A change is gonna come

Why parliament intervenes in legislation

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According to conventional wisdom legislatures in parliamentary systems play a less active legislative role than legislative assemblies in presidential ones. With the same political majority prevailing in government and parliament the assembly risks becoming a tool in the hands of majority leaders, usually holding key ministerial positions, leaving limited room for parliament to play an independent role.

While it is well known that parliamentary systems vary in the extent to which legislative assemblies are dominated by the cabinet (Döring 1995), recent research has renewed interest in how parliaments may actually be important actors in the policy making process (Martin and Vanberg 2011). Parliaments can play an important role in 'policing' coalition bargains along with other instruments of coalition governance, such as coalition agreements (Müller and Strøm 1999), cabinet committees (Kim and Loewenberg 2005) and shadow junior ministers (Thies 2001).

Analysing the policy and legislative roles of parliament vis-à-vis the cabinet calls for a closer look at why cabinets tend to dominate in parliamentary systems and under what circumstances parliaments are permitted a more active role. We suggest that three factors are of primary importance to the cabinet's control of parliament. In the first place *majority power* gives the cabinet the upper hand, at least when supported by a cohesive or disciplined parliamentary majority and majoritarian procedures of decision making. Secondly, the ability to *co-ordinate* the work of the majority is likely to contribute to greater control over the policy process, which is especially important where there are coalition governments rather than just single party majorities. Finally, the overwhelming *policy making*

resources and technical superiority of the executive are likely to help the government to overcome resistance to its policies in parliament.

Variation in the influence of parliaments on policy is then expected to be caused by weakness in one or more of the three factors contributing to cabinet predominance. Majority power may be limited by the numerical weakness of the government in parliament or by recourse to veto options by the opposition. Lack of coordination may lead to failure of the government to work coherently, e.g., through lack of party discipline or weak coalition management. This may thwart the progress of government proposals through parliament. Failure to prepare policy sufficiently may create opportunities for both majority and minority members of parliament to question the premises on which policy is based, providing opportunities for obstruction, diversions and amendments. These factors are laid out schematically in table 1.

Table 1. Cabinet dominance in parliamentary systems: Sources and limits

Sources of government superiority	Potential weaknesses in government control
Majority power	• Numerical weakness (e.g. minority government) • Opposition veto power
Cabinet management and co-ordination	Lack of party- and coalition cohesion
Informational advantage	Parliament fails to recognize superior government expertise

To study the impact of these factors on government predominance in parliament we take advantage of very detailed data on the progress of bills through the Icelandic parliament. The Icelandic parliament, Althingi, plays an unusually active legislative role as parliamentary committees amend almost all government bills to some extent, and some of them quite substantially. Although this is often done in collaboration with the minister in question the extent of committee intervention goes far beyond even the Scandinavian legislatures, which are generally considered unusually active (Arter 1985). Rasch (2011) notes that a quarter of all government bills are amended in the Norwegian Storting on average (p. 247) – which he considers quite high. The comparable figure for the Icelandic Althingi is 90%. The great degree of legislative intervention in Althingi provides an opportunity to apply statistical analysis to study variation in the extent to which government bills are modified or rejected.

To examine why and when parliament takes an active role in legislation we examine the fate of all government bills in Iceland 2003-2014 where each bill is tracked from the date of introduction to the end of the parliamentary session.

Cabinet and assembly

Assembly power in Iceland should reflect weaknesses in one or more of the main roots of cabinet supremacy in parliamentary systems, i.e. majority power, cabinet management or informational advantage. In what follows each of the three factors is examined with special reference to the Icelandic case in order to develop hypotheses relevant to the empirical material.

<u>Majority power</u>

Although parliamentary government has been defined in different ways the minimum requirement is that the parliamentary majority has the right to remove the government at any time. Under normal circumstances this implies that the government can count on the support of the parliamentary majority as a government which does not enjoy the confidence of parliament would have to resign. Most decisions taken by parliaments require only a simple majority of votes so the majority principle essentially gives the government control over the work of parliament. Parliamentary government is thus a way of making parliament and the cabinet act in a unified and efficient manner (Cox 1987).

In cases where parliament fails to produce a stable majority or produces only a weak one there still needs to be a government, but its control over parliament is less secure and in some cases non-existent. The threat of losing control may be met with the formation of coalition governments which may effectively retain control of the parliamentary majority. The smaller the majority of the government, however, the more vulnerable its control is and the more susceptible it may be to blackmail by some of its supporters. Minority governments without a parliamentary majority may enjoy stable parliamentary support if one or more non-cabinet parties in parliament decide to lend the government its support in exchange for greater influence. In other cases, minority governments may have to negotiate with parliament on a case-by-case basis, which is likely to make their position still more vulnerable. This provides parliament with far greater opportunities to affect legislation than under stable majority control. Minority governments, e.g. in Scandinavia, have provided

parliaments with comparatively great opportunities to intervene in legislation (Damgaard and Jenssen 2006).

Although parliamentary government is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the Icelandic constitution, it was adopted in Iceland parallel to reform of the Danish executive in the early 1900s. Iceland obtained Home Rule in 1904, sovereignty in 1918 and became a republic in 1944. Parliamentary government encouraged the formation of more stable party groupings in parliament and during the Inter-War period a class based party system developed consisting of a conservative party, farmers' party, social-democratic party and communist party. Minority governments were relatively common in the formative period of Icelandic party politics but since the Second World War there have been only five such cabinets, most of them lasting only a few months. All other governments have been majority coalition governments with a stronger tendency for minimal winnings coalitions (MWCs) to prevail than in most European states (Indridason 2005). Smaller coalition partners are generally overcompensated in the distribution of portfolios reflecting a strong bargaining position and pre-election pacts are very uncommon. The Icelandic party organizations have an established tradition of patronage and constituency service which – although receding to some extent in recent decades – has encouraged office seeking behaviour (Kristinsson & Indriðason 2007). The main parties in the period under study here are the Independence Party (IP, conservative – 36.6-23.7% of votes), Social Democratic Alliance (SDA, social democrats, 12.9-31% of votes), Progressive Party (PP, centre, formerly agrarian, 11.7-24.4% of votes) and Left-Greens (LG, left green socialists, 8.8-21.7% of votes).

Although Icelandic governments tend to be majority coalitions there are two instances in the period under study of minority governments, i.e., that of the Social-Democrats and Left Greens in February-April 2009 and the same parties 2011-2013. Given the small size of the assembly however (63 members) the government majority in some cases hinges on the votes of a few members, which may create temptations for members of the majority. They may be tempted to use their pivotal position to the advantage of a narrow interest (e.g., those of their constituency) based on the threat of defecting from the majority.

H1: *The weaker the numerical strength of the government in parliament, the weaker its control over legislation. Minority governments, in particular are likely to have weak control over legislation.*

Majority power in the Icelandic Althingi is not checked by many veto points. The president may refuse to countersign legislation, which calls for a referendum to decide the issue, but this has only been used three times since the establishment of the republic in 1944. The main tool of the opposition to influence normal legislation against a united majority is the filibuster. Technically the government can overrule attempts at filibustering but a tacit agreement exists among the parties not to use such measures. Bills which have not been adopted in a given parliamentary session have to be re-introduced as new bills in the subsequent session if they are not to be abandoned. Towards the end of the parliamentary session the government sometimes gets into trouble with its legislative programme and has to negotiate with the opposition on the order or priorities. This provides an opportunity for the opposition to affect which bills are passed and potentially their content as well. The opposition is likely to use such pressure to thwart salient policy bills while the government is likely to prioritize them. Salient bills attracting a lot of attention during parliamentary debates are likely to test the governing capacity of the government more than others and are hence more likely to be passed. Party discipline, as a rule, is high in the Icelandic parties, comparable to the Scandinavian countries (Kristinsson 2011). This applies to both the government and opposition parties. Efforts by the government to pull through legislation create greater pressure in the governing parties to enforce party discipline.

H2: *Bills which are introduced late in the session are more likely to be thwarted by the opposition.*

H3. *Bills which are salient in government - opposition terms are more likely to be passed than others.*

Cabinet management

Early attempts at understanding the management of coalition cabinets focused primarily at portfolio allocations (Gamson 1962). Laver and Shepsle (1996) assumed that coalition bargains were essentially deals dividing control over whole issue areas between coalition partners, rendering further control superfluous. Subsequent research, however, has revealed a number of important tools which are used by coalition partners to keep control of their partners, including coalition agreements, hierarchy in the cabinet, cabinet committees, junior ministers and parliamentary scrutiny (see, e.g., Thies 2001, Indridason &

Kristinsson 2013, Martin and Vanberg 2014). Surveillance may be directed both at a party's own ministers (who may be tempted to prioritize their own preferences above those of the party) and those of its coalition partners. Surveillance is, on the whole, more important if the policy distance between ministers and their principals in the cabinet are great (Pedrazzani & Zucchini 2013).

The Icelandic cabinet has traditionally had a relatively flat structure, relying to a great extent on cabinet meetings as the main venue for co-ordination, although how well this mechanism works has been called into question (Kristinsson 2012). Coalition agreements tend to be relatively short and hierarchy within the cabinet not much developed, although the use of cabinet committees has been growing since the 1990s. Althingi, however, has long played a more active legislative role than most other parliamentary assemblies (Arter 1984) and the parliamentary committees, in particular, may be an important extension of cabinet management. In fact they may serve coalition members both in keeping control over the ministers of their coalition partners and own.

The committees play a key role in the parliamentary processing of government bills. After bills have been approved by the government – sometimes after rather limited scrutiny at cabinet level – they are presented on the floor for the first round of discussion. After that they are referred to the standing committees which effectively decide their fate. The committees are elected from the floor and the government as a rule is in a majority on all the committees. The coalition partners decide which MPs become committee chairs, positions that are of considerable influence. When the minister and committee chair are from the same party they often work closely together and are likely to have similar preferences, increasing the likelihood that the minister's legislation will be adopted as well as being subjected to fewer amendments. When the minister and committee chair represent different coalition partners, the expectation is the opposite as the committees become a more important venue for intra-coalitional oversight and settlement of disputes. Naturally, the extent to which non-congruent committee chairmanships are important depends on the degree of differences in policy preferences among the coalition partners – and, importantly, even when minister and committee chair are co-partisans there may be differences of opinion that affect the success of the minister's legislative proposals.

H4: *When the minister and committee chair belong to the same party this improves the chances of a bill being passed and reduces the amount of change introduced by the committee. (Opposition chairs are likely to be most obstructive.)*

H5. *Policy distance between the minister and the party of the committee chair reduces the likelihood that a bill will pass and increases the amount change made to it if it does. This applies even if the minister and committee chair are from the same party.*

Complexity and technical superiority

The cabinet in parliamentary systems has policy making resources at its command which are vastly superior to those of the opposition. It is generally considered the role of the cabinet and individual ministers to initiate legislation, examine policy alternatives, consult interested parties and come to well considered and well-argued conclusions. Private members bills do emerge in parliamentary systems but their numbers are limited and their chances of succeeding slim (Mattson 1995). Parliamentarians' belief in the technical superiority of the executive in preparing legislation should generally ease the passage of well-prepared legislative bills through parliament. If parliamentarians are suspicious of executive policy preparations, however, they are more likely to intervene.

Several factors suggest that Icelandic parliamentarians are less intimidated by the superior resources of the executive in preparing legislation than in other European states. The policy making process in Iceland at the ministry and cabinet stage is a much less elaborate affair than in the other Nordic countries while parliament plays a more assertive role. Commentary and explanatory texts accompanying government bills in Iceland are much shorter than in the other cases (Kristinsson 2013). According to a European survey of senior civil servants, Icelandic politicians are much less respectful of the technical expertise of the administration than in most of the other cases (Icelandic Ministry of Finance 2015). In some countries junior ministers, backed by policy experts in the ministries, play an active role in navigating government bills through parliament and its legislative committees. Icelandic cabinets, however, include no junior ministers and the cabinet, therefore, often lacks agents with a sufficiently strong political standing who are able to follow through government

policy in the committees. Although a number of politically appointed ministerial assistants work in the ministries, these tend to have limited impact in the committees and are usually hired primarily for PR purposes. Civil servants feel uncomfortable in following through politically contested issues and tend to limit their commentary to technical issues.

Although most of the bills that pass through parliament are government bills, the number of private members bills (including committee bills) introduced is higher than in most parliamentary systems. The unlimited rights of private members and committees to introduce legislative bills means that such bills receive more time and attention than in other parliamentary systems. All bills receive at least one hearing in plenum with generous time allocation, after which they are referred to committees. While the success rate of private members bills is low it is higher than in most parliamentary systems and the success rate of committee bills is high.

Complicated issues, nonetheless, are likely to strain the capacity of parliament to process bills. With nine members per parliamentary committee and rather limited access to expert advice the committees are likely to be more adept at handling smaller bills than large and complicated ones. How should the parliamentary committees respond to issue complexity when they lack confidence in the expertise used during policy preparations? Most likely they will concentrate on dealing with simpler issues. More complicated issues are likely to be postponed or stopped altogether. Sometimes, however, the executive is expected to prepare a new bill in the following session, taking note of the mood of the committee. Lack of confidence by parliamentarians in the policy making capacity of the executive is likely to be reflected in reluctance to pass bills which receive a lot of stakeholder commentary unchanged.

H6: *Complexity decreases the likelihood that a bill will pass.*

H7: *Smaller changes are made by parliament to complex bills.*

H8. Bills which receive a lot of attention and external commentary are less likely to be passed and more likely to be changed than others

Data and methods

The legislative success of governments and government ministers is reflected in two measures. On the one hand whether they are passed or not (i.e. if they have been accepted before the end of session) and in the case of successful bills how much they have changed from the original bill to the passing of a new act. The amount of change is measured, as suggested by Pedrazzani and Zucchini (2013) as the number of words changed from the initial version of the bill presented to parliament to final legislation approved by parliament. Changes in the content of a bill from its introduction to its adoption is measured by moving the texts of bills and legislation into MS Word 2003. Texts are compared by counting the number of words in a bill (k), the number of words in legislative acts (l), the number of deleted words in a bill (m) and the number of new words in legislative acts (n). The amount of change is calculated according to the formula $x = 100*(m + n) / (k + l)$. The theoretical range of the change coefficient, x, is from 0 to 100 where 0 indicates identical documents and 100 means that the document is unrecognisable.

In the period under study, 2003-2014, a total of 1457 government bills, excluding budgetary bills, were introduced in the Althingi.[1] Their fate is reported in table 2. Budget related bills are not available in a format suitable for the present analysis but all 36 of them were, however, approved.

Table 2. Fate of government bills 2003-2014

	Number of bills	%
Not Approved	353	24,8
Approved w/Amendments	918	64,6
Approved Unamended	150	10,6
Total	1457	100,0

About 25% of government bills fail in parliament. In a comparative perspective the proportion of government bills passed (i.e., 75.2% of introduced government bills) is not unusual. According to Bräuninger and Debus (2009, 820) the corresponding figures for Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom are 68-95%. Legislative activism of the Icelandic Althingi is reflected more in the amount of changed made to government bills than in blocking government legislation.

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[1] The analysis is restricted to government bills.

When the bills which pass unchanged – amounting to 10.6% of government bills, are examined – these are primarily short bills of secondary importance. In table 3 we look at the combined number of words in the legislative text and commentary in government bills.

Table 3. Total Length of Bills & Explanatory Notes

Fate of Bill	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Not Approved	9937	350	14608
Approved w/Amendments	5781	918	9937
Approved Unamended	1160	150	2115
Total	6318	1418	11098

Whereas bills which fail are on average close to 10 thousand words, and bills passing after changes close to 6 thousand, those which pass un-amended are on average just over one thousand words. Other evidence supports the interpretation that these are bills of secondary importance, including the number of speeches made in plenum during discussions and the number of comments received by the parliamentary committees, both of which are much lower than in the case of bills which pass with changes.

Consider that the great majority of approved legislation is adopted after the initial bill is amended it appears clear that amendments are an important form of parliamentary activism in Althingi.

Table 4 shows the average change coefficient for each session in our data set. The average change coefficient for adopted legislation is about 20%. The average prior to the crash in 2008 is slightly lower (15%) but still substantially higher than might be expected in a parliamentary system. After the crash the amount of changes made to government bills is considerably higher (26%) although the exceptionally high numbers for 2011-2012 account for a considerable part of the change. Higher rates of change can partly be accounted for by weak support for the government in parliament in 2010-2013. The return of a strong parliamentary majority in 2013, however, seems not to have facilitated a return to pre-crisis figures. An average change of 21% in the session of 2013-2014 is still considerably higher than anything seen prior to the crash.

Table 4. Change Coefficient

Session starting	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
2003	17.67	105	25.40
2004	13.25	89	18.88
2005	14.01	112	19.67
2006	18.03	100	26.52
2007	15.27	118	22.08
2008	19.17	76	26.09
2009	17.48	138	22.48
2010	23.51	105	28.48
2011	50.90	72	7.95
2012	19.55	72	23.66
2013	21.15	81	25.29
Total:	19.97	1068	24.70

Turning to our independent variables, *Government MPs*, is simply the total number of government party MPs. An indicator variable for *Minority Governments* is also included to account for the possibility that minority governments face different challenges in passing legislation. Minority governments are rare in Iceland. In the period under study, however, there are two periods of minority governments, i.e. a few months early in 2009 when a government of the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement sat until an election could be held later that year, and 2011-2013 when the government of the same parties had lost its parliamentary majority. Pedrazzani and Zucchini (2013, p. 687) suggest that more changes are made to minority government bills than others.

Legislative proposals die at the end of each legislative session and must be reintroduced in the following session. With each legislation session lasting about eight or nine months the cabinet and legislature face significant time pressures and legislation introduced late in the term is, other things equal, less likely to be adopted. The variable *Days Remaining* measures the number of months until the time that Althingi normally concludes its business for the session, i.e., in June each year except in election years when the session ends at

the end of April.[2] An indicator variable for *Election Year* is also included to account for the fact that a shorter session may alter the dynamics of the legislative process – as, indeed, may the fact that elections are looming on the horizon.

Legislation that is considered highly salient is expected to be both more likely to be adopted and to be amended more heavily. Measuring the salience of a particular legislative proposal is challenging but we consider a series of proxies to capture the effects of salience. First, we consider the *Number of MPs* that offered their views on the legislation by speaking to the chamber. Second, allowing for the possibility that some MPs speak multiple times, we count the *Number of Speeches* made in the chamber. Third, the total *Number of Comments* submitted to Althingi – in total and by specific groups of actors – on the legislative proposal can be considered a measure of salience.[3]

Ideological differences are expected to influence both how much bills are amended and whether they are adopted. Here we primarily focus on how intra-coalitional ideological differences shape legislation. The ideological measures are derived from an expert survey in which 26 experts (academics, journalists, and specialists in Althingi) were asked to estimate the ideological distance between each of the political parties and each minister within the minister's portfolio. Thus, the ideological measures provide an "issue-specific" measure of ideological differences. We consider three measures. The first measure, *Ideological Distance,* is simply the ideological distance between the coalition partners (all the coalitions were two party coalitions). The second measure, consider the difference in the issue position of the minister and his party – if Althingi and the legislative committees have a role in providing ministers with oversight then more extensive amendments are expected when the minister is a poor representative of her party on the issue. The third measure is the difference between the minister's issue position and the coalition partner's position. This measure is, of course, highly correlated with the first measure so only the first measure is included in the outcome equation of the model while both are

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[2] Althingi's sessions run from October 1 each year until the end of the Septermber the following year. Normally the last meetings of Althingi occur around mid-June although in a few instances Althingi reconvenes in the same session in late fall. In addition there are short summer sessions in election years following the election but typically Althingi does not conduct much business during the summer sessions. We exclude bills proposed during reconvened and summer sessions of Althingi.

[3] We also consider the number of comments broken down by who submitted the comments; parliamentary committees, political actors, ministries, public institutions, local governments, occupational groups, interest groups, research institutions, the private sector, organizations and clubs, and individuals.

included in the selection equation as including more variables in the selection equation aids identification of the model.

Committee chairs that share party affiliation with the minister in charge of the corresponding portfolio are expected to usher bills through the committee and to shield them from extensive revisions. In contrast if the committee is chaired by a member of the coalition partner, the bill is less likely to become a law but if it does it subjected to greater amendments. The variable *Same Party Committee Chair* is coded one when the portfolio minister and the committee chair are members of the same party.

Legislation can vary in complexity and that may have implications for both its adoption and how much it is amended. Althingi may be ill equipped with dealing with complex legislation – at least relative to the expertise that exists in the bureaucracy. The lack of expertise may reduce how much the legislation changes in passing through Althingi but it is also possible that Althingi, in the face of complex issues, will choose not to act on the legislative proposal.[4] The first measure of bill complexity is simply its length, *Bill Length,* measured in thousands of words. An explanatory note or explanatory memorandum generally accompanies legislative proposals in Althingi – unlike the explanatory notes in, e.g., UK's House of Commons, the explanatory notes can contain an extensive discussion of the legislation context, providing both the rationale for its introduction and justification of its contents. The length of the explanatory note serves as another measure of the complexity of the legislation.

As those two aspects of legislative success, i.e., adoption of legislation and the extent of its amendment by parliament, are not necessarily independent, we model the adoption and amendment of government model using a Heckman selection model. Apart from the obvious theoretical connection, using a selection model is also important as changes to government legislation are only observed for bills that are eventually adopted by Althingi. The selection equation in our Heckman model thus focuses on whether the bill was adopted by parliament while the outcome equation has the change in the content of the government bill as its dependent variable.

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[4] One potential issue here is that bills expire at the end of each session. Thus, Althingi may allow bills to "fail" in order for them to be reintroduced in the following session to continue work on the bill.

The results of the estimated Heckman models are presented in table 5. The government's representation in parliament has the predicted effects – the greater the government's majority the more likely the bill is to be passed and the less it is amended. While this may be taken to indicate that the opposition does have some influence on legislation when the cabinet parties have a slim majority that is not necessarily the case. That is, similar results are expected when the government is held hostage by its own MPs but the scope for individual MPs to do so expands when the government majority is very small.

The timing of the introduction of legislative bills has the hypothesized effects. The earlier the bill is introduced, the more difficult it is for the opposition to prevent its passing, e.g., filibustering is not a viable option when bills are introduced very early on in the session. The results also indicate that the earlier bills are introduced, the less the final result resembles the original proposal.

The party identity of the committee chair is expected to influence the extent to which bills are amended. In particular, bills are expected to be amended less when committee chair and minister in the relevant portfolios are members of the same party. There is a slight indication that this is the case although the effect is only statistically significant at the 90% confidence level and only in the first model. In terms of substantive significance the effect is sizable with there being about three points less changes in the bill when committee chair and minister come from the same party. Legislative bills handled by committees whose chair and ministers are co-partisans are also slightly more likely to be adopted but the effect fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

The idea that the party identity of the committee chair matters is predicated on the notion that ministers and committee chairs may have different policy preferences. As changes in legislation can be expected to be the result of both the ideological differences of the coalition partners as well as the ideological differences between the minister and the committee chair we interact the ideological differences between the coalition partners with the indicator for whether the minister and committee chair are co-partisans. In other words, examining the effect of the ideological differences between minister and

committee chair is equivalent to asking whether ideological differences have different effects depending on the party membership of the committee chair.[5]

Table 5: Bill Amendment & Passage
---Heckman Selection Model---

		(1)	(2)	(3)
Outcome Equation: Change Coefficient	Government MPs	-0.98***	-0.97***	-0.89***
		(0.3)	(0.3)	(0.3)
	Minority Gov't	-9.58**	-9.79**	-8.63**
		(3.9)	(3.9)	(3.9)
	Days Remaining	0.040***	0.040***	0.042***
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
	Ideological Distance	0.73***	0.72***	0.53**
		(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.2)
	Other Party Committee Chair	1.67	1.33	-4.29
		(1.9)	(1.9)	(3.8)
	Other Party Committee Chair* Ideol. Dist.			0.70*
				(0.4)
	Bill Length (Words)	-0.70**	-0.67**	-0.65**
		(0.3)	(0.3)	(0.3)
	Dist. Minister-Own Party	0.28	0.33	0.35
		(0.3)	(0.3)	(0.3)
	Comments - Total	0.30***		
		(0.08)		
	Comments - Ministry		0.71	0.71
			(0.8)	(0.8)
	Comments - Public Inst'n		0.13	0.15
			(0.3)	(0.3)
	Comments - Interest Groups		0.50*	0.49*
			(0.3)	(0.3)
	Comments - Private Sector		1.34***	1.35***
			(0.5)	(0.5)
	Comments - Others		-0.087	-0.14
			(0.3)	(0.3)
	#Speeches		-0.0062	-0.0064
			(0.006)	(0.006)
	Constant	38.9***	38.1***	36.1***
		(10.4)	(10.5)	(10.5)
Selection Equation: Bill Passes	Election Year	-0.33***	-0.33***	-0.33***
		(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)
	Government MPs	0.034*	0.034*	0.034*
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
	Minority Gov't	-0.28	-0.28	-0.28
		(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.2)
	Days Remaining	0.0044***	0.0044***	0.0044***
		(0.0008)	(0.0008)	(0.0008)
	Number of MPs Speaking	0.088***	0.088***	0.088***
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
	Comments - Total	-0.033***	-0.033***	-0.033***
		(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
	Other Party Committee Chair	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18
		(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)
	Bill Length (Words)	-0.0036	-0.0037	-0.0036
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
	Dist. Minister-Own Party	-0.077***	-0.077***	-0.077***
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
	Dist. Minister-Coalition Party	-0.0083	-0.0083	-0.0080
		(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
	Ideological Distance	0.018	0.018	0.018

[5] That is in part a function of the data available as addressing the question of the ideological differences between minister and committee chair would require information about the policy preferences of the committee chair. Here we only have information about the issue position of the committee chair's party.

	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Explanatory Note Length (Words)	-0.016**	-0.016**	-0.016**
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Constant	-0.63	-0.64	-0.64
	(0.7)	(0.7)	(0.7)
atanh(ρ)	-0.082	-0.093	-0.077
	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.2)
ln(σ)	3.17***	3.16***	3.16***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Observations	1031	1031	1031
Log Likelihood	-4255.9	-4251.4	-4249.9

Standard errors in parentheses. $^{*} p < 0.10$, $^{**} p < 0.05$, $^{***} p < 0.01$

The ideological distance between the coalition partners, when the committee chair is the minister's co-partisan, increases the probability that the bill will pass but the effect is not statistically significant at the conventional levels. Ideological distance has, however, a clear effect on how much the bill changes from its introduction to its final vote – a one unit increase in ideological differences results increases the change coefficient by about .5 on average. Considering that the range of issue differences ranges from .6 to 22.1, these effects are substantively large – in issues areas where the coalition partners are far apart large differences can lead to quite large changes.

In the case of „watch-dog" committee chairs, the effect of ideology is more than twice as big – a one unit increase in ideological differences increases the change coefficient by about 1.2. This is a strong indication that chairmanship in committees does matter – while co-partisan chair may not be able to completely shield a bill from amendments, it appears "watch-dog" chairs can engage in substantially larger revisions.

As the model includes an interaction it is evident that the effect of "watch-dog" chairs depends on how big the ideological issue differences are. At low levels of ideological differences moving from a co-partisan to a "watch-dog" chair has essentially no effect on how much the bill is amended but at the higher levels of ideological differences in our the effect is positive and substantively large (upto a seven point increase in the change coefficient). The estimated effect has a significant degree of uncertainty attached to it and only borders on the 10% level of significance.

The ideological distance between a minister and his own party is also of interest. Just as parliamentary committees may be used to manage intra-party conflict, they may be used as tool to combat policy drift that results from ministers' preferences not being representative of their parties. While the results do indicate that bills that originate from ministers whose issue preferences are

distant from their parties are less likely to become a law there are, at best, only slight indications that their bills are amended more extensively. It is not surprising that the evidence for this hypothesis is not strong as one would expect a strong selection effect – the parties are unlikely to select ministers whose policy preferences in a given portfolio depart far from the party preferences.

The length of the bill and explanatory notes was used as a proxy for the complexity of the legislation. The length of both the bill and the explanatory notes reduced the likelihood that the bill passes in a given session although only the length of the explanatory notes was significant at the conventional levels of statistical significance. The opposite was true when it came to the extent of amendments of bills – only longer bills had an effect on how much the bill was amended.[6] Longer bills were amended less – at least in terms of proportions – and suggest that Althingi is perhaps ill prepared to handle more complicated legislation for lack of expertise.

To gauge the importance of the salience of the issue we considered a series of variables. The number of MPs addressing Althingi on the subject of a particular bill increased the likelihood of the bill being adopted into law. That stands to reason, more important or salient legislation is unlikely to be allowed to be stalled in the legislative process – the government generally has the tools to force a legislation through parliament and is most likely to make use of those tools on issues that it considers important. Neither the number of speakers nor the number of speeches made have a significant effect on amendment activity on the bill. The second group of measures focused on the number of comments submitted to Althing from external actors on a particular legislation. Considering the total number of comments received, we find that comments negatively affect the probability that the bill is passed. Again, this stands to reason as more contentious and salient pieces of legislation are more likely to receive comments. If the bill passes into law, however, it will look more different from the initial proposal the greater the number of comments. Taking a closer look at the submitters of the comments, it becomes apparent that comments from interest groups and the private sector are most strongly associated with changes in the bill.

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[6] Length of explanatory notes was not statistically significant and was dropped from the model to help with its identification.

Discussion

Our premise was that there are three factors that contribute to the legislative effectiveness of governments; majority power, the ability to coordinate among the coalition parties, and its informational advantage. Below we consider briefly how variation in each of these factors contributes to the success of the government's agenda.

Majority power

The primary source of the ability of parliamentary cabinets to implement legislation rest with the main organizing principle of parliamentary systems, i.e., that cabinet maintain the support of the legislature, which in the Icelandic case has generally implied the formation of majority cabinets. In such circumstances, the ability of the cabinet to enact its agenda is primarily dependent on the cohesion of its parliamentary parties and, in its absence, party discipline. Party cohesion and discipline is most likely to be consequential when the cabinet's majority is slim. This is borne out by the empirical evidence. Government bills are more likely to be adopted when the government has a more comfortable majority and the resulting legislation bears a greater resemblance to the original legislative proposal.

The cabinet's majority power is most obviously diminished when its coalition parties don't have a majority in parliament. In those cases the cabinet must build majority support for its legislation. The empirical results here are somewhat mixed. Minority cabinets are slightly, if at all, less successful in passing legislation – as one might expect – but when minority cabinets are successful their legislation survives with far less amendments than majority cabinets experience. We hesitate to draw general conclusions from this finding as there are only two minority cabinets in the period under study and the minority cabinets in our data came into being in somewhat unusual circumstances, i.e., following the economic collapse in 2008. Another possibility, however, is that minority cabinets are simply more circumspect about proposing legislation – knowing that they must rely on the support of other parties, controversial bills may be withheld or negotiations over their content takes place before their introduction.

The timing of bill introduction has predictable effects. The early introduction of bills reduces the ability of the opposition to impede the progress of the legislation through parliament and the bills are more likely to be adopted. Legislation that is introduced early on in the session, however, is more likely to be amended more extensively. This could be because governments may be more likely to introduce important pieces of legislation early in the term but it could also be simply because there is more time available to debate and amend the legislation.

Salience plays a role in cabinet management in that the government is more likely to push through legislation in issues which receive greater attention in parliament, most likely to indicate a concern with demonstrating government competence.

Co-ordination

Results of the statistical analysis indicate that parliament plays an important role in cabinet management. More precisely, the combination of minister and committee chair can have an important influence on the fate of government bills in parliament. When ministers and committee chairs are from the same party this gives an advantage to the minister, although not strong enough to be statistically significant. The relationship between minister and committee chair becomes important primarily in relation to ideological distance between coalition partners. Committee chairs are likely to play a watch-dog role when the ideological distance is large.

Informational advantage

Our conclusions with regard to the informational advantage of the government are broadly in line with our expectations. Complicated bills are less likely to be passed and they are changed less than other bills. This reflects on the one hand limited confidence in parliament in the competence of the executive while at the same time its own lack of policy making capacity. Complicated bills are delayed and reverted back to the executive, but they are changed less than others.

Salient issues, receiving a lot of attention from interest group, especially in the private sector, are less likely to be passed and more likely to be changed than

other bills. This, again, most likely reflects limited confidence in parliament in the policy-making capacity of the executive, although connections between parliamentarians and private interests may also play a role.

Between them, the three explanatory factors outlined earlier in this paper show some promise of accounting for why parliament intervenes in legislation. Although the study is based on a single case only the variations found in the amount of change introduced to bills and the likelihood of their passing indicates that majority power, cabinet management and informational advantage may be important factors in accounting for variations in cabinet predominance in parliaments. Does this, however, explain Icelandic exceptionalism with regard to the impact of parliament on legislation? Only a broader comparative study can decide if this is the case. What we have shown, however, is that the relationship between cabinet and legislature is not simply decided by constitutional principle but by a range of political and institutional factors which may be very different from one parliamentary system to another.

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