by the government of the sample. Important similarities between those institutional indices and the classification based on the type of governments examined before can be observed. As indicated in Table 7, the correlation between the institutional index and Lijphart index is of 0.403 and of 0.381 for the
In other words, the more a government is stable and/or single-party and/or majoritarian, the more this body has institutional prerogatives at her disposal to control the legislature. Domination and inequalities are cumulative when influence is assimilated to government stability and to institutional rules organizing the parliamentary business.

When comparing Döring index of agenda control with the veto powers of Western European States, G. Tsebelis arrives exactly to the same conclusion: « […] the number of veto players is highly correlated with (the lack of) agenda control » (TSEBELIS 2004: 197-8). Indeed, in parliamentary democracy, the number of veto powers, i.e. « individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary for a change of the status quo » (Ibid: 169), is considered through the number of parties composing the cabinet. The index of Woldendorp is partly based on this information and regarding the Lijphart index, we have indicated that single-party cabinets last longer than others. G. Tsebelis brings about three explanation for the rather high level of correlation between the two series of variable without selecting one. First, the institutional characteristic of the agenda control may have consequence on the number of veto players: the more the cabinet can control the parliament, the less it becomes necessary to incorporate a large number of parties (and conversely). Second, his theory predicts that political system made of numerous veto powers will find more difficulties to agree on any decisions, including the decision to change institutional rule to the detriment of the parliament. Third, it is possible that both measures reflect a deeper political culture opposing divided and limited governments to unitary and strong ones. It is true that each democracy has to face the contradictory necessities of granting capacities to the government and of limiting the central power.

4. Parliamentary influence, stability of the cabinet and institutional rules: non-linear relations

Such a conception implicitly categorises the parliament as a counter power, a body opposite to the executive and in charge of controlling and bounding governmental initiatives. MPs would fill that part discussing and amending bills as Constitutional courts play a similar role interpreting laws. As indicated in introduction, it seems that such a picture - far from being naive - only depicts a limited part of real politics. Does the median legislative voter in

---

8 The correlation are equivalent with Tsebelis index of agenda control be it with the Lijphart index (0,453) or the Woldendorp et al. index (0,416).
9 With some exceptions: the German Bundesrat counts as a veto power when opposing the government, the Presidents of Portugal and France are also considered as veto powers since they play a significant legislative (POR) or regulatory (FRA) part.
the parliament want to defeat ministers that he has trusted in the past and when they all belong to the same party or coalition of parties? Intuitively, the answer would be: “sometimes, not always”. It may be added that the reason for opposing the government lies less in the simple belonging to the parliament but rather in the belonging to the opposition or in individual ambitions or in the will to send signals to voters. Since in parliamentary democracies the main confrontation generally does not oppose the executive to the legislative power but rather a political team established in the parliament and led by the government to a political opposition, legislature influence does not necessarily mean “legislature influence over the cabinet”. As stressed by Tapio Raunio and Simon Hix: “In member States with cohesive, disciplined parties – such as Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Spain and Sweden – the executive and Parliament are often so intertwined that measuring their independent influence in decision-making is, at best, very difficult” (HIX, RAUNIO 2000:149). Four points can be formulated in that sense: the first and the second argue that parliamentary influence is different from the strength of the cabinet, the third and the fourth that this influence should be distinguished from institutional rules governing the relation between the executive and the legislative power.

1. The influence of a legislature does not necessarily derive from the weakness of the cabinet. Paradoxically, G. Tsebelis’s theory helps to demonstrate that point since the veto power notion applied in parliamentary democracies concentrates on the number of parties in government rather than in parliament (TSEBELIS 2002)\textsuperscript{10}. The capacity of a cabinet to legislate and to last derives first from the composition of the cabinet. As pointed to by Paul Warwick, the party composition of a cabinet – and notably the ideological distance between parties – constitutes the first element of explanation for the cabinet duration, before the distribution of parliamentary groups (WARWICK 1994). More globally, G. Tsebelis’s theory predicts convincingly that the more numerous veto powers a given political system count, the more it is difficult to initiate “important” legislation and the more judges and bureaucrats are autonomous. Is it really sure that when political elite find difficulties to face major challenges MPs tend to be collectively more powerful? Likewise, the strength of the bureaucracy and the judiciary power also restrains the parliament’s capacity. Obviously, no one would seriously support that French Parliament

\textsuperscript{10} « The independent variables are veto players, along with their congruence and cohesion. In a crude way, this translates to the number of parties in government, the ideological distance between those parties, and the cohesion of each one of them (instead of the parties in parliament used by the party system analyses)” TSEBELIS 2004: 169, note 1. Italics are from the original text.
was weaker under the Fourth Republic but it is sure that the difficulty of cabinets to face
the Algerian conflict contributed to the settlement of a new regime in 1958.

2. **Institutional arrangements aiming at rationalizing the parliament do not necessarily limit
the capacity of the parliament.** John Huber studied two controversial procedures of the
French Fifth Republic (HUBER 1996). One authorises the government to select or refuse
any amendments during the plenary discussion (up-or-down proposals or “vote bloqué”).
The other establishes that a law is passed without being approved except if a motion of
non-confidence is successful (article 49.3). He concluded that those tools contribute to
foster the cohesion of both the governing coalition and the opposition. Rather then
limiting an already limited legislative power of the National Assembly, such procedures
can be conceived as mean of creating “party discipline by default” in the presence of
incohesive party. Of course, a cabinet can use such tools when confronted to filibustering
strategies from the parliamentary opposition (DÖRING 2004: 144). But from an electoral
point of view, minority as majority MPs can benefit from the settlement of a clear
distinction between them thanks to such rules, especially at the end of a legislature. As
pointed to by Paul Magnette, the European Parliament provides probably the best example
of the potential benefits for the parliament itself to be rationalized (MAGNETTE 2004,
see also COSTA 2001). This transnational body has gained greater homogeneity and
efficiency imposing severe rules to its members since the eighties. Individual discipline
was the price for collective assertion.

3. **The (mis)use of institutional prerogatives by MPs indicates that parliamentary behaviour
obeys to complex and manifold logics.** P. Norton noted: « What is remarkable about the
legislatures is not their power to say no to government but rather their reluctance to
employ that power » (NORTON 1998: 192). There is no doubt that MPs do not make
collectively a maximum use of their institutional prerogatives. A group of elected
representatives (whose size is difficult to evaluate) under-invests the parliamentary
function. Some persons take important risks and pay major costs in order to become MPs
and once elected just come once or twice a year in the assembly. Many interpretations
have been developed on that paradox but it is sure that the real power of a parliament
cannot been exactly inferred from existing institutional tools since some are scarcely used.
Moreover, the use of such instruments does not necessarily intend at opposing the cabinet
or even at influencing a policy. When interviewing members of the Commons in 1972-73,
Donald Searing analysed that 41 % of the backbenchers were actually privileging a
“policy advocate” role but that the others preferred other dimensions of their function as
the relation to the constituency (25 %), their career (25 %) or the enjoyment of Westminster atmosphere (9 %) (SEARING 1994). Again, the European question provides a relevant example for the sharp gap between the endowment of prerogatives and their actual use. During the nineties, most of the national parliaments of the EU member States have gained some specific attributions regarding the scrutiny of European affairs (HIX RAUNIO 2000, MAURER WESSELS 2001). But when observing closely the implementation of those procedures in some assemblies as the House of Commons or the National Assembly what is striking is the contrast between the vigour of past claims and the shyness of actual practices (ROZENBERG SZUKALA to be published).

4. **The global power of a parliament is not equivalent to the strength of parliamentary internal institutions, be they committees or procedure rules.** The first reason for the differentiation between exterior influence and internal institutions has been developed on point 3: MPs may not use their prerogatives. The second reason is that the institutionalisation of parliamentary internal procedures and committees can intensify the control of backbenchers MPs by party leaders. Maark Hallerberg observes that MPs from “commitment” political system (when a coalition cabinet is made of parties that commit themselves to respect a program at the beginning of a legislature) have an incentive not to make a complete use of their power (HALLERBERG 2004: 26-27). An active use of their scrutiny or amendment opportunities could publicly reveal internal cleavages of their coalition and there would be a risk in the end that the a party withdraw from the coalition and that anticipated elections were called. In short, MPs from those systems can change legislation or collect information on it because their defection is unlikely. When defection is more likely, parliamentary internal structure and procedure can be significantly developed but strictly controlled by the leaders of parliamentary groups. The presentation of the three kinds of parliamentary committees by Ingvar Mattson and K. Strøm can be interpreted in that perspective (MATTSON STRØM 2004, see also MATTSON STRØM 1995). Committees can first be considered as *arenas* where MPs take public positions and promote themselves (MAYHEW 1974). Proper to Westminster and/or corporatist models, those committees have reduced effects on public policies (FRA, GER, UK). The various *universalist* models conceive parliamentary committees as solutions to collective action problems relative to the distribution of “pork” (SHEPSLE WEINGAST 1987) or the

---

11 According to M. Hallerberg, the following countries belonged to this system during the eighties: Austria (1985-89), Denmark (1982-91), Finland, Ireland (1988-91), Luxembourg, the Netherlands (1983-91), Norway (1981-86 and 1990-91).
gathering of information (KREHBIEL 1991). I. Mattson and K. Strøm explain that this dimension is uncommon in parliamentary European systems, except for the Northern countries characterised by changing and ad hoc coalitions. Lastly, the partisan dimension of the committees tends to be the more significant in Europe. Gary Cox and Matthews McCubbins developed a model assimilating the committee to an element of the party system: the leaders of the parties control backbenchers MPs and impose discipline and cohesion through the committee system among other channels (COX McCUBBINS 1993). According to I. Mattson and K. Strøm, this dimension can particularly be observed in countries with multiparty and stable cabinets, that is “commitment” systems. This last category let consider that the strength of the committee system does not necessary lead to the collective assertion of the parliament. Moreover, the degree of procedural autonomy of the committee vis-à-vis the government on which H. Döring has based a part of his scale is a rather approximate proxy since a committee can be institutionally independent from the government and politically controlled through the whips.

5. A middle-term indicator: the personal vote

Critics of existing indicators should not lead to change them for new ones but rather to try to complete them with alternative data. The criteria based on institutional rules are focused on short-term influence related to the day-to-day policy-making process. From a middle-term perspective, which means from an electoral perspective, the hypothesis can be established that parliamentary influence depends on the electoral systems. Parliamentary elections can be centred on individual candidacy or on party. Bruce Cain, John Ferejhon and Morris Fiorina have developed the concept of personal vote that “refers to that portion of a candidate’s electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record” (CAIN FEREJHON FIORINA 1987: 9). It can be postulated that the more MPs are elected on their name, the more they are independent from their party. The control over their electoral destiny gives them an individual political capital that can be diversely used. Electoral capital does not necessarily lead backbenchers to rebel but it may help them if they are willing to do so. Since the XIXth century, the common trend of Western democracies has been opposed to the development of personal vote. As understood early by Max Weber, the systems of representation have been collectivised with the assertion of political parties to the detriment of local notables (WEBER 2003, see also BEST COTTA 2000b). However, personal votes have never totally disappeared as studied in the UK at the beginning of the eighties by B. Crain and his colleague. Since then, the crisis of identification to political
parties combined with the development of constituency services may have helped to foster it. Indeed, the level of personal votes depends of complex and numerous elements including the electoral system, but also voters’ behaviours and candidates’ strategies regarding particularly the incumbents.

Unfortunately, no indicator associating all those elements can be found. M. Hallerberg has developed an index of personal vote mainly based on electoral systems (HALLERBERG 2004: 20-22). His indicator distinguishes plurality and proportional representation systems, proportional systems under closed or open lists and the district magnitude in each country (i.e. the number of seat per constituency). Following John Carey and Matthew Shugart’s calculations, he also integrates the control of the leaders of the parties over the candidacy list, the pooling of the votes and the number of votes per person (CAREY SHUGART 1995). In the building of his index, M. Hallerberg considers that the personal vote is most important when the proportional electoral system adds open lists and high district magnitude. On the contrary, the increase of district magnitude combined with a close list systems diminishes the personal vote. Countries under plurality/majority systems occupy an intermediary position. The classification of the 18 European countries by M. Hallerberg is presented on column 4 of Table 6. The data cover either the eighties or the nineties. The personal vote is higher in Finland, Italy, Luxembourg and Ireland whereas electoral systems in Sweden, Portugal, Austria and the Netherlands are the more favourable to political parties.

The correlation between this index and the other series, indicated at Table 7, are quiet low or low: 0,303 for the Lijphart or the Woldendorp index and 0,165 for the institutional index. If there is no clear relation between the personal vote and the control of the parliamentary agenda, we know from M. Hallerberg, that the personal vote is positively correlated with the use of restrictive rules by the cabinet. Restrictive rules – close-by-clause vote rather than package vote – are three time more used when the electoral system promotes personal vote. H. Döring and M. Hallerberg infer from that finding that: “Imposition, of restrictive rules is used – but by single-party governments only – to contain possible “pork barrel” behaviour resulting from features of the electoral system and from a “common pool

---

12 This index is extremely precious and useful but not fully satisfactory. First, it should be either established for a precise period or it should take into account the changes of the electoral systems. Second, M. Hallerberg’s opposition between a group of countries favourable to personal vote (from 1 to 7,6) and a group favourable to party-vote (from 0,2 to 0,9) is not exactly reflected in the figures since the median score is different from 1. This is particularly problematic when correlating this index with other series. In other words, France, the United Kingdom and Germany should have a higher score in comparison with countries with closed lists proportional systems.
resource problem” ” (DÖRING HALLERBERG 2004b: 201)\textsuperscript{13}. In other words, in political system characterised by a high degree of personal vote, the cabinets do not have additional institutional means to control the parliament (compared with other systems) but they use the existing ones more often then other systems. It is likely that cabinets do not use restrictive rules needlessly but because they are confronted with real troubles in their parliament, in their coalition, in the media and/or in public opinion. In that paradoxical perspective, both the level of personal vote and the effective use of restrictive procedures can be considered as valuable proxy for the parliament strength. Even if the influence of a parliament does not suppose tense conflicts with the cabinet as argued above, the parliament cannot be depicted as out of touch when the cabinet behaves as if it was threaten credibly.

In the detail, two groups of countries may be distinguished from the comparison between the personal vote and the institutional index (Figure 1). In the first group, a linear increasing function associates the two series (ITA, FIN, SWE, DEN, LUX, GRE, FRA, UK). Countries of the second group rate rather highly on the institutional index while parties closely control legislative elections (POR, AUS, NOR, SPA, GER, BEL, ICE, SWI).

Figure 1. The relation between the institutional index and the personal vote index.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{The relation between the institutional index and the personal vote index.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{13} Our calculation does not confirm that a high level of correlation associate the personal vote with the proportion of single-party cabinets.
Other middle-term data should be used in order to estimate alternatively the relative influence of legislatures. In that perspective, candidate selection methods are of particular interest (HAZAN 2002; RAHAT HAZAN 2001). As Reuven Hazan and Gideon Rahat demonstrate, the parliamentary behaviour is partly dependent on the level of inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the candidate selection process. Unfortunately, they indicate that transnational comparisons between legislatures are complicated since the level of analysis is the single party. The feasibility of the comparison thus depends on the similarity of the parliamentary party methods in a given country. However, it seems that such comparison, even unsatisfactory, could be established for a specific period (since its imperfectability can be estimated).

6. Long-term indicators: the parliamentary nature of political careers

When finishing D. Searing’s masterpiece Westminster’s World, the reader may have some serious doubt about considering the UK parliament as the least significant in Europe. Even A. Lijphart qualifies the majoritarian model – characterised among other elements by the weakness of the parliament – by the name of the British parliamentary institution, Westminster, rather than Whitehall. In some European democracies, it seems that the strength of a centralised cabinet eventually benefits to its surrounding and rationalized parliament. The discipline of majority MPs, the resignation of the opposition and the daily impotence of the whole parliament tend to hide the deep parliamentary feature of European polities. Influence should not be observed on public policies only but also on political life on a long-term perspective. M. Hallerberg describes delegation political systems made of cohesive and durable majoritarian cabinets (FRA, GER, UK) and concludes that “the most important things parliaments do in these countries seemingly is to elect the government and then to get out of the way once the government is installed” (HALLERBERG 2004: 32). If cabinets are so powerful in those systems, the selecting process of their members becomes all the more strategic. Moreover, the question of the political and professional background of the ministers is also central.

Politicising our conception of parliamentary influence does not only refer to the connections between the parliament and electoral cycles but also to the sociological approach of the MPs as essential members of the political elite. The collectivisation of political activities surely reduced the independence of elected representatives towards the leaders of their parties but this process also created “the politicians” as a specific profession (LAGROYE 1994). This profession as any other possesses its own rules, organization,
hierarchy and patterns of career. Whether each MP would like to be minister is questionable but there is no doubt that belonging to the cabinet constitutes all other Europe the privileged outcome of a successful carer. In that sense, the executive power still dominates the legislative power on a sociological perspective. However, the centrality of the parliament regarding political careers and particularly the selection process of the ministers indicates that the assemblies are far from being this empty place that is often described. Parliamentary houses can benefit from the executive strength if they offer the specific resources that help to become a member of the cabinet. The assimilation of the cabinet to a “natural monopoly” in law production should not hide that parliaments nearly enjoy a (quasi) natural monopoly in the making of a minister. An MP starts to be a potential minister when questioning on the floor or reporting on a specific issue in a committee. Her colleagues, the whips and the ministers may notice her on such occasions. As highlighted by studies based on roles theories, it is in the chamber or in the vicinity of the house that an MP has the opportunity both to be known and to learn how to behave and to present herself. Parliaments are obviously not the only fishponds in modern politics but they are still central.

The parliamentary background of ministers appears to be a relevant proxy for the evaluation of the parliamentary character of a political system on a long-term perspective. Before considering it, Table 4 presents the legislation in each Western European country regarding the compatibility between the two functions. Ireland and the United Kingdom are the only two countries where the belonging to the parliament is required to become a member of the cabinet.

Table 4. Cabinet position and membership in Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compatibility</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incompatible</td>
<td>BEL (since 1995), FRA (since 1959), LUX, NET, NOR, POR, SWE (since 1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatible</td>
<td>AUS, BEL (1945-94), DEN, FIN, GER, GRE, ICE, ITA, SPA, SWE (1945-73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required</td>
<td>IRE, UK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BERGMAN et al., 2003, pp. 150-151, table 4.9.

The Blondel project on Cabinets in Western Europe and particularly the studies of Lieven de Winter provide extremely rich data about the parliamentary background of ministers that end unfortunately in 1984 (DE WINTER 1991; DE WINTER 1995). Table 5 presents the proportion of ministers previously MPs and the average number of years spent in parliament when becoming a member of the cabinet. The proportion of ministers with a parliamentary background is calculated for two different periods. Column 4 also adds the age
of starting ministers. The index of parliamentary careers (1945-1984) is obtained adding MPs status values (column 1) and the average parliamentary seniority (column 3) for the same period. The same weight has been given to the two sets of variables.

Table 5. Parliamentary background of ministers by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUS</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEL</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEN</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>50*</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td><em>(48)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRE</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITA</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUX</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWE</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources and notes:
- Age of starting ministers 1945-1984: BAKEMA 1991: 71; * France data covers the Fifth Republic only (1958-1984);
- Junior ministers of all types are excluded. The period covered started in 1944-46 except for Germany (1949).

The index of parliamentary careers opposes a group of countries where almost all ministers had spent more than nine years in parliaments before becoming a member of the cabinets (UK, IRE, ITA) to a group in which parliamentary background is less important (NET, NOR, FRA, AUS, GER). Despite those differences it should be noted that the belonging to the parliament constitutes the major means of access to the cabinet. From 1945 to 1985, 75 % of Western European ministers had been MPs before becoming ministers and

---

14 With the exception of Iceland: the only available measure being the proportion of ministers with MPs status from 1970 to 1984, the rate for the index of parliamentary careers has been calculated adding the figure of 82 % to 9.25 years of average parliamentary seniority. Those 9.25 correspond to the 82 % multiplied by the average relation between the two series for the 13 other countries.

15 The new Constitution of 1958 constitutes an important turning point: during the Fourth Republic nearly all of the ministers were members of the Parliament (97 %) while only two-thirds of the ministers had been parliamentarians from 1958 to 1984 (DE WINTER 1991: 50-1).
all of them spent on the average nine years of their life in the house before. The United Kingdom offers the higher result with an experience of more than twelve years in the Commons before entering the cabinet that derives partly from the exclusion if junior ministers in the data. Except for the obvious cases of Ireland and the UK, the index of parliamentary careers is not related to the legal provision regarding the compatibility between cabinet position and parliamentary function. The index is correlated with the average age of starting ministers but rather moderately (0.403).

No specific relations link the index of parliamentary careers with the measures relative to the duration or the stability of the cabinets (Table 7). On the contrary, the index of parliamentary career is positively correlated with the personal vote (0.419) and negatively with the institutional index (-0.471). The rate of correlation is even stronger using G. Tsebelis’s index of agenda control (-0.616). Those figures should be taken cautiously since data are missing for four countries (GRE, POR, SPA, SWI) and do not cover the same period of time. However, it appears that in a majority of country, the more high political careers implies to spend years in parliament, the more MPs control their electoral fate and the more they are institutionally controlled by the cabinet. The Figure 2, inspired from Thomas Saalfeld, makes clear this latter relation (SAALFELD 2000: 373).

Figure 2. The institutional index and the parliamentary careers index.

---

16 This result clearly contradicts the building of the Jane-Erik Lane and Svante Ersson’s index of executive strength (LANE ERSSON 1999: 216). On of the five criteria they used was the legal provisions regarding the compatibility between cabinet and parliament. They estimate that the executive strength was reinforced if a minister was allowed to remain MP.
Using the same sources, T. Saalfeld also finds this result. Influenced by previous works of K. Strøm (STRØM 1995: 74), he uses the principal-agent theory to theorise the relation between a parliament (the principal) and the cabinet (the agent) and particularly the controls exercised by the principal on the agent (SAALFELD 2000: 357). Incentive compatibility, one of the three kinds of contract between them, is based on mechanisms establishing shared interests between principals and agents. Selecting ministers among MPs and above all MPs elected for ages is a simple and effective way of fostering such shared interests. When a community of interest is created by such means, the parliamentary scrutiny of the cabinet day-to-day program is less strategic. On the contrary, if the parliamentary background of ministers is challenged, it becomes highly important that MPs possess the institutional capacity to amend and control the cabinet’s decision. T. Saalfeld assimilates the first system to an economical but rather hazardous ex-ante control and the second one to a expensive but efficient ex-post control: “[...] some countries such as United Kingdom or Ireland have in the past relied more strongly on ex-ante devices whereas others such as the Netherlands, Sweden of Finland have placed for greater emphasis on ex-post mechanisms of oversight” (SAALFELD 2000: 373-4). This explanation for the negative correlation between institutional and career variables is attractive but it should be mentioned first that this situation can change (T. Saalfeld considers that ex-ante control is declining) and second that counter-example exists. Italy rates highly on both measures whereas French parliament has tended to be marginalized on both levels since 1958.

7. Connections between the different measures

In addition to short-terms indicators based on institutional rules, middle-terms and long-terms indicators based on the personal vote and on the parliamentary background of cabinet members have been developed. At the appendix, Table 6 presents the score of each index in the 18 Western European legislatures and Table 7 the correlation between all the indices. If each index is divided in two half, only four countries are always situated in the same set among the fourteen countries for which all the data are available. Parliaments of Italy, Denmark and Finland can be considered as more influential than other from the three perspectives whereas the Austrian parliament is always disadvantaged, even if results could have been different if they had incorporated the Bundesrat. Apart from those examples, a majority of countries scores differently on the three variables: parliaments of the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway tend to control their agenda but their members are less significant from a electoral or career-based perspective. The United Kingdom, Ireland and the Luxembourg are
in the opposite situation. Lastly, other countries offer specific relations between the variables: Iceland and Belgium scores rather highly on the institutional and career indexes but personal vote is less important, the parliamentary background of ministers is the only weak point of the Bundestag whereas the personal vote is the only – and moderate – advantage of the French National Assembly.

An explorative global index has also been created adding the institutional index, the personal vote and the parliamentary career and giving the same weight to each of the three variables (Table 6, last column). Since we have not proved that personal vote or parliamentary background were exactly as important as the institutional index, it should be strongly emphasized that this synthesis is explorative and just intends at giving an account of the situation of each legislature. The global index opposes the powerful Italian parliament to the French parliament. In comparison with the classification based on institutional prerogatives, parliaments in the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Germany appear to be less powerful. This is particularly true of the Netherlands where MPs have large institutional means to influence legislation but are strictly controlled by parties and by a cabinet made of 53 % of former deputies only. Table 7 shows that this global index is more correlated with the Lijphart index (0,489) than with the Woldendorp index. This means that when parliaments are classified according to various measures related to institutional rules, electoral systems and political life, the more powerful parliaments can be found in political systems where cabinets are durable rather than stable (i.e. single party and/or majoritarian). If the correlation rate should be considered very cautiously, it seems nevertheless that Lijphart’s choice to estimate the executive-legislative balance of power out of the duration of the cabinet is relevant.

Lastly, the correlations between the three sets of variable can be examined differentiating the eighteen democracies according to different sub-groups (Figure 3). Majoritarian (group 1) and consensus (2) democracies are distinguished according to the measures of A. Lijphart (LIJPHART 1999). The first dimension of the comparison, called “Executives-parties dimension” as opposed to the federal-unitary dimension is considered separately (3 and 4). Lastly, the figure opposes the democracies including few veto players (5) to the countries characterised by two or more veto players (6) on the base of G. Tsebelis’s calculation (TSEBELIS 2002). Those different measures are considered in order to differentiate “governing” and “majority” democracies characterised by a centralised, unique, cohesive and durable governing system to “divided”, “consensus” and “negotiation” democracies characterised by multiparty and fragmentation of central power (ARMINGEON
2002). Since the cleavages between the two models are difficult to identify and measure, three different types of data have been used.

Figure 3. Correlations between the three indicators (institutions, personal vote and parliamentary careers) according to different groups of countries opposing “governing” democracies to “negotiation” democracies.

1 and 2: Majoritarian vs. consensus democracies (Lijphart)
- 1: 8 majoritarian democracies: FRA, GRE, ICE, IRE, LUX, POR, SPA, UK
- 2: 10 consensus democracies: AUS, BEL, DEN, FIN, GER, ITA, NET, NOR, SWE, SWI
- Note: The majoritarian or consensus type is determined adding the two dimensions defined by A. Lijphart: executives-parties dimension and federal-unitary dimension (group 1 < 0, group 2 > 0). Period covered: 1971-96.

3 and 4: Executives-parties dimension (Lijphart’s first dimension)
- 3: 9 majoritarian democracies on the executives-parties dimension: AUS, FRA, GER, GRE, IRE, LUX, POR, SPA, UK
- 4: 9 consensus democracies on the executives-parties dimension: BEL, DEN, FIN, ICE, ITA, NET, NOR, SWE, SWI
- Note: This dimension is made of 5 variables: single-party cabinets vs. multiparty coalitions; executive domination vs. executive-legislative balance of power (Table 6, column 1); two-party vs. multiparty systems; majoritarian vs. proportional representation; pluralist interest group systems vs. corporatist systems. The 18 countries being devided in two equal groups, countries considered as majoritarian or consensual in the Lijphart’s comparison of 36 democracies may appear in the other category (group 3 < 0.5, group 4 > 0.5). Period covered: 1971-96.

5 and 6: number of Veto players (Tsebelis)
- 5: 7 democracies with less than 2 veto players: AUS, FRA, GRE, IRE, SPA, SWE, UK
- 6: 9 democracies with 2 or more veto players: BEL, DEN, FIN, GER, ITA, LUX, NET, POR, SWI
Even if, again, correlation rates just offer basic indicators for the relations between the variables, specific features of negotiating and governing democracies appear. Thus, the negative correlation between institutional variable and parliamentary careers is more present in majority democracies (groups 3 and 5). In the countries characterised by a limited number of veto players, the institutional index is also negatively correlated with the personal vote. It may be inferred from this result that in governing democracies, the more the cabinet controls the MPs’ daily activities related to legislation, the more the MPs influence the cabinet on a long-term perspective as electoral agents or as a selectorate of the ministers. Such balance of power between short-term influence and middle and long-term influence is specific to governing democracies. In consensus democracies this relation does not appear. In any kind of consensus or negotiating democracies (groups 2, 4 and 6), measures relative to the parliamentary background of the ministers and the personal vote are positively and rather highly correlated whereas the relation appears less clearly in majority democracies. The more the MPs tend to be elected on their name rather than on the brand of their party, the more the cabinets tend to be made of former MPs. Intuitively such connexion seems logical: the parliamentary background of the ministers could constitute a stronger resource when individual MPs partly control legislative elections. However, it is hard to explain why the correlation is higher in consensus democracies than in majority ones.

**Conclusion**

French Constitution is so favourable to the executive that P. Norton considers about the French Parliament (and the European Parliament) that « there is some doubt about their designations as legislatures » (NORTON 1998: 206). In addition, French legislative elections are controlled by rather centralised political parties and generally dependent of the result of the previous Presidential election. To finish, a high share of ministers are recruited outside of the *Assemblée nationale*, especially from the high civil service. And yet, even in France, ministers that are not appreciated by backbench majority MPs risk to be changed by a leader willing to give time and attention to the parliamentary troops. This example aims at pointing first that legislatures do matter, and second that instruments of measure should be developed and diversified in order to capture the various dimensions of parliamentary influence. The conclusion that parliaments matter in parliamentary regimes should not be so original and yet
the highlight put on institutional influence over legislation has tended to depict legislatures only as registry offices of cabinet decision. On this basis of existing data collected and created by L. de winter and M. Hallerberg, this paper has developed alternative measures grounded on different temporal perspectives but others data need to be collected. Among them, we can cite: the effectiveness of parliamentary activity (the proportion of MPs physically present and active in the house, the effective use of the instruments of controls, the significance of constituency services), the connections between parties and parliamentary groups (the proportion of MPs among the leaders of the parties, the role of the leaders of the parliamentary group in the party), the backbencher’s individual career (duration, incumbency rate, the evolution of the discipline and personal vote during a career), the TV coverage of parliamentary activities… The connections between the main-stream neo-institutionalist literature and sociological comparative approaches as the collective book edited by Heinrich Best and Maurizio Cotta could be particularly fruitful (BEST COTTA 2000a). Comparative analysis requires facts but also ideas: global theories of parliamentary behaviour should link together short, middle and long-term perspectives. Be they rational choices models as the principal agent theory or legislative roles approaches as the use of the Weberian concept of eligibility (KERROUCHE 2004), their stake consists in explaining to which extent parliaments do matter when it seems that they do not.
### Appendix

Table 6. The classification of 18 legislatures according to 6 different indexes of parliamentary influence (lower houses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Lijphart index</th>
<th>Woldendorp et al. index</th>
<th>Institutional index (1)</th>
<th>Personal vote (2)</th>
<th>Parliament careers (3)</th>
<th>Global index (1+2+3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>(3.2)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>(48)</td>
<td>(5.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>5.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources and notes:
- **Lijphart index**: LIJPHART 1999: 313; for this index only a high factor is attributed to a weak parliament; the period covers 1971-1996; the index being based on the durability of the cabinet, the original unit of the figures is years;
- **Woldendorp et al.**: WOLDENDORP et al. 2000: 79; the period covers 1945-1998; as concerns France, see note 5;
- **Institutional index**: cf. Table 3, based on DÖRING 1995b; the data cover the eighties;
- **Personal vote**: HALLERBERG 2004: 22; the data cover the eighties and/or the nineties;
- **Parliamentary careers**: cf. Table 5, based on DE WINTER 1991: 48; the data covers 1945-1984.

Table 7. Correlations between the different indexes (Pearson’s r)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lijphart index</th>
<th>Woldendorp et al. index</th>
<th>Institutional index (1)</th>
<th>Personal vote (2)</th>
<th>Parliamentary careers (3)</th>
<th>Global index (1+2+3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lijphart</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woldendorp</td>
<td>-0.533</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>-0.403</td>
<td>0.381</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>-0.303</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td>-0.165</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers</td>
<td>(-0.001)</td>
<td>(-0.37)</td>
<td>(-0.471)</td>
<td>(0.419)</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>(-0.489)</td>
<td>(0.186)</td>
<td>(0.179)</td>
<td>(0.787)</td>
<td>(0.623)</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: cf. Table 6.
Notes: For the Lijphart index only, a high factor is attributed to a weak parliament. The correlation rate should be read cautiously for different reasons. First Lijphart, Woldendorp, Institutional and Personal vote indexes cover 18 countries while Parliamentary careers and Global indexes cover 14 countries. That is why the rates regarding parliamentary careers and the global index are in brackets. Second, the variables do not cover the same period of time since the required data were not available.

Abbreviations

AUT Austria  
BEL Belgium  
DEN Denmark  
FIN Finland  
FRA France  
GER Germany  
GRE Greece  
ICE Iceland  
IRE Ireland  
ITA Italy  
LUX Luxembourg  
NET Netherlands  
NOR Norway  
POR Portugal  
SWE Sweden  
SWI Switzerland  
SPA Spain  
UK United Kingdom

References


