

# Parliamentary Control of the Executive in 47 Democracies

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Preliminary version, not to be cited

## 1. Introduction

Most of the existing studies on the parliamentary control of the executive are limited to Europe, the OECD or a particular region in the world. This study is extended to a representative group of countries in which parliaments (whether fused with or separated from the executive) play a substantial role in determining the policy-making process. This extension enables us to determine whether existing findings on executive-legislative relations are also valid for a larger selection of countries.

Point of departure is the recent increase of the number of democracies which urges for a reanalysis of executive-legislative relations. Since the democratization in Central and Eastern Europe and parts of Asia, a large number of new democracies have been established which are not always similar to the established European democracies. Four of the newly democratized states of former Soviet-controlled Central and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia and Slovakia) have installed parliamentary executives which are drawn from and responsible to the assembly. A further four (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania and Slovenia) have 'dual executives', being partnerships between presidents and prime ministers with varying degrees of legislative and executive powers. The remaining 19 states in this region and ex-Soviet Central Asia have presidential executives. It is significant that the presidential, rather than the parliamentary executive type has been adopted most often by newly democratized states, including most of the Southern European ones (Liebert and Cotta 1990; Derbyshire and Derbyshire 1996). An exception to this trend has been South Asia where, since 1988, Pakistan and Bangladesh have moved from presidential to parliamentary executives.

Parliamentary control is the legislature's ability to constrain executive behavior. We can distinguish between three types of parliamentary control (Mény 1996: 121):

- *Partisan control*, voiced by the opposition, which is only effective under conditions in which the government is vulnerable;
- *Non-partisan control* by means of parliamentary oversight which may take numerous forms: questions, committees, hearings and so on;
- *Control with a penalty*, like a motion of censure, which is most drastic, but cannot be used often without destabilizing the system.

This paper will focus on parliamentary control with a penalty. The aim of this paper is to examine and also explain the main variations in this type of control in 47 countries: how do these affect the balance between governments and parliaments and with what effects? The variations in this type of parliamentary control will be explained by situating it within a wider institutional framework.

## 2. Data and methodology

The exploration of variations in parliamentary control is based on a new data set which holds several variables on the interactions between 48 parliaments and executives, reflecting the situation in 1998 (Woldendorp et al. 2000: see Appendix A and B for a selection of variables from this data set). These variables cover a broad range of institutional features of parliamentary government, including the role of heads of state, the state format and organization, the structure of parliament, relations between executive and legislature, decision rules in parliaments and the role of referendums, and features of governments (see Appendix C for a full list of variables).

I have dropped the Bahamas because of many missing data. Following Derbyshire and Derbyshire (1996), the remaining 47 countries can be subdivided into:

- *parliamentary executives* which are drawn from and responsible to the assembly which makes these governments formally accountable (29=61,7 %, adopted in 55 states in 1996).

- *limited presidential executives* in which the presidency is the executive which powers are limited by the need for the approval of the parliament for certain executive actions (10=21,3 %, adopted in 78 states in 1996).
- *dual executives* in which the executive consists of a working partnership between the president and the prime minister (8=17%, adopted in 12 states in 1996). This type is also referred to as semipresidential or premier-presidential (Shugart and Carey 1992: 6-7).

The borderlines between these types are not always clear. For example, a dual executive with a weak president functions as a parliamentary system (Mezey 1998: 781). Given these distributions, it turns out that parliamentary executives are overrepresented, but for our purposes it is logical and necessary that all main parliamentary executives are included. Of the selected countries, most of the limited presidential and dual executives are rooted in new independent states, most of them breakaways from former Soviet countries.

According to the IPU-Parline database there are 180 national parliaments operating in may 1997 (Copeland and Pattersen 1998: xix). Many of these parliaments do not meet the regularly criteria of democracies, especially those in communist and in one-party states. The countries included in the analysis have in common that the government is ultimately responsible to parliament. The main exceptions are the US and the Russian federation where the administration is only indirectly responsible to parliament. These countries are only included because of their impact in the world. Excluded are all other systems which are either unlimited presidential or low on democraticness (measured by means of the Freedom House indicators) or one-party systems of governance or too small in size (like most of Caribbean islands, of which Jamaica and Guyana are sampled to represent the rest). On the Freedom House index (1=democracy high; 7=democracy low), 80% of the countries has a score lower than or equal to 2. On Jagers and Gurr's index (1=low on democracy; 10=high on democracy), 85% of the countries scores 8 or higher.

Of all selected countries, 55% is an uninterrupted democracy (since independence) and 45% is interrupted or experienced drastic changes in the constitution. Hence, the included countries are very diverse in history and as such the universe of discourse is quite uncommon in the field of parliamentary research. Most existing studies on parliamentary control are limited to Europe or to a small selection of countries. Due to the recent democratization in Central and Eastern Europe, the universe of (parliamentary) democracies has become much more diverse (Ágh and Ilonski 1996, Olson 1998). Consequently, in order to be able to analyze the diversity of the interrelationships between parliaments and governments one has to expand the universe of discourse to the new democracies. This operation leads to some remarkable results which do not always match with prevailing assumptions, as will be shown in the following sections.

That the selection of cases matters for the outcomes of the research can be illustrated by referring to the newest book of Arend Lijphart on *Patterns of Democracy* which gives an overview of the government forms (including executive-legislative relations and parliaments) in 36 countries (Lijphart 1999). Lijphart has included some of the new democracies in his selection of countries, but far less than those included in the data set of Woldendorp et al. As far as new democracies are included by Lijphart they are often part of the Commonwealth and their systems are therefore predominantly majoritarian. No less than 15 of the total of 36 countries (42%) belong to the Commonwealth, whereas in the data set of Woldendorp et al. this number is 11 (23% of 47). Lijphart's selection of countries artificially strengthens the importance of the consensus-majoritarianism divide by including a large number of Commonwealth countries. A different selection of countries, like the one used in this paper, would reveal different patterns and variations in legislative-executive relations.

Not only the units of analysis but also the units of measurement are important for the outcomes. For example, on the aggregated level of national political systems the correlation between the duration and termination of governments is significantly higher ( $r = -.69$ ) than on

the disaggregated year-to-year level. The caveat is therefore that *inter*-system differences are more visible than *intra*-system ones (see for a discussion of this: Keman 1999). The reason is that when countries are compared (n=47), all countries are weighted equal, whereas when governments are compared (n=927), the number of governments in established democracies outrules the number of governments in new democracies. This paper is mainly (but not exclusively) restricted to the aggregated level which gives an equal weight to the countries in order to be able to grasp the effects of the rise of new democracies. However, the data set enables longitudinal analysis of nearly all subsequent postwar governments, including variables such as complexion, duration in days, ministers and their portfolios, reasons of termination etc. (Woldendorp et al. 1993; 1998; 2000).

The extension to 47 countries (in stead of the more common selection of Western Europe or OECD-countries) makes the universe of discourse more representative, but it does, of course, not solve all methodological problems and it even creates new ones. It is difficult to get detailed, reliable and comparative information on parliaments in new democracies and it is also problematic to generalize as the selected 47 parliaments are very diverse. The 47 countries are 'most different' in terms of their political institutions.

Furthermore, the available data are limited to formal procedures and do not tell much on how procedures are actually used (Mezey 1998). This limitation is understandable as it is extremely time consuming to gather comparative information on the use and effects of formal parliamentary powers in 47 countries. One should realize that formal power is not be equated with real power. Many examples could be given of this. One example is the vote of confidence which can be used to weaken but also to strengthen the parliament (Huber 1996; Heller 1999). Another example refers to the parliaments in new central European democracies of which Olson concludes that they had greater opportunity (i.e. more formal powers, rapid sequence of elections), but less ability (i.e. preparation, experience, resources) to act independently than is typically found in western democracies (Olson 1998: 847). The same goes for the Russian Federation (Mezey 1998: 781).

The limitations of the formal approach of parliaments are not recognized by the so-called constitutionalism-argument. In this argument formal powers of legislatures are in itself important enough to study (Laver and Shepsle 1994: 134; Sartori 1994). The reason is that "the constitutional state requires that legislatures define themselves in relation to the executive and the judiciary and maintain the basic pattern of the balance of power typical of the Rule of Law" (Lane and Ersson 2000: 288). Or, as Gallagher et al. conclude: "The fact that (-) governments must be able to survive in the legislature is, when all is really said and done, what makes Western European politics democratic" (1992: 28). Hence, in the constitutionalist view it is worthwhile to study formal powers of parliaments and executives as they are.

The extension to 47 countries leaves us with a puzzling paradox. The number of units of analysis is increased in order to be able to generalize on parliamentary control by means of finding patterned variations. But the very same expansion also leads to more diversity which hampers the generalization we were looking for. Given these and other methodological problems, this analysis of executive-legislative relations in 47 countries is limited to the exploration of variations in the constitutional aspects of parliamentary control of the executive. Detailed descriptive accounts of both the formal and informal aspects of parliamentary control in these 47 countries are not given here, but can be found in Kurian (1998).

## 2. Executive-legislative relations: patterns and variations

In this section, the main competences, conducts of work and decision rules will be discussed in order to get a first impression of the variations in parliamentary control of the executive. Parliamentary government is a fused system, meaning that there is no straightforward separation of powers as is the case in most presidential systems (Shugart and Carey 1992, Andeweg en Nijzing 1995, Kurian 1998). Hence, most features of government and parliaments do affect the power relations between both institutions. Given the huge variety in features of governments and parliaments, we may expect varying degrees in which parliaments control the executive.

Executive-legislative relations encompass the possible modes of interaction between parliament and government. In the literature it is stressed that parliament and government should not be seen as two independent entities, but as two overlapping bodies (King 1976, Andeweg en Nijzink 1995). The modes of interactions between parliament and government depend on the power divisions within and between parliament and government. Basically, there are three modes of interactions:

- the government dominates parliament;
- the parliament dominates government;
- parliament and government are balanced.

This section explores some basic variables that constitute these legislative-executive relationships:

- *the role of the vote of investiture* (variable INVESTIT). When this is constitutionally required, it imposes a barrier on the executive when there is no majority in parliament (De Winter 1995);
- *the vote of confidence* (variable CONFIDEN). This procedure can be used by both parliaments and governments in order to achieve their goals (Huber 1993);
- *the role of the Head of State* (variable HOSGOV), especially the formal powers in relation to the parliament and government (Shugart and Carey 1992).

A correlational analysis shows that INVESTIT is strongly related to particular environments. Vote of investiture is often found in countries with an absolute majority (MAJSIMPL), newly established presidential systems, formerly collapsed systems, and systems with a low government duration and in non-Commonwealth systems. From this it follows that the vote of investiture is adapted in many former communist systems. The vote of confidence, on the other hand, is more common and therefore less confined to new democracies. How these formal powers are actually used can only be determined indirectly, for example by studying the reasons of termination of governments.

*Table 1. Reasons of termination of 831 governments in 47 countries in three time periods*

Reasons of termination:	1945-1970	1971-1997	1945-1997
Elections	47,1	51,3	49,2
Voluntary resignation of the Prime Minister	11,2	12,6	11,9
Resignation of the PM due to health reasons	4,6	1,7	3,1
Dissension within government	20,1	16,7	18,4
Lack of parliamentary support	12,1	10,7	11,4
Intervention by Head of State	2,4	3,8	3,1
Broadening of the coalition	2,4	3,1	2,8
Source: Woldendorp et al. 2000, data file. Excluded are 96 governments with missing data.	100 (412)	100 (419)	100 (831)

Table 1 indicates that half of the governments end by elections. One out of ten governments is terminated because of a lack of parliamentary support, including every instance when parties

either withdrew support from government, or a (successful) vote of no confidence (or similar parliamentary action). This number indicates that parliamentary control with penalty matters for the life and death of governments, but in order to do so, it can only be used sparsely (De Winter 1995). Yet, the usage of this type of control is frequent enough to deny Mény's finding (based on the Big Five in Europe) that "The use of the 'absolute weapon' has become so exceptional that it can no longer be called a parliamentary means of controlling the government" (1990: 184). The comparison between the two time periods before and after 1970 learns that there is no serious decline of the strength of parliaments. In fact, the distributions are remarkably stable.

It is interesting to note that, after entering both the vote of investiture and confidence as independent variables in a regression, the vote of investiture has a moderate negative relation with government duration (Beta=-.54; p=.00) and the vote of confidence has a weak positive effect on cabinet duration (Beta=.30; p=.05)(n=42; R<sup>2</sup>=.24). These opposite scores indicate that the vote of confidence can both strengthen and weaken governments, but most of the time it is used by governments to secure the support of the parliament for policy proposals (Huber 1996).

As is shown in Appendix B., most parliaments have the right to exert a vote of investiture or a vote of (no) confidence. The *combination* of both a vote of investiture and the vote of no confidence, however, is mainly seen in three types of 'new' democracies:

- the defeated nations which rebuild their democracy after the Second World War (Germany, Italy);
- the successors to (fascist) dictatorship (Spain, Portugal);
- post-communist democracies.

Of the 21 countries in which both types of votes do exist, no less than 15 countries belong to the new and previously interrupted or drastically changed democracies. Obviously, the need to strengthen parliament was felt most profound in these new democracies. The experience of an authoritarian regime has led to new constitutions in which the parliament was given relatively high control over government (Maddex 1996). The main exceptions are the post-colonial democracies which mostly do not have a vote of investiture. On the basis of these variables Woldendorp et al. constructed the variable PARLGOV: the extent to which parliament is dominant over government (see Appendix A. for the operationalization).

Most post-communist democracies did not only enhance the power of Parliament but also the power of the Head of State over parliament and government. The legislative and non-legislative powers of presidents are measured on the basis van Shugart and Carey's index (Shugart and Carey 1992; Strom and Amorim Neto 1999). This index (variable PRESPOWE) is the sum of a selection of legislative presidential powers (such as veto power, decree powers) and executive powers (such as cabinet formation, cabinet dismissal and dissolution of the Assembly). In most cases the executive powers are more decisive than the legislative powers. When presidential power is summed up, the share of legislative powers among the 47 countries is only 21%. This measure of presidential power is more informative than the simple dichotomy between presidential and parliamentary systems which neglects the crucial variations in degrees and types of presidential powers.

The variable HOSGOV measures the extent to which the Head of State can influence the composition and continuation of the existence of a government (see Appendix A. for the operationalization). It indicates the independent power of the Head of State vis-à-vis Parliament. This independent power is relatively high in many of the new democracies (The correlation between HOSGOV and a dummy variable representing uninterrupted versus interrupted democracies is: r=.50, n=47, p=.000). Both HOSGOV and PARLGOV are different ways to control the government. Both are positively related (r=.35, n=47, P=.015). When both variables are summed up, we find high scores in new democracies which recovered after a collapse (r=.67, n=47, P=.000).

Additionally, a variable is constructed which measures the extent to which government is dominant over parliament. It is constructed by adding up the variables which measure whether government can ignore losing a vote of confidence and whether government and/or Head of State can dissolve parliament (the variable GOVPARL). GOVPARL is the opposite of PARLGOV. The dominance of government over parliament is more often found in established democracies than in new democracies (the correlation between GOVPARL and the year in which a parliament is established is  $-0.31$  ( $n=47$ ,  $p=.032$ )).

The summary variable EXLEGBAL is a composite index of the relative strengths of executive and legislative powers which is constructed on the basis of the variables PARLGOV, HOSGOV, and GOVPARL (see Appendix A and B. for details on the operationalization and the scores per country). This variable measures the relative power of the executive and legislative branches of government. As such it is a truly institutional measure based on formal powers, and it contrasts with Lijphart's measure of cabinet duration which tends to be partly (but not exclusively, see: Pennings 2000) a result of executive-legislative power relations (Lijphart 1999: 129). Although both indicators intend to measure the same, there is no significant statistical relationship between EXLEGBAL and cabinet duration ( $r=-.23$ ,  $n=42$ ,  $P=.138$ ). Contrary to Lijphart's assumptions, strong legislatures do not automatically imply weak executives, as will be demonstrated later on in greater detail.

*Table 2. Variations in the power balance between executives and legislatures (variable EXLEGBAL).*

<b>Parliament dominates government *</b>	<b>Balanced **</b>	<b>Government dominates parliament ***</b>
Germany, Hungary, Israel, Macedonia	Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Rep., Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Fed, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland	Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Finland, France V, Guyana, Iceland, India, Lithuania, Namibia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States

\* EXLEGBAL equals 1 or 1.5 ( $n=4$ ); \*\* EXLEGBAL equals  $-0.5$ ,  $0$  or  $0.5$  ( $n=26$ ); \*\*\* EXLEGBAL equals  $-1$  or  $-1.5$  ( $n=17$ )

Table 2 clearly shows that situations in which the parliament dominates over government are rare. More common are situations in which the legislative-executive relations are balanced or when the government dominates over parliament. It is remarkable that the Scandinavian countries are not as 'strong' as they are often described, which is partly due to low scores on HOSGOV (Damgaard 1994, Shugart 1997). Note that executive dominance is not solely a consequence of constitutional design. Parliaments also have a weak capacity to constrain the executive because they are unable to match the policy expertise of the government (Mezey 1998). In addition, high levels of party discipline in parliament, due to the costs of defying the party line, enable party leaders to push the government program through the legislature (Gallagher et al. 1992: 20). Given these practices, 'executives' are a misnomer given the authority that they have acquired (Mény 1990: 182). As Laver and Shepsle put it: "parliamentary democracy is not rule by legislature" (Laver and Shepsle 1996: 280). Hence, the term 'legislature' is equally misleading because most actual lawmaking takes place within the cabinet (Shugart and Carey 1992: 3).

One should be aware that EXLEGBAL is focused on the formal powers of parliaments and governments and that it does exclude some important aspects of the functioning of

parliaments. The index EXLEGBAL neglects some potential determinants of parliamentary strength, such as the role and functioning of committees, the influence of opposition parties and the type of government (Lees and Shaw 1979; Shaw 1998). Shugart's proxy of the strength of parliament (applied to 37 European countries) which is based on these types of variables, leads to a different ordering of countries (Shugart 1997: 253).

*Table 3. Strengths of European governments and parliaments according to Shugart (1997)*

		<b>Parliament</b>	
		<b>Weak</b>	<b>Strong</b>
<b>Government</b>	<b>Strong</b>	Serbia, Russia, Moldova, Croatia, Ukraine, Georgia, France, Azerbaijan, Slovakia, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Portugal, UK, Greece, Romania, Hungary, Malta, Spain	Netherlands, Iceland, Ireland
	<b>Weak</b>	Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Turkey, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Belgium, Switzerland	Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Latvia, Italy

Adapted from: Budge and Newton 1997: 253

In Shugart's classification, weak parliaments are mainly assigned to new democracies and strong parliaments predominantly to established democracies. However contradictory the outcomes of both measures seem to be, they are reconciled by Olson's observation that the formal powers of new parliaments (=high on EXLEGBAL) are mostly not materialized into real power and influence (=low on Shugart's index) (Olson 1998).

The meaning of EXLEGBAL is further clarified when we relate it to the U.S. Congress. This is mostly seen as a strong legislature because of its committee system and veto power (Blondel 1990: 241), but the index EXLEGBAL indicates a weak parliament in stead. The reason for this is the independent position of the executive: the Congress cannot send away the President and therefore has per definition a limited control of the executive. This is not to deny, of course, that the U.S. Congress does exert a powerful influence over the functioning of the President. But this impact solely affects the room to maneuver of the president and normally not the political life of the President, unless there is an impeachment procedure. The U.S. Congress cannot initiate an alternation of power: it neither selects or unseats the chief executive and is therefore not a 'parliament' in the British sense (Olson 1994: 2; Loewenberg and Patterson 1979: 33). From a constitutional point of view, the United States and parliamentary democracies share virtually nothing in common. But, although most parliaments in parliamentary systems may theoretically hold the power of life or death over governments, in reality they do not. In that respect there is an unexpected resemblance between both types of legislatures (Mény 1990: 182).

How countries are characterized in terms of legislative-executive relations is mainly a matter of operationalization. When EXLEGBAL is redefined into a new index which is calculated as PARLGOV minus GOVPARL, than the U.S. Congress would be placed into the group of balanced parliaments. This alternative 'minimal' operationalization could be considered because there is a significant relation between EXLEGBAL and GOVPARL ( $r = -.59, p = .00$ ) and with PARLGOV ( $r = .69, p = .000$ ), but not with HOSGOV ( $r = -.20, p = .21$ ). This implies that strong heads of state may coincide with both weak and strong parliaments

(this time defined as PARLGOV minus GOVPARL. Table 4 is the only table which is based on this minimal definition in order to be able to relate HOSGOV to the strength of parliament. It is based on recoded variables in order to limit the number of cells. The reason to keep HOSGOV into the composite measure is that the role of the head of the state is crucial for the executive-legislative relations. This is illustrated, for example, by the executive-legislative deadlock: the Achilles' heel of presidential democracy (Magar 1998). Table 4 demonstrates that all possible combinations of weak/strong parliaments and heads of state do occur frequently.

*Table 4. The relationship between the strength of parliament (minimal definition) and the Head of State (HOS)*

		<b>Head of State</b>	
		<b>Weak</b>	<b>Strong</b>
<b>Weak parliament</b>	Belgium, Guyana, India, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, Un. Kingdom	Bangladesh, Finland, FranceV, Iceland, Pakistan	
<b>Balanced Parliament</b>	Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Jamaica, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Switzerland	Botswana, Namibia, Sri Lanka, Un. States	
<b>Strong parliament</b>	Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Macedonia, Netherlands, Spain	Bulgaria, Czech Rep., Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Fed, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Turkey	

Next, we examine the occurrence of all possible combinations of weak and strong parliaments and presidents. On the basis of EXLEGBAL we can divide parliaments into strong and weak ones. In my definition, balanced/strong parliaments have a score on EXLEGBAL higher than 0. This division leads to a more equal spread of countries than the one presented in Table 5. The division into strong and weak presidents is based on Shugart and Carey's index and the cut-off point is put on 10. The interrelations between parliamentary and presidential powers turns out to be rather complex. The combination of strong parliaments and strong presidents is confined to two Eastern European cases, but all other combinations do occur frequently.

*Table 5. The relationship between the strength of parliaments (EXLEGBAL) and presidents.*

		<b>Presidents</b>	
		<b>Weak</b>	<b>Strong</b>
<b>Parliaments</b>	<b>Weak</b>	Austria, Bangladesh, Finland, France V, Guyana, India, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia, South Africa, Turkey	Botswana, Iceland, Namibia, Pakistan, Russian Fed, Sri Lanka, Un. States
	<b>Balanced /Strong</b>	Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland	Czech Rep., Slovakia

Table 6. The relationship between the strength of parliaments (EXLEGBAL) and prime ministers.

		Prime ministers	
		Weak	Strong
Parliaments	Weak	Botswana, Guyana, Iceland, Namibia, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka	Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France V, India, Jamaica, Japan, Lithuania, Malta, New Zealand, Russian Fed., Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom
	Balanced /Strong	Czech Rep., Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Switzerland	Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain

Table 6 shows the combinations of weak and balanced/strong parliaments and prime ministers. When a prime minister has no special competences compared to ministers, he is defined as weak. In all other cases he is defined as being strong. Here the pattern is quite different compared to the previous table on presidents. Strong prime ministers are relatively often found in case of weak presidents (the correlation is  $-.50$ ,  $n=33$ ,  $P=.003$ ). Strong prime ministers are uncommon in consociational countries and relatively more common in majoritarian democracies (such as the Commonwealth:  $r=.32$ ,  $n=46$ ,  $P=.032$ ) (Derbyshire and Derbyshire 1996: 41).

#### 4. Institutional environments of parliamentary control

The above section showed a series of juxtapositions of legislative and executive powers. But how are these two actually related? This section presents a small intermezzo on the juxtaposition of weak/strong parliaments on the one hand and weak/strong governments on the other. This contrast is rather misleading for at least four reasons:

- Parliamentary government is a fused system, meaning that there is no straightforward separation of powers as is the case in most presidential systems.
- Not the confrontation between the executive and the parliament, but a clash between the government and its parliamentary majority on the one hand, and the opposition as a parliamentary minority on the other, is much more common and likely (Pasquino 1995: 278).
- The strength of a parliament is not a constant but varies, for example depending on whether there is a majority or a minority government (Lane and Ersson 1996: 268)
- A weak parliament does not automatically imply a strong government because there may be other societal groups with veto points. Veto power is not restricted to parliaments.

The above arguments imply that, in order to evaluate the parliamentary control of the executive in terms of formal power and its consequences, one has to place parliamentary activity in its institutional setting. In order to do so, we have to look at the main barriers or impediments to central governments. Veto power is defined as the presence or absence of institutional provisions supporting the democratic and independent rights of those who are not part of government or the civil service. Note that this conceptualization differs from Tsebelis veto player's theory, which defines the veto players as the number of parties in government (Tsebelis 1999).

The main veto points stem from factors like referenda, bicameralism, the constitution and parliamentary censure. Let's start with the referenda. Most countries know the possibility of referenda (there are only five exceptions), but the way it is used and organized is very diverse. In seven countries where it is an option, it is never used. In some countries it has

never been used on the national level. In two-thirds of all cases, frequent initiators are Parliament and the Head of the State, in the remaining cases it is the government and the electorate. In most countries, the outcome is binding. Referenda seem to be a significant source of veto power, but the impact depends (as always) on its institutional setting.

Bicameralism is another instance of veto power. About a half of the countries is characterized by a bicameral structure of Parliament and about a half of all bicameral systems are strong, meaning that the legislative powers are strong for both chambers. Strong bicameralism is typical for federal systems because it enables power sharing between the federal state and the territorial units (Tsebelis and Money 1997; Derbyshire and Derbyshire 1996). Strong bicameralism affects the working and lifetime of government as it may impair the 'room to maneuver' for government when one of the houses supports the government and the other does not (a divided parliamentary government). Many of the new democracies have an unicameral system.

The rigidity of the constitution is also related to veto-power. A rigid constitution is difficult to amend and this inflicts a strong veto point upon the executive because its room for maneuver (and that of the parliament itself) is confined. Only nine countries (20%) have rigid constitutions (defined as a score low than 2 on FLEXICON). This theme recurs when we discuss thick versus thin constitutions.

Finally, parliamentary censure is an obvious veto point. If a vote of investiture is a necessary condition for a government to govern and a vote of confidence is necessary for a government to continue to govern after a crisis, then the making and breaking of a government clearly depends on parliamentary consent (Laver and Shepsle 1996).

These features end up in a composite measure 'veto points' (variable VETOPOP) which represents the barriers to the central government deciding or acting autonomously. This index measures the degree to which those who are not part of government have the formal rights to affect the decision-making.

The features of governments end up in a second measure, 'institutional autonomy' (variable AUTONOMY), which measures how independent the non-central units of governance are. It is an additive index of the degree of fiscal centralization, regional autonomy, territorial decentralization and local rights.

Table 7. Variations in veto power and institutional autonomy in 47 countries

	<b>Autonomy low</b>	<b>Autonomy high</b>
<b>Veto power low</b>	<u>Botswana</u> , Bulgaria, Czech Rep., Estonia, <u>Guyana</u> , Hungary, <u>Iceland</u> , Israel, Jamaica, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Un. Kingdom	<u>Finland</u> , Greece, New Zealand, <u>Sri Lanka</u> , Sweden
<b>Veto power high</b>	<u>Bangladesh</u> , <u>France V</u> , Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, <u>Lithuania</u> , <u>Namibia</u> , Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, <u>Slovenia</u> , <u>Turkey</u>	Australia, <u>Austria</u> , Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, <u>India</u> , Macedonia, Norway, <u>Pakistan</u> , Romania, Russian Fed, <u>South Africa</u> , Spain, Switzerland, <u>Un. States</u>

Note: weak parliaments (EXLEGBAL # 0) are underlined.

Table 7 shows that veto power is a more widespread phenomenon (n=29; 62%) than institutional autonomy (n=21; 45%). The 16 countries which score high on autonomy and veto power mostly belong to the federal and semi-federal systems (with four exceptions: Denmark, Macedonia, Norway and Romania). Countries with a high degree of institutional autonomy, but a low score on veto points, are mostly non-federal.

The available data suggest that a weak parliament does not automatically imply a strong government because the room to maneuver of governments may be restricted by other veto players. The table shows that weak parliaments do occur frequently in situations of both low and high veto power and low and high institutional autonomy. The juxtaposition of weak parliaments and strong governments is apparently misleading. For this reason, the variations in parliamentary control of the executive should be studied within the broader constitutional context of modern democracies in order to understand the impact of various mechanisms of control on the functioning of governments (Sartori 1994).

## **5. Explanatory models of parliamentary control**

Until now, the focus was on describing variations in parliamentary control of the executive. But it is equally important to explain these variations in order to increase our knowledge of the functioning of modern parliaments. In the literature there are several hypotheses on the factors that structure the functioning of parliaments. Only those are selected which play a role in the present-day debate on executive-legislative relations:

- Majoritarianism vs. consensus democracy (Lijphart 1999): Consensus democracies will enlarge the room to maneuver of parliaments compared to majoritarian democracies and their governments are expected to be weaker because they are built on coalitions. Majoritarian countries are characterized by weak parliaments and executive dominance which is based on the doctrine of the 'party mandate' (Budge 1996).
- Old versus new democracies (Schmidt 1999): the difference between established and fragile democracies has become more important than the juxtaposition of consensus and majoritarian democracies. This hypothesis explicitly contradicts the previous one, stating that the divide between majoritarianism and consensus democracy cannot account for major differences (especially in terms of political performance) of modern democracies. In established democracies, parliaments are more developed and better equipped to perform legislative tasks. As far as democratic performance is concerned, the divide between old and new democracies has become more important than the one between majoritarianism and consensus democracy (Schmidt 1999: 291).
- Thick versus thin constitutionalism (Lane and Ersson 2000): this hypothesis also contradicts the first one, but on different grounds. It states that thin constitutions (mainly characterized by division of powers as institutionalized by the Westminster state) enhance strong legislatures because the division of power principle entails that the legislature has to compete with the other two main state organs. Thick constitutions on the other hand do restrict the room to maneuver of parliaments (and governments) because of a rigid constitution, a fundamental bill of rights, special protection of minorities.
- Parliamentarism vs. presidentialism (Linz 1994). Linz argues that the performance of presidential regimes is far lower than that of parliamentary regimes. In addition, the room to maneuver of parliaments is much higher in parliamentary than in presidential regimes. But in Lijphart's view it is not necessary to emphasize this distinction, because all presidential systems are essentially majoritarian: "the consociational principle of executive power-sharing virtually rules out presidential and semi-presidential forms of government" (Lijphart 1994: 211).

The hypotheses of Linz and Schmidt are related to differences in performance, whereas those of Lijphart and Lane and Ersson focus on the effects of constitutional structures. Let's first discuss shortly the juxtaposition of majoritarian and consensus democracy. Parliaments and governments in both types of democracies have distinct features. A correlational analysis on the Woldendorp et al. data set confirms that in majoritarian systems we often find unicameralism, disproportional electoral systems, a low number of effective parties, a strong prime minister with special competences and single party governments. Do these factors

inevitably lead to weak parliaments, as is suggested by Lijphart? There are both empirical and theoretical grounds to doubt whether this juxtaposition of consensus and majoritarian democracies offers the best explanation for variations in the parliamentary control of the executive. First, elements of consensus democracy and majoritarianism are getting more and more mixed in modern democracies (Dunleavy and Margetts 1995). Second, case study analysis has shown that the parliamentary control of the government in consensus democracies is seriously weakened by the majority's duty to support the coalition government (the osmosis between parliament and government) (Keman 1996; De Winter 1998). On the other hand, the role of government backbenchers can also be conducive to parliamentary control in cases where consultation forces the government to modify its proposal in order to safeguard its support in parliament (De Winter 1993; Mezey 1998: 784). In any case, it is not too obvious that the underlying rationale of Lijphart's hypothesis is correct. Moreover, also Schmidt's and Lane and Ersson's hypothesis do contradict Lijphart's reasoning. This is not to say that the distinction between consensus democracy and majoritarianism is irrelevant for parliamentary control. The functioning of parliaments is certainly affected by these major institutional differences. However, it would be wrong to reduce the variations in parliamentary control to this simple distinction or any other dichotomy. As the previous analyses have shown (see Tables 4-6) there are complex interactions between legislatures and executives which cannot be reduced to simple dichotomies.

There is also a methodological problem with Lijphart's and Linz' hypotheses. Both are grounded on a particular selection of countries which evokes a common pattern. Once this selection is altered, the suggested relationship weakens or even vanishes. When Linz' hypothesis would be extended to the new democracies in Eastern Europe it would not be confirmed because they are formally characterized by both strong parliaments and strong presidents (Magar 1998). This is confirmed when presidential power (PRESPOWE) is correlated with the Freedom House democracy scale and Van Hanen's democracy scale. The resulting scores are low ( $r=.22$ ) and not significant ( $p=.14$ ). Hence, there is no statistical relationship between presidentialism and democratic performance.

The four juxtapositions have in common that they try to explain variations in parliamentary control by means of a simple dichotomy which comes down to a bivariate analysis. But given the complexities of parliamentary control, a multivariate model would better be equipped to incorporate institutional conditions which may facilitate parliamentary control. Such a model should be based on a range of factors which account for the fact that many systems combine elements of both majoritarianism and consensus democracy and presidentialism and parliamentary democracy.

A multivariate approach means that all four hypotheses can be integrated into one explanatory model of parliamentary control. This is illustrated by the regression in Table 8 with EXLEGBAL as dependent variable. The independent variables are represented by proxies which are operationalizations of the four hypotheses (all are explained in Appendix A):

- ELSYS (the degree of proportionality of the electoral system) and TOG3 (percentage of surplus governments) represent the dichotomy of majoritarianism vs. consensus democracy. These two variables represent the undisputed conditions for consociationalism (see: Pennings 1999). Lijphart expects a positive relationship with EXLEGBAL.
- NOFGOVS (the number of governments) represents the new democracies (we expect a negative relationship with EXLEGBAL because new democracies -which score low on NOFGOVS- often equipped their parliaments with abundant formal powers to control the government);
- FLEXICON (constitutional flexibility) represents thin vs. thick constitutions (the lower the score the more flexible a constitution is, so we expect a negative relationship with EXLEGBAL);

- PRESPOWE represents the distinction between parliamentarianism and presidentialism (on the basis of Linz' hypothesis we expect a negative relationship with EXLEGBAL).

**Table 8. Regression analysis on EXLEGBAL. Adjusted R2=.41.<sup>a</sup>**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
(Constant)	-,276	,452		-,611	,545
FLEXICON Flexible Constitution	-,144	,187	-,092	-,767	,447
ELSYS electoral system	,679	,208	,386	3,271	,002
TOG3 surplus coalition	1,637E-02	,004	,537	4,364	,000
NOFGOVS number of governments (1945-1996)	-1,692E-02	,007	-,326	-2,595	,013
PRESPOWE presidential powers index	-5,165E-02	,019	-,327	-2,784	,003

<sup>a</sup>. Dependent Variable: EXLEGBAL. Extent to which relationship between executive and legislative are balanced

The outcomes of the regression show that only FLEXICON is not significant. This may be partly due to its crude operationalization which does not capture the full details of the concept of thick versus thin constitutionalism as it is merely restricted to constitutional flexibility (The correlation between FLEXICON and Lijphart's measure of constitutional flexibility is .70 (n=28, p=.00. see Lijphart 1999: 220).

The other independent variables are significant and have the expected signs. The regression results indicate that the balance between executive and legislative powers depends on a combination of factors. Yet, this explanation is still incomplete as more than 50% remains unexplained. Analysis of residuals shows that in case of Guyana and Finland EXLEGBAL is lower than expected, whereas in case of Greece, Slovakia, Germany EXLEGBAL is higher (in all cases the standardized residuals are higher or lower than 1, but they are not outliers given the moderate scores).

The data indicate that the divisions into majoritarian versus consensus democracy and old versus new democracies are too crude to explain variations in parliamentary control. In addition, many of these divisions have become weaker or are combined into mixed or hybrid systems (Olson and Norton 1996: 234). As a consequence, most new parliamentary democracies are established with numerous cross-pressures which cannot be captured with the help of simple dichotomies.

## 6. Discussion

The emphasis in this paper is on the traditional forms of parliamentary control which may lead to the fall of a government. Recently, there is evidence for a reinforcement of unsanctioned controls, like parliamentary questions or request for information, committees of inquiry and control, and hearings (Mattson and Strom 1995; Wiberg 1995; Mény and Knapp 1998; Longley and Davidson 1998). These forms of parliamentary activism do not necessarily strengthen the parliamentary control function (the so-called 'paradox of parliamentary activism', see: Andeweg and Irwin 1993). Possible reasons for this are the majority's duty to support the government or the transfer of parliamentary oversight from the plenary floor to powerful committees who have their own agenda, see: Pasquino 1996). These unsanctioned controls have remained largely unspoken in this paper. The most recent comparative data on these forms of parliamentary control are fourteen years old and exclude the newly established democracies (IPU 1986). The new data set of Woldendorp is the first attempt since the

publication of the IPU-database in 1986 to gather quantitative comparative information on the present functioning of parliaments and governments.

The data are limited to formal aspects and not to the use and effects of parliamentary control. As is shown by the country descriptions in Kurian (1998), formal powers do not always lead to actual impact of parliaments (as in case of most Eastern European democracies) and the lack of formal powers does also not automatically mean that a parliament is powerless. The drawback of Kurian's descriptive approach is that the functioning of parliaments is merely depicted as varied and diverse and it does not unravel systematic patterns behind these differences. The quantifying approach in this paper is limited due to the small number of variables, but has demonstrated its capacity to find patterns behind variations in parliamentary control. Furthermore, the data set can be expanded with new variables so that the data analysis can become more detailed and encompassing. But even the current data show patterned variations in parliamentary control and lead to some interesting findings. The data set of Woldendorp et al. offers an unique possibility to analyze executive-legislative relations within a broader institutional context. It also enables us to do comparative research on parliaments which is nearly completely lacking in the current literature (Döring 1995; Mezey 1993).

The analysis has shown that parliamentary control has a dynamics of its own and is not solely a derivative of other variables, like federalism, institutional autonomy, presidentialism etc. The results also indicate that the main patterns (or degrees) of parliamentary control do not as neatly correspond to 'families of nations' as is sometimes suggested in the literature. Lijphart's distinction between consensus democracy and majoritarianism offers a poor statistical explanation of variations in parliamentary control. Lijphart's assumption that Westminster systems are characterized by strong governments and weak parliaments, whereas consociational countries are characterized by strong parliaments and weak governments is not confirmed by the data analysis.

The distinction between parliamentary versus presidential regimes does also not explain variations in parliamentary control. Since the rise of the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe the explanatory power of this model is further weakened because the new democracies combine presidential systems (implying executive dominance) with a (formally) strong parliament. The analysis has revealed the interesting paradox that, from a strictly formal point of view, the oldest democracies have relatively weak parliaments and the newest democracies have relatively strong parliaments. The results confirm the recent analysis of Lane and Ersson in which they show that presidentialism does not necessarily imply a weak parliament. Contrary Linz assumptions, parliamentary systems can be rather docile compared to presidential systems because the latter are not closely tied to the executive (i.e. not fused) (Blondel 1990: 241). But, as this paper has also shown, generalizations are hard to make because there are many cross-pressures and circumstances which may strengthen or weaken parliaments.

These findings suggest that the rise of new democracies with strong parliaments cause many old dichotomies to be outdated. Governments and parliaments, presidents and parliaments, consociational and majoritarian institutional features are becoming more and more intertwined. The ideal types, which still dominate in the literature, have in reality been replaced by more hybrid systems. As a consequence, many earlier findings on the functioning of parliaments vis-a-vis governments are not valid anymore because the parliamentary universe has become much more diverse.

Finally, this research has once again shown that the selection of cases is crucial for the research findings (Pennings et al. 1999). Western European countries are not necessarily representative for parliamentary democracies. The enlargement of the number of national parliaments since the fall of the German Wall necessitates a comparative reanalysis of all basic interrelationships between governments and parliaments. Our preliminary analysis on

the basis of the newest data suggests that well known 'facts' about parliaments and their relationship with the executive may have to be revised. Many conclusions based on studies of Western European countries cannot be generalized to all parliaments. One example is Mény's finding that parliamentary control with sanctions has become totally obsolete. Another example is Döring's analysis of legislative-executive relations in Europe (Döring 1994).

Döring found a perfect correlation between the active role of the Head of State and "Minimal Winning Coalitions". In countries where the Head of State intervenes in the formation and continuation of government, one will often find surplus government instead of Minimal Winning coalitions. It is assumed that the Head of State takes the role of an arbiter who has to intervene in case of conflicts. When we correlate in our data set the variables HOSGOV (the extent to which the Head of State can influence the composition or continuation of government) and the percentage of surplus coalitions (TOG3) we do indeed find the expected negative relationship (-.37) but this relationship is far from perfect and not significant (n=15 European countries; p=.169). In the data set as a whole, this relationship completely vanishes. This means that the research findings on variations in executive-legislative relations strongly depend on the selection of the units of analysis and on the operationalization of variables. Whereas our selection pretends to be a representative sample of parliaments, Döring's sample was clearly confined to Western Europe and therefore restricted to a particular group of established democracies which is not representative (any more) for parliamentary democracies in general.

Despite its limitations, the used data set has proven to be useful in order to analyze variations in parliamentary control and to evaluate the outcomes in terms of reliability, validity, conceptualization, operationalization and generalization. In future research the analysis will be refined and extended in order to analyze more aspects of parliamentary control such as the role of committees and opposition parties in various party systems.

**Acknowledgement.** I wish to thank Hans Keman and Jaap Woldendorp for making the data set available to me.

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APPENDIX A. Operationalization

Variable	Description
Invest	Investiture: Formal vote of Investiture is required (1=Yes; 0=No).
Confiden	Vote of no confidence: the Government must resign if it loses the Vote of Confidence. 1 = Losing a vote of (non-) Confidence always results in the resignation of government (or, alternatively, in the dissolution of parliament; 0 = Not required (or can be ignored by the government).
Parlgov	Extent to which Parliament is dominant over Government. It is a cumulative index: It is constructed by adding up scores of: -Vote of Investiture is necessary condition to govern (1,0) -Vote of Confidence is necessary condition to continue to govern (1,0).
Govparl	Govparl = Extent to which Government is dominant over Parliament. It is constructed by adding up scores of: - Government can ignore losing a Vote of Confidence (1,0) - Government (or PM) can dissolve Parliament: 1,0 (if shared with Head of State, then: 0,5)
Hosgov	Extent to which the Head of State can influence the composition and (continuation) of the existence of a Government. Hence, it indicates the independent power of the Head of State vis-à-vis Parliament. This variable is constructed by adding up the scores of: - HoS is directly involved in the formation of Government (0,5) - HoS can dissolve Parliament (0.5) - HoS has also executive powers (1,0).
Exlegbal	Extent to which the relationship between the Executive and Legislative powers is more/less balanced. This variable is a composite index constructed on the basis of the foregoing three variables. A positive score implies dominance of Parliament over the executive powers (including the Head of State); a negative score implies dominance of Government and/or Head of State over Parliament. The closer the score is to 0 the more balanced the relationship between Executive and a Legislative power in a parliamentary democratic polity is assumed to be. The scores are computed by deducting the sum of (Hosgov + Parlgov) from ParlGov.
Autonomy	Composite Index of non-central independence government, based on: fiscal centralization, regional autonomy, state centralization, independent rights of local government. The maximum score is 8.
Vetopop	Degree of Veto-points available vis-à-vis Central government, based on: referenda, bicameralism, PARLGOV and constitutional flexibility.
Legpower	Legislative powers of the president, based on Shugart and Carey 1992.
Nlegpower	Executive powers of the President, based on Shugart and Carey 1992.
Prespowe	The sum of presidential powers
Elsys	The type of electoral system (1=PR, 0=Non-PR). It is derived from a variable on electoral formula which divides countries into: majority systems, plurality systems, mixed systems and PR systems.
Tog3	The percentage of Surplus Governments
Nofgovs	The number of postwar governments
Flexicon	Flexible Constitution. The lower the score the more flexible (or less rigid) the Constitution is. Operationalization of FlexiCon (maximum = 3.5): - Qualified Majority is required for changing/amending the Constitution = 1; - If by an Absolute Majority or Two Readings are required = .5; if else = 0 - External Review by Judiciary = 1. by HoS and/or Council = .5; if not = 0 - Internal Review required = .5. if not = 0 - Referendum required = 1. if optional = .5. if not = 0

Source: Woldendorp, Keman and Budge, 2000.

## APPENDIX B. Country scores: a selection of variables

## Appendix C. Full list of Variables

COUNTRY	country
MAJSIMPL	Minimal required majority for decision-making in parliament
ELSYS	electoral system
DISSOLUT	dissolution of parliament
FIXTERM	The length of term between elections in years
MONARCHY	Hereditary type of Head of State (=HoS)
PRESIDEN	Elected Head of State
PRESELDI	Directly elected by the electorate
PRESELIN	Indirectly elected by a democratically elected body
LEGPOWER	legislative powers of president
NLEGPOWE	non-legislative powers of president
PRESPOWE	presidential powers index
FEDVSUNI	Federalism
FISCALGO	Central Government Revenues as a Percentage of Total Taxation
DECENTRA	Degree of Autonomy for sub-national government
AUTONOMY	Composite Index of non-central independence government
VETOPOP	Degree of Veto-points available vis-à-vis Central government
UNICAMER	Parliament consists of one Chamber only
BICAMERA	Parliament consists of an Upper & a Lower House
SEATSLH	Number of Seats in the Lower House (absolute Number)
SEATSUH	Number of Seats in the Upper House (absolute Number)
TERMLH	Maximum years of term, i.e. in office as MP
TERMUH	Maximum years of term, i.e. in office as MP
ELTHRESH	Electoral threshold
UNSUFFRA	Universal Suffrage
REFTYPE	Right of the Electorate to cast their vote re specified issue
NOFREFS	Nr of nation-wide Referendums since 1945 or since independence
MININPAR	Compatibility of Offices whilst in Government
PMSTRONG	PM has special competences beyond other members of Government
COLLECDM	Extent to which GVT is directly responsible for its actions
FLEXICON	Flexible Constitution
INVESTIT	Formal vote of Investiture is required
CONFIDEN	Government must resign if it loses the Vote of Confidence
PARLGOV	Extent to which Parliament is dominant over Government
HOSGOV	Extent to which the HOS can influence the comp-cont of GVT
GOVPARL	Extent to which GVT is dominant over Parliament (index)
EXLEGBAL	Extent to which relationship between EXT and LEG are balance
DEMOCR73	freedom democracy index 1973
DEMOCR98	freedom democracy index 1998
COLLAPSE	recovered after collapse of democracy
DUR	duration in days (mean 1945-1996)
CPG	colour of party government (mean 1945-1996)
SUPPORT	parliamentary support (mean 1945-1996)
NOFGOVS	number of governments (1945-1996)
TOG1	single party government
TOG2	MWC
TOG3	surplus coalition
TOG4	single party minority govt
TOG5	multi party minority govt
TOG6	catetaker govt
CPG1	right-wing
CPG2	right-centre
CPG3	balanced
CPG4	left=centre
CPG5	left-wing
CAT	interruption of democracy
DEMSCALE	democracy scale (jaggers/gurr; vanhanen)
REGION	region (Derbyshire)
REGTYPE	regime type Derbyshire
REPMON	republic or monarchy
COMMONW	member of commonwealth
YEAR_EST	year that regime type was established
HOS_YEAR	year HOS came to power
EFFNOP	effective number of parties in the 1990s, based on POLSCI
STANDCOM	number of standing committees
RFT	% of governments terminated by elections

Source: Woldendorp, Keman and Budge, 2000. This list also includes variables which are added to the original file by the author.