

# Coalition Government and the Internal Organization of Legislatures

Dr. Shane Martin,  
School of Law & Government, Dublin City University  
shane.martin@dcu.ie

Dr. Sam Depauw,  
Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Brussel  
sam.depauw@vub.ac.be

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# Coalition Government and the Internal Organization of Legislatures

Although committees constitute one of the most significant and well-researched forms of internal legislative organizations, the nature and causes of variations in committee structures among different legislatures has received little consideration. We suggest that strong committees emerge as a structural solution to the needs of each party in a coalition government to keep tabs on each other. This proposition is tested against alternative American and comparative explanations of internal legislative design using new data on committee structures from 31 national assemblies. The evidence receives supplemental support from a case study tracing the reorganization and strengthening of committees in the *Oireachtas* (Irish parliament) following Ireland's shift from single party to coalition government.

A richly informative literature exists for the origins and consequences of internal legislative design under presidentialism (Gamm and Huber 2002), and in particular for the evolution of committees in the US Congress (for competing explanations of committee power in the US Congress see, among others, Cox and McCubbins 1993; Diermeier and Myerson 1995; Krehbiel 1991; Maltzman 1997; Shepsle and Weingast 1987).

By contrast, the literature is sparse in consideration of how and why legislative structures have evolved in parliamentary systems. Comparative work on committee structures is largely descriptive (Lees and Shaw 1979; Mattson and Strøm 1998; Hazan 2001). Legislative specialists have been remarkably unsuccessful at transposing theories of Congressional committees to a cross-national perspective (Martin 2008). The lack of comparative theory building is aggravated by the lack of comparable data on national committee systems. Research has been driven largely by the comparison of committees in the United States and the United Kingdom, juxtaposing strong committees to weak parties (Lees and Shaw 1979 – for a different view see Cox and McCubbins 1993). As a result, consideration of the structures and powers bestowed upon committees is viewed largely from the perspective of oppositional strength (Andeweg and Nijzink 1995). Strøm (1990), highlighting how opposition parties can influence policy if the legislature has a strong committee system, suggested strong committees facilitate minority government. Powell (2000:34) noted the empirical correlation between strong committees and proportional representation electoral systems.

Recent scholarship, influenced in particular by practices in the German Bundestag, provided a compelling argument for the role that legislatures play in making and maintaining multiparty government.<sup>1</sup> Building on the “keeping tabs”

perspective (Thies 2001), parties, apparently, use the legislative process to overcome problems of ministerial drift in coalition governments by scrutinizing more closely policies that have been drafted by coalition partners (Martin 2004; Martin and Vanberg 2004, 2005).

Combining recent scholarship on multiparty government and the earlier institutional research tradition, this study suggests that internal legislative organization depends on the form of government – single party versus coalition. Committees within the legislature serve as a structural solution to the “keeping tabs” problem inherent in multiparty government, and stronger committees within the legislature should systematically associate with coalition government. In contrast, legislatures with a single party government should experience relatively weaker committee systems.

The next section develops more fully the rationale for why partners in a coalition government would be willing to develop strong committees within the legislature. Second, the introduction and use of a new cross-sectional dataset of committee structures in 31 national parliaments tests the argument while controlling for variables generally assumed to shape internal legislative organization. Third, the micro-foundation of this study’s argument is evaluated with a case study which traces the reorganization and strengthening of committees in the *Oireachtas* (Irish parliament) following Ireland’s shift from single party to multiparty government. The final section considers wider implications of the research, for both our understanding of internal legislative organization and the nature of coalition government.

## **Coalition Government, Delegation, and Legislative Organization**

Increasingly, decision-making within coalition government is understood in terms of a *principal-agent* relationship (Andeweg 2000; Strøm 1995, 2000). From this perspective, the Cabinet delegates the formulation and implementation of policies to individual cabinet ministers. However, ministers have an incentive to deviate from the agreed-upon policy positions and that incentive increases as policy preferences further diverge (Martin and Vanberg 2004, 2005) and an additional incentives occur with conditions of *hidden information* and *hidden action* (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). Ministers acquire information within their jurisdictions – aided by an extensive civil service and, possibly, relations with specialized interests. Ministers can exploit *feasibility constraints* in defense of their preferred policies. For given circumstances, the defense assumes an “all that could be done” posture – a claim that easily defeats verification (Martin and Vanberg 2004). Moreover, ministers’ post- and non-legislative actions may affect policy implementation but are generally not subject to collective Cabinet approval (Huber and Shipan 2002).

As a result, ministerial drift is more likely to be a problem for multi-party than single-party governments. In most situations, the assumption is that policy differences across parties surpass policy differences within a single party, thereby multiplying ministers’ incentive to renege on the coalition’s policy agreement compared to members of single-party governments. Moreover, a single-party government leader has the political ability to keep tabs on or remove ministers, unlikely powers when dealing with ministers from a coalition partner.

Problems of delegation in the presence of divergent preferences are not uncommon in politics, and the literature has identified a number of solutions. Ex ante mechanisms –common in parliamentary systems of government (Strøm 2000) – to

“keep tabs on coalition partners” are unlikely to be very effective. Detailed *coalition agreements* cannot remove the risk of coalition partners seeking to renege on agreements, especially if discovering the subversion is unlikely, and if position-taking benefits exist (Müller and Strøm 2000). Ministers may agree to ex post mechanisms and present proposed policies before *inner cabinets*, specialized *cabinet committees*, permanent *coalition committees*, or ad hoc *party summits* to reconcile disagreements once they appear – rather than to unearth them (Müller and Strøm 2000: 20-21). *Junior ministers* may be assigned to “shadow” ministers of the coalition partner (Thies 2001). *Deputy prime ministers* or *finance ministers* (and their extensive political staff) may serve a similar purpose (De Winter et al. 2000; Saalfeld 2000).

Furthermore recent scholarship provides a compelling argument, that parties, participating in multi-party government, will, in certain circumstances, use the legislative process to ensure implementation of coalition policies. Cabinets in Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, Martin (2004) noted, introduce bills on which the coalition partners agree early in the term and postpone more controversial bills. In the German and Dutch parliaments, bills confronting contest among coalition partners, Martin and Vanberg (2004) added, also face more detailed scrutiny during the legislative process, lengthening the delay to which these bills are subject. Bills contested among coalition partners also have more articles amended. On the other hand, bills from ministers being shadowed by junior ministers of another party have fewer articles amended in committee (Martin and Vanberg 2005). Assignment of committee chairs provides further evidence that the legislature is a source of inter-coalition monitoring: German political parties predominantly use their shares of committee chairs to shadow a ministerial portfolio held by a coalition

partner (Kim and Loewenberg 2005). Lithuanian parties adopt similar strategies in appointing committee chairs (Clark and Jurgelevilt 2008).

Our suggestion is that parties' need to "keep tabs" on coalition partners is also likely to impact *legislative organization*, in particular, committee structures and powers. Only as long as committees continue to serve governing parties' interests for monitoring one another, will they agree to a strong committee system within the legislature. Focusing on committees as a solution to ministerial drift clearly has advantages. A strong committee system is likely the best form by which the legislature can hold accountable individual cabinet ministers (Lees and Shaw 1979). Well-structured committee systems within the legislature can monitor the executive branch in at least two ways: First, committees can scrutinize draft laws emerging from the government. Significantly, they can do so more efficiently and effectively than the plenary assembly because of gains from trade, information acquisition, and specializations of committee members (Krehbiel 1991). Secondly, and equally important, if not more significant, strong committees can maintain vigilance of post- and non-legislative activities of individual ministers, particularly where parliamentary committees shadow a particular government department. A substantial number of ministers' actions never require the legislature's assent. Indeed, Hallerberg (2000) concluded that when ministers decide the budget within their "fiefdom," multi-party coalitions tend to be scrutinized by stronger committees; whereas, single-party governments tend to face weaker committees.

An important insight is the process by which committee systems actually "evolve" or "adapt" to meet the needs of multiparty government. The key to understanding this process is to appreciate the effective political control that the governing party or coalition of parties have on parliamentary reform. The structure of

committees and the resulting strength of committee systems are not exogenous in that a majority of the legislature itself can typically change and amend structures. Under parliamentarism, this translates into the governing parties' having agenda and/or veto power over the methods of designing committee systems. Majority governments, be they single party or coalition, remain generally unconstrained when determining the actual structures and powers of committees. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Leader of the House of Commons, whose task is to direct parliamentary business and issues of parliamentary reform, is a member of the cabinet. No majority will condone a legislative organization that is disadvantageous over any length of time (Cox 2006; Binder 1996; Krehbiel 1991, 2004). While single party governments have little use for committees in the legislature, parties in coalition governments can use committees in parliament to effectively and efficiently manage coalition affairs, and in particular, to uncover and deal with drifts from collectively agreed governmental policy. Facing the risk of ministerial drift, government parties will agree to rules that provide committees with extensive structures and powers in order to "keep tabs" on coalition partners.

### **Cross-institutional Data**

Based on the above analysis, relatively stronger committees should exist in legislatures associated with multiparty government. Legislatures with relatively weaker committees should be associated with single party government.

#### *Dependent Variable: Measuring Committee Structures and Powers:*

Reliable, comparable information on the committee systems of national legislatures is not readily available. Therefore, newly compiled data of committees in each of the national parliaments included in the study use an analysis of standing orders and other

documents and follow with in-depth country surveys of national experts during 2009 and 2010. In this study, the included countries' legislatures have been *parliamentary democracies* for ten or more years and correspond closely to the list of OECD and European Union member states (excluding presidential systems).

From an institutional perspective, a strong committee is one that is *structurally equipped* with the ability to impact the legislative process and provide oversight of ministerial activity. Institutional rules are more readily controlled by parties than the more outcome-focused assessments that country experts commonly make of the, typically, weak policy impact of committees (and as a consequence, parliaments). Arguably, government parties' rationales can be more readily studied in its relation to parties' *output* (the rules parties adopt) than to an *outcome* over which they have no (complete) control. Committees may serve the purpose of reducing ministerial drift, even without affecting policy. Committee members may alert their ministers to deviations from agreed policy. Ministers may then seek redress within the cabinet.

Information collected on current committee structures in 31 national legislatures is the basis for developing an index of committee strength based on responses to 12 questions. Each question's intent is to uncover important choices in the design of committee systems, choices that impact whether or not committees are useful for reducing ministerial drift. Details of the questions appear in Appendix I, and the results appear in Table 1.

<Table One about here>

The twelve aspects of committee structures represent an attempt to explore cross-national variation in the strength of committee systems. Questioning the significance of any one of the questions remains feasible, as does suggesting that other features of committee systems should have been explored. An unwise stance would be to

concentrate on any one variable and assert that it could, by itself, conclusively provide a measure of committee structure and power. Admittedly, a common problem with the reductionism employed in this study is that the method induces loss of some valuable information. For example, most of the survey questions could easily withstand further investigation. In reality, collecting information on even the most general features of committee structures renders thorough investigation unrealistic.

The committee structures and powers reported in Table 1 confirm the suspicion that legislative committees do indeed show a major degree of cross-institutional variation.<sup>2</sup> The obvious question for social scientists is to consider when and under what conditions strong committee systems emerge.

*Independent and control variables:* To test the previously indicated theory of committee systems, data is collected on government-type between 1979 and 2009.<sup>3</sup> Collation of the data on government type used a number of sources including Müller and Strøm (2000) and various editions of the Annual Data Yearbook of the *European Journal of Political Research*. For countries not reported in either of those sources, as well as more recently formed governments, the data collection relied on *Keesing's Record of World Events*.

The considered governments received a code: single party (minority or majority) or multiparty (minority or majority).<sup>4</sup> To identify a change of government, four criteria were used: (1) a general election or, (2) a change in the parties in government, or (3) a change in the status of government from minority to majority or single-party to multiparty, or (4) a change of prime minister. Two different measures of government form is used in the regression analysis: the variable *Current Government* captures whether or not the government in place as of 2009 is either a single party or a multi-party administration. *Rate of Coalition Government* measures the rate of

coalition government in each country between 1979 and 2009. While committee structures and powers can be changed, institutions are also *sticky* and unlikely adaptable to what are deemed temporary or extra-ordinary circumstances. Therefore the study adds the rate of coalition government as a measure of the general orientation towards coalition or single-party government.

The impact of coalition governments is tested against theories that focus more on the role of the opposition: in particular, the consensual nature of the polity and the frequency of minority governments. A reasonable suggestion is that a legislature's committee system depends on whether or not the legislature operates in a consensus as opposed to majoritarian democracy as defined by Lijphart (1999). As noted earlier, conventionally, strong committees have association with opposition influence. Stronger committees may, therefore, be a feature of consensus political institutions with weaker committee systems more likely to exist in majoritarian political systems. To test the claim that legislatures in consensus systems have stronger committee structures, Lijphart's original data have been supplemented with data of Eastern European democracies provided by Roberts (2006) and Fortin (2008). Having added Eastern European countries to the original Lijphart dataset, each of Lijphart's ten variables are re-standardized, following his original method (see Lijphart 1999: 247fn1) for all 31 countries included in this study. The variable, *Degree of Consensus*, measures the degree to which the political system can be described as being consensus-based.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, to a control for consensus systems, the statistical analysis includes a control for political systems whose institutions evolved from the Westminster model (associated with strong parties and weak committees) through the influence of

colonialism. The variable *Westminster* measures whether or not the political system was once part of the British Empire.

Included also is a dummy variable for Central and Eastern European Countries. The shared experience of communism and the reinvigoration of legislative institutions following the fall of communism, could induce a regional shape to legislative organization. Indeed, the influence of US-based agencies and scholars may well have shaped legislative organization in many central and eastern European countries.

Strøm (1990) considered strong committees to be a significant factor in determining the propensity for minority governments to form. Although this study makes no prediction about the relationship between minority/majority government and committees, nevertheless, the research includes two measures of minority government: The variable, *Current Minority Government*, measures whether or not the government in office as of 2009 was a minority (coalition or single party minority) or majority (again coalition or single party majority). Also provided is a more temporal measure of minority government: The variable, *Rate of Minority Government*, measures the rate of minority government formation over the period 1979-2009. The inclusion of both measures of minority government allows us test for a relationship between strong committees and minority government.

Perhaps larger legislatures are more likely to have committees because larger chambers may have difficulty operating effectively unless some form of internal organization allows for delegation of responsibility, such as that from the chamber to committees. Smaller legislatures may have the opposite problem, possibly lacking sufficient membership to staff a committee system even if a strong committee system were otherwise the preferred option. However, conflating the number of committees

(large legislatures may or may not have *more* committees) with committee significance may be inappropriate. *Size of Legislature* is a continuous variable that measures the number of members of the lower chamber.

Finally, in American politics, strong legislative committees are associated with the candidate-centered electoral system and the related need for members of Congress to cultivate personal votes. Katz and Sala (1995), for example, argue that, with the emergence of the Australian ballot and the resulting need for incumbent members to cultivate personal votes, legislators looked to committees as a means of creating policy changes and redistributive benefits for which they could claim credit in their home districts. Therefore, the analysis employs the Carey and Shugart (1995) index of particularism to control for the effect of an electoral system's candidate-centeredness on committee structures. The index measures the degree to which incumbents are required to cultivate personal votes in order to gain reelection. The index is sourced data from Seddon Wallack et al. (2003). Additional data for countries not included in that database is sourced from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Database on Electoral System Design.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the variable *Electoral System* measures the incentive created by the ballot structure for individual legislators to cultivate personal votes.

## **Results and Analysis**

In line with this study's core hypothesis, committees are substantially stronger in countries with coalition governments. The results are presented in several ways: First, a graphic, presenting the data visually, illustrates the relationship between committee strength and the rate of coalition government. Second, a table offers regression coefficients and robust standard errors for which the current government is the key

explanatory variable. Third, a table of regression coefficients shows the relationship between the rate of coalition government and the strength of committees. Finally, alternative specifications are considered. Throughout, the main conclusion holds: Committees are stronger under coalition governments, even controlling for alternative explanations of internal legislative organization.

<Figure 1 about here>

Figure 1 plots the rate of coalition government against this study's measure of committee strength, and the figure shows a clear positive correlation. Countries with higher rates of coalition government, such as Belgium and Finland, have stronger committees in parliament on average. Countries with traditions of single party governments have relatively weak committees, as illustrated by the cluster of countries in the bottom left of Figure 1 (the United Kingdom, Spain, Canada, Greece, and Malta). A higher rate of coalition government enhances the strength of parliamentary committees.

<Table 2 about here>

Moving beyond the simple bivariate relationship between coalition government and committee strength, Table 2 reports multivariable regression results (robust standard errors in parentheses). The coefficient of interest is *Coalition Government*. This study's hypothesis predicts a positive coefficient; coalition governments will have stronger committees, as compared to single party governments. Indeed, this is the result. In six of the seven estimated models, *Coalition Government* is a robust predictor of committee strength. On average, multiparty governments have committees that are nearly 50 percent stronger than single party governments. This result is robust with the inclusion of numerous control variables even with the relatively small sample size.<sup>7</sup>

<Table 3 about here>

Table 3 reports multivariable regression results (robust standard errors in parentheses). However, in Table 3 the coefficient of interest is the *Rate of Coalition Government*. Again, the key hypothesis predicts a positive coefficient, and in fact, the rate of coalition government is expected to be a stronger predictor of committee strength. Institutions are sticky and take time to change; hence the rate of government form should more strongly associate with committee system structure than a one-time indication of the form of government. This expectation proves true: *Rate of Coalition Government* is a robust predictor of committee strength across all estimated models, and this variable is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. In the simple bivariate model, *Rate of Coalition Government* explains 58 percent of the variation in committee strength. Countries with higher rates of coalition government have stronger committees, all else equal. Increasing the rate of coalition government by one standard deviation over its mean value increases the strength of parliamentary committees by more than 25 percent.<sup>8</sup>

This finding is remarkably stable across alternative specifications. Estimating a negative binomial model produces similar results, which are also robust to the specification of the error structure. Most importantly, this finding is robust with the inclusion of numerous important control variables. This is particularly striking, given the relatively small sample size.

Only two of the control variables reach conventional levels of statistical significance; the first is *Degree of Consensus*. In Table 2, the estimated coefficient for *Degree of Consensus* is positive and significant in Models 5, 6, and 7. Countries with a higher degree of consensus tend to have stronger committees, on average. Importantly, the form of government remains a robust predictor of committee

strength, controlling for consensus.<sup>9</sup> The inclusion of *Degree of Consensus* does, however, reduce the magnitude of the coefficient for the two measures of government form. This is perhaps not unsurprising given the correlation between form of government and consensus versus majoritarian politics.

The second control variable that reaches conventional levels of statistical significance is a dummy variable for *Central/Eastern Europe*. In Model 7 Table 2, this variable is positive and significant at the 0.1 level. On average, committees in Central/Eastern European countries are 1.4 units stronger than committees in Western European countries, holding all else equal. As discussed earlier, the fall of communism provided these newly-democratizing countries an opportunity to reinvigorate their legislatures, and the shape of American legislative institutions heavily influenced those reorganizations. Again, however, of note is that both measures of coalition government are robust with the inclusion of this regional dummy.

### **Confirming the Pattern: The Case of Ireland**

It would be wrong not recognizing the limitations of the cross-sectional empirical approach employed in this study. The impracticality of collecting temporal data on committees remains an obvious concern when trying to understand the relationship between committees and government form. The addition of a qualitative case study to regression analysis, Lieberman (2005) contended, serves to verify the causal linkages posited between independent and dependent variables on the basis of the large-N analysis. A case study of the evolution of committees for the Irish government helps to demonstrate that the hypothesis put forward here, that committee structures and powers develop to “keep tabs” on coalition partners, is in fact “*what is going on.*” The

Irish case is particularly interesting as the Republic of Ireland moved from having a predominantly single party government (between 1932 and 1982) to a situation where, today, multiparty government is the norm.<sup>10</sup> Prior to the 1980s, only two brief periods of multiparty government interrupted the single party norm since the foundation of the state in 1921.

Historically, committees in the Irish legislature were among the weakest of any democratic assembly, being few in number, having no fixed jurisdiction, lacking basic resources, meeting only sporadically, and enjoying few if any real powers.<sup>11</sup> As part of a coalition agreement in the 1980s between Fine Gael and the Labour Party, the Irish committee system altered. Cautious about being subsumed and overwhelmed by the larger coalition partner, the smaller Labour Party agreed to enter government in 1983 on the condition that the Irish parliament would be reformed to allow for a stronger committee system (Arkins 1988). The 1983 committee system vastly expanded the number of committees, the range of topics under committee jurisdiction, and the committees' roles for reviewing legislation and overseeing the executive. A recognized aspect of that first committee system was that committees were prevented from having a distributional function for government spending, still tightly controlled by the cabinet.

Although that new committees brought greater life to the roles and functions of the Oireachtas, the single party minority Fianna Fáil government elected following the 1987 general election quickly moved to downscale the committee system, by cutting the number of committees to pre-1983 levels, reducing the scale of staff and research resources, and curtailing the remainder of committee. In one move, the single party minority government undid virtually all committee reform introduced by the previous majority coalition government, despite relying on support from the second

party for the legislative agenda and continuation in office. Interestingly, the Fine Gael party in opposition was happy to acquiesce to diminution imposed on the Oireachtas committee system.

Only after the 1992 general election which saw the emergence of a Fianna Fáil and Labour Party coalition government did the committee system again gain strength. Committee reform discussions became part of the negotiations leading to the formation of that coalition government. That the strengthening of committees in parliament constituted part of the negotiations between the two parties contemplating entering government together highlights the critical role of committees in coalition management, particularly by the Labour party which sought multiple means for keeping tabs on Fianna Fáil ministers. Indeed, as noted in the autobiography of one of the key players in the Labour party (Finlay 1998), a number of structural changes to the operation of politics in Ireland were the subject of intra-party negotiations, with the intent of ensuring that the Labour party would be a more equal partner in government. Labour has been less than successful in previous coalition governments and was determined to find mechanisms allowing a full role in coalition government. In addition to a strengthened committee system, the Labour negotiators also secured a new Department of the Tánaiste (deputy-prime minister) with coordinating functions and the introduction of a management system to review implementation of the coalition agreement (O'Malley and Martin 2009). As O'Halpin (1997) noted, these innovations were designed to “arm lock” Fianna Fáil and ensure no minister could outmaneuver any government party in the implement of the coalition agreement.

The outcome of negotiations was a coalition agreement that made committee reform in the *Oireachtas* a priority. As Gallagher (2005: 231) noted, “after the 1992 election the committee system leapt into life again.” Reforms included an increase in

the number of committees, the referral of bills to committees, and departmental-committee correspondence. Speaking in the chamber (Dáil Debates, Vol. 426, 18 February 1993), Minister Noel Dempsey described the significance of these changes:

The new committee system being introduced is probably the greatest single change in the way the House conducts its business since the foundation of the State. The potential for each Deputy to influence legislation and spending by Departments should not be underestimated.

Moreover, more work was delegated to committees, both legislatively and in terms of investigating government departments and agencies. The power to compel witnesses was introduced, although the majority retained the right to compel a witness who refused to attend. Since 1992 the committee system has continued to play a greater role in the work of the legislature than previously, and the system survived changes in the composition of successive coalition governments. Appendix II highlights further changes.

This short case study, tracing the critical juncture in the reorganization and strengthening of committees in the *Oireachtas* (Irish parliament) highlights that this study's explanation of the role of committees in monitoring coalition agreements is more than a simple correlation between the propensity towards coalition government and the presence of relatively strong committees in the legislature. Clearly evidence exists that, following Ireland's shift from single party to multiparty government, the reformed internal organizational structure of the *Oireachtas* provided a strengthened committee system. More significantly, the motivation for this shift in organization arose from the desire for smaller parties in coalition government to have a mechanism to obviate being outmaneuvered by coalition partners.

## **Conclusion**

Committees are one of the most significant forms of internal legislative organization. Despite this, existing research has failed to explain the apparent variation in committee structures across different legislatures. This paper proposes a rational-efficiency view of legislative structures, shows that strong committees are a solution to the problem of principal-to-agent delegation inherent in the politics of multiparty ministerial governments.

The evidence presented suggests that committee systems vary in design and importance from legislature to legislature and that, as expected, a significant proportion of this cross-national variation relates to the type of government (single versus multi-party government). As predicted, strong committees tend to exist in multiparty coalition systems while weaker committee systems tend to exist in legislatures than spawn single party governments.

In addition, recent changes in the committee structure in Ireland, which retains strong-party credentials, provide qualitative evidence of the link between strong committees and multiparty government, thus helping to reveal micro-level mechanisms that lead to strong committees under parliamentary systems of government. Such comparative, in-depth research should help overcome any concerns of reverse causality – the idea that strong committees may be causing multiparty government. Yet, beyond the evidence from Ireland that changes in the pattern of governmental form precede changes in committee structures, sufficient reasons exist for suspecting that committees are more likely to depend on governmental form, rather than governmental form depending on committee structures. For example, in most political systems, apparently changing internal legislative structures may be easier than changing the party system – perhaps the most significant factor in

determining whether or not governments are single party or multiparty. As Carroll, Cox and Pachón (2006) suggested, a multiparty regime is unlikely to revert to a two-party regime because the executive is probably composed, in part, of smaller parties that would have a strong survival incentive to veto any electoral rule that would ensure a switch to a two party (and thus single party government) legislature. Committees, on the other hand, in the flow of institutional design, seem more adaptable, particularly for a government with a majority of seats in the legislature.

Beyond the immediate findings, a number of significant implications follow from this research. Conventionally, strong committees associate with weak parties as, for example, in the case of the United States Congress. Strong committees also associate with political systems that promote effective oppositional influence as, for example, Italy. The proposed theoretical argument calls into question these predictions, arguing instead that strong committees emerge to serve the needs of parties in government rather than parties in opposition. Any argument that a strong committee system is incompatible with strong, cohesive, and disciplined legislative parties – a typical feature of parties in parliamentary systems - seems less obvious when observing strong committees serving the needs of governmental parties under parliamentarism. The implication that legislative committees compliment rather than challenge political parties, finds resonance in the work of Cox and McCubbins (1993) on legislative structures in the United States Congress.

This research adds to a recent and growing literature on the role of institutions in managing and assisting the emergence and survival of coalition governments. While scholars have focused extensively on the making and breaking of coalition governments, much less is known of the actual operation of multiparty governments, and which, if any, institutional devices assist competitive political parties to

governing together. Understanding the role of legislative institutions in facilitating and maintaining multiparty governments illuminates the inaccuracy of conventional views of legislatures as weak and insignificant institutions in parliamentary democracies. Ultimately, further insight is needed into why otherwise similar political systems select different mechanisms to monitor the implementation of coalition policy. The study of multiparty government needs to focus to a greater extent on such procedures and mechanisms: how, and especially why, they vary from country to country and how such variation in institutional devices impacts the viability of different combinations of parties in governments.

## **Appendix One: Measuring Committee Strength**

To compare and contrast committee structures in 31 national legislatures, national experts responded to 12 questions on committee organization following an analysis of standing orders. Details of the questions and their logic appear below with the resulting data reported in Table 1.

(a). *Are committees jurisdictional to ministerial portfolios?* The more closely the committee system corresponds to ministerial portfolios the better able committees are to monitor the actions and behavior of individual ministers and hold “property rights” over proposed legislation and oversight in a particular area of policy. “Keep tabs” on individual ministers may be more difficult when committees have a cross-departmental remit, or when multiple committees oversee the same ministry.

(b). *Are bills considered by committees prior to the plenary stage?* The earlier a committee involves itself in the process of law-making the more influential it is likely to be. A committee’s influence on policy making is likely more difficult when proposed legislation is already debated and voted on the floor of the house before reaching the committee.

(c). *Who controls the timetable during the committee stage of a Bill?* When committees have agenda control over the committee stage, their influence over and independence from the plenary will be greatest. In comparison, if the plenary controls the committee agenda and/or retains the right of recall, committees are less free to act.

(d). *Do committees have the right to initiate legislation?* The ability to act independently of the executive branch through introduction of legislative proposals signals a strong agenda setting role for committee systems in policymaking. Even if a minister shirks from promised legislation, strong committees may be able to compensate for ministerial inaction by introducing legislation independently.

(e). *Which version of the bill is subsequently presented for vote to the plenary?* If the plenary simply votes on the Bill as amended by the committee, the committee system enjoys significant procedural advantages. However, the legislative process may require that committee amendments be voted separately, effectively reducing the influence of committees, thus reducing the significance of the committees' role in shaping and monitoring policy change.

(f). *Can amendments subsequently be made at plenary stage, and if so do any rules restrict such amendments?* The committee stage could represent the last opportunity for amendments to be presented, and the plenary then takes only a vote on the amended bill, indicating a relatively significant role for committees in the legislative process. Alternatively, a bill's ease of amendment in the plenary indicates less significance for committees in the parliamentary process.

(g). *Can committees compel ministerial attendance and evidence?* Having the power to compel individual cabinet ministers to attend a committee meeting and supply oral testimony places committees in a strong position to monitor a minister's activity. Committees can use such hearings as an opportunity to question a minister's activities and policies and determine how the minister's actions and attitude might differ from coalition policy.

(h). *Can committees compel civil servants to attend?* Civil servants act as an important source of ministerial information but also as agents of the minister. As such, they are in a position to provide information of the actions or inactions of ministers. Committees empowered to compel public servants to attend and supply oral testimony are better able to oversee and judge the performance of executive departments.

(i). *Can committees demand documents from government?* Having the power to compel the production of documentation places committees in a strong position to monitor a minister's activity. Ministerial, departmental, and agency documents have the potential to provide significant insight into activities within a ministry and allow committees' monitoring the political and bureaucratic activity within government.

(j). *Is committee time unique, that is, can sessions of the plenary and a committee be scheduled simultaneously?* Legislators have limited resources, not the least of which is time. If members must choose between committee work and attending plenary sessions, they may be less inclined to focus on committee assignments. Consequently, for the strength of the committee system, committee time, of necessity, must be on at a separate time from plenary is meetings.

(k). *Are substantive (that is, non-procedural/administrative) sub-committees used?* Sub-committees provide a mechanism for committees to further specialize and delegate workloads. The gains from division of labor arising from delegation within committees will likely strengthen the efficiency and overall effectiveness of the committee system.

(l). *Do committees hire staff to help with administrative tasks, research, and drafting documents?* Competing demands on the time of legislators, allied with a lack of professional skills and knowledge, can make having a professional staff to aid with committee work an essential requirement for committees to operate effectively. Better resourced committee systems are more capable of monitoring individual ministers, all else equal.

## Appendix Two: Key Reform to Oireachtas Committees

<i>Year/Government</i>	<i>Committee reform/status</i>
Pre-1982 Single party government as the norm.	Overall, MacCarthaigh (2005: 137) describes the pre-1980s Oireachtas committee system as “scanty,” aside, perhaps, from the slightly-significant Public Accounts Committee which was modeled closely on its House of Commons counterpart.
1982-2: FG-Labour Majority Coalition	The 24th Dáil saw dramatic reform with the creation of 10 new committees. Arkins (1988) reported that funding for committee activity increased ten fold between 1979 and 1986, and the “the achievements of the committee experiment were considerable” (Arkins 1988: 97) although she also judged the committee experiment to have been “too much, too quickly.”
1987 FF Single Party Minority	With a change of government following the 1987 election, the minority Fianna Fáil administration moved quickly to undo most of the 1982 reforms. A majority of committees disappeared and Arkins (1988) reported that committees’ funding was slashed. MacCarthaigh (2005) explained the weakening of Oireachtas’ committees as being the result of Fianna Fáil’s attachment to single party government and a strong executive branch. The 1987 developments could be seen to contradict conventional comparative views that strong committee systems associate with minority government.
1989 FF-PD Majority Coalition	No significant developments during this short lived Government.
1992 FF-Labour Majority Coalition	Significant reforms to Oireachtas’ Committees had been the subject of negotiation between the parties in the run-up to the formation of government.
1994 <sup>(a)</sup> FG-Labour-DL Majority Coalition	With Fianna Fáil no longer in government, it had to relinquish committee leadership positions to Labour’s new coalition partners (Fine Gael).
1997 FF-PD Minority Coalition	A reduction in overall number of committees and size of each committee occurred. The increased role of investigative committees included the DIRT inquiry by a sub-committee of the Committee of Public Accounts. Investigative committee work was curtailed following the Supreme Court ruling that committees could not make “findings of fact.”
2002 FF-PD Majority Coalition	No significant changes.
2007 FF-Green-PD Coalition	The coalition agreement, <i>An Agreed Programme for Government</i> notes a desire to “pursue ... strengthening the role of Committees.” The economic crisis led some journalists to criticize the committee system and in particular the cost of having so many committees.

Notes: <sup>(a)</sup> 1994 saw a change of government without a general election after the Labour Party withdrew from the coalition with FF and formed a rainbow coalition with FG and Democratic Left.

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## Endnotes

1. A coalition government consists of more than one political party. The terms “multiparty government” and “coalition government” are used interchangeably throughout the paper.
2. The new data is highly correlated with earlier data available for a select number of committee systems, and where variation existed, the data could generally be traced to changes in committee structures and powers.
3. For newer democracies, only governments formed during democratic rule are included (most central-European countries became functioning democracies in the early 1990s).
4. As reported in Table 2, regression analysis found that committees were no stronger in countries with minority governments than in countries with majority governments.
5. In his original data analysis Lijphart (1999) found that the 10 variables cluster around two dimensions. However, subsequent work has found that these dimensions do not withstand the inclusion of data from Central and Eastern European countries. For this reason, a general measure of consensus is reported, rather than using one of the original dimensions. Using either dimension does not significantly alter the results.
6. Available online at <http://www.idea.int/esd/>.
7. The supplemental tables provide the descriptive statistics, pairwise correlation of key variables, and the regression analysis with variables introduced sequentially. The results of the regression analysis remain robust when variables that form our measurement of committee strength are given numerous different weightings.

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8 Estimated using Model 1 from Table 3.

9. With the exception of 1 of the 14 models estimated.

10. In the future, more cases will need to be analyzed – in particular, cases “off” the regression line; cases that do not appear to fit the causal mechanism posited.

11. A dearth of research exists, even for the most basic features of the organization of the Oireachtas. For the most comprehensive account see MacCarthaigh (2005).

Table 1: The Strength of Committees in 31 National Legislatures

<i>Country</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>Score</i>
Australia	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	5
Austria	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	8
Belgium	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	9
Canada	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	4
Czech Republic	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Denmark	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	6
Estonia	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	9
Finland	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
France	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	6
Germany	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	7
Greece	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Hungary	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	9
Iceland	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	6
Ireland	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	7
Israel	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	7
Italy	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	6
Japan	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	6
Latvia	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Lithuania	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	9
Luxembourg	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	6
Malta	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
New Zealand	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	5
Netherlands	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	5
Norway	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	5
Poland	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Portugal	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	6
Slovakia	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	7
Slovenia	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	6
Spain	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Sweden	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	6
United Kingdom	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2

Notes: Higher values indicate a stronger committee system. See Appendix I for coding.

Table 2: Results of OLS Regression Analysis: Current Government

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Current Government	2.354*** (0.77)	2.318*** (0.73)	2.308*** (0.73)	2.268*** (0.68)	1.309* (0.67)	1.108 (0.81)	1.194* (0.65)
Size of Legislature		-0.000305 (0.0015)	0.000111 (0.0016)	0.000111 (0.0016)	-0.000405 (0.0017)	-0.000738 (0.0017)	0.000114 (0.0017)
Electoral System			0.131 (0.26)	0.134 (0.25)	0.0736 (0.23)	-0.0448 (0.26)	0.0740 (0.26)
Current Minority Government				-0.161 (1.08)	-0.585 (0.88)	-0.538 (0.89)	-0.449 (0.75)
Degree of Consensus					0.807** (0.29)	0.721** (0.30)	0.515* (0.30)
Westminster						-1.092 (0.85)	-0.760 (0.77)
Central/Eastern Europe							1.382* (0.77)
Constant	4.556*** (0.71)	4.658*** (0.73)	4.877*** (0.99)	4.940*** (0.84)	5.673*** (0.84)	5.746*** (0.90)	5.343*** (0.81)
Observations	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
R-squared	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.33	0.46	0.48	0.57

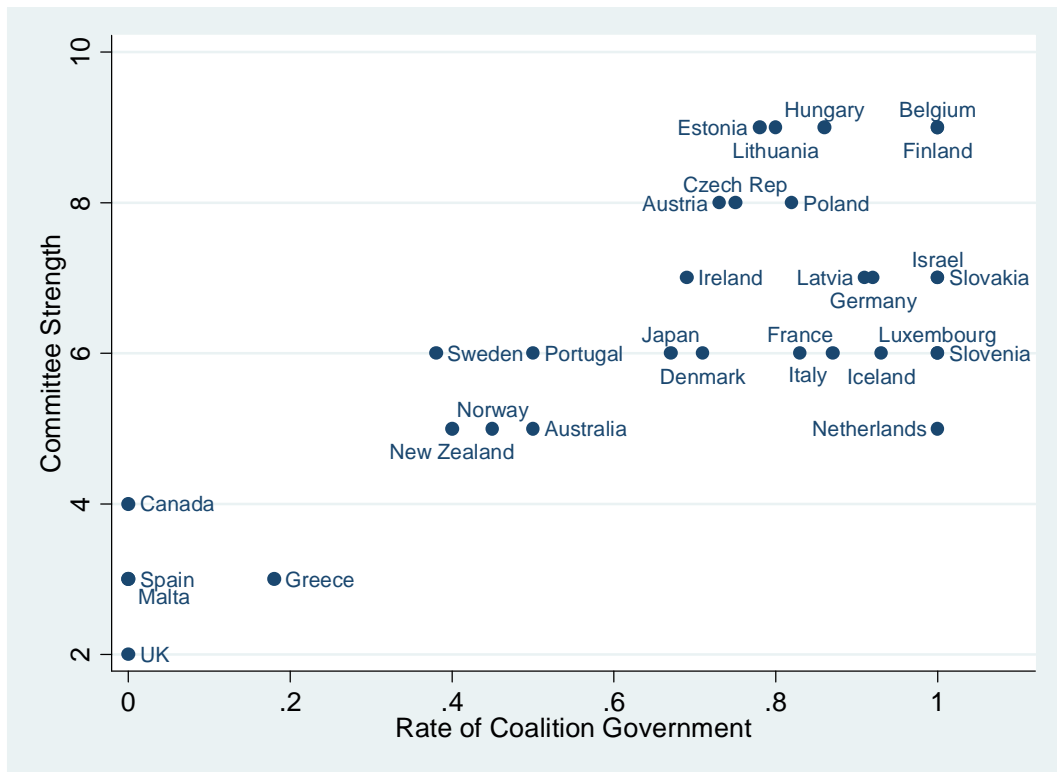
Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.1

Table 3: Results of OLS Regression Analysis: Rate of Coalition Government

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Rate of Coalition Government	4.359*** (0.60)	4.311*** (0.57)	4.356*** (0.57)	4.452*** (0.57)	3.795*** (0.55)	3.573*** (0.71)	3.311*** (0.74)
Size of Legislature		-0.000454 (0.0011)	-0.000670 (0.0013)	-0.000736 (0.0013)	-0.000790 (0.0013)	-0.000887 (0.0014)	-0.000309 (0.0012)
Electoral System			-0.0721 (0.17)	-0.0859 (0.18)	-0.0801 (0.18)	-0.121 (0.20)	-0.0280 (0.19)
Rate of Minority Government				0.533 (0.68)	0.296 (0.68)	0.155 (0.73)	0.0870 (0.69)
Degree of Consensus					0.333 (0.24)	0.322 (0.25)	0.216 (0.26)
Westminster						-0.472 (0.63)	-0.314 (0.59)
Central/Eastern Europe							1.080 (0.66)
Constant	3.318*** (0.35)	3.466*** (0.41)	3.315*** (0.48)	3.096*** (0.61)	3.624*** (0.66)	3.795*** (0.75)	3.767*** (0.77)
Observations	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
R-squared	0.58	0.58	0.59	0.59	0.61	0.61	0.66

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.1

Figure 1: Rate of Coalition Government and Committee Strength in 31 National Legislatures



Supplemental Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Obs.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Committee	31	6.23	1.93	2	9
Current Government	31	0.71	0.46	0	1
Rate of Coalition Government	31	0.67	0.34	0	1
Size of Legislature	31	254.35	180.21	60	659
Electoral System	31	-2.43	1.28	-5	0
Current Minority Government	31	0.16	0.37	0	1
Rate of Minority Government	31	0.26	0.27	0	0.94
Degree of Consensus	31	0.00	1.02	-2.42	1.96
Westminster	31	0.13	0.34	0	1
Central/Eastern Europe	31	0.26	0.44	0	1

Supplemental Table 2: Pairwise Correlations of Key Variables

	Committee	Government	Size of Legislature	Electoral System	Minority Government	Degree of Consensus	Westminster	C/E Europe
Committee	1							
Government	0.5635	1						
Size of Legislature	-0.1923	-0.295	1					
Electoral System	0.1707	0.1596	-0.455	1				
Minority Government	-0.191	-0.2992	0.0575	0.0225	1			
Degree of Consensus	0.5769	0.4616	-0.0777	0.1333	0.0403	1		
Westminster	-0.4519	-0.3898	0.1192	-0.4054	0.0928	-0.3918	1	
Central/Eastern Europe	0.513	0.2148	-0.1692	-0.026	-0.0582	0.3673	-0.227	1

Supplemental Table 3: Results of OLS Regression Analysis with Variables Introduced Sequentially: Current Government

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Current Government	2.354*** (0.77)	2.318*** (0.73)	2.298*** (0.79)	2.323*** (0.73)	1.577** (0.76)	1.908** (0.87)	1.985*** (0.70)
Size of Legislature		-0.000305 (0.0015)					
Electoral System			0.124 (0.23)				
Current Minority Government				-0.127 (1.08)			
Degree of Consensus					0.760** (0.29)		
Westminster						-1.549* (0.85)	
Central/Eastern Europe							1.781** (0.67)
Constant	4.556*** (0.71)	4.658*** (0.73)	4.897*** (1.04)	4.598*** (0.67)	5.106*** (0.69)	5.072*** (0.86)	4.358*** (0.57)
Observations	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
R-squared	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.45	0.38	0.48

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.1

Supplemental Table 4: Results of OLS Regression Analysis with Variables Introduced Sequentially: Rate of Coalition Government

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Rate of Coalition Government	4.359*** (0.60)	4.311*** (0.57)	4.389*** (0.58)	4.440*** (0.59)	3.725*** (0.85)	4.118*** (0.66)	3.798*** (0.67)
Size of Legislature		-0.000454 (0.0011)					
Electoral System			-0.0314 (0.15)				
Rate of Minority Government				0.483 (0.62)			
Degree of Consensus					0.348 (0.28)		
Westminster						-0.465 (0.45)	
Central/Eastern Europe							1.210** (0.59)
Constant	3.318*** (0.35)	3.466*** (0.41)	3.222*** (0.47)	3.139*** (0.41)	3.741*** (0.61)	3.539*** (0.43)	3.380*** (0.37)
Observations	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
R-squared	0.58	0.58	0.58	0.59	0.60	0.59	0.65

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.1