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How much power do oppositions have? Comparing the opportunity structures of parliamentary oppositions in 21 democracies

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Abstract

We cannot imagine a political system without opposition. Despite this crucial position in politics, political science has largely neglected to study oppositions. Attempting to fill this gap, this article analyses the institutional opportunities of parliamentary oppositions. It offers a parsimonious framework by distinguishing two dimensions of opposition influence: Some institutions enable oppositions to control governments, while others offer opportunities to present alternatives. A comparison of oppositions' opportunities in 21 democracies shows that countries fall into four groups along these dimensions: In majoritarian democracies, weak control mechanisms are countered by excellent opportunities to publicize alternatives. Consociational democracies are characterized by strong control mechanisms, but provide only weak opportunities to present alternatives. Moreover, in Southern Europe, control mechanisms and opportunities to present alternatives are weak, while both are pronounced in Nordic Europe. The results are summarized in three indices that can easily be applied in future research examining oppositions and their power.

Keywords

Parliamentary opposition, opportunity structures, power, parliaments, comparative institutional analysis

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How Much Power Do Oppositions Have? Comparing the Opportunity Structures of Parliamentary Oppositions in 21 Democracies

Introduction

We cannot imagine a political system without opposition. The recent *Arab Spring*, the current wave of protest in Ukraine and Russia, and on-going student demonstrations against rising tuition around the world are evocative examples. But everyday politics in established democracies underlines this point even better: When the evening news reports on a new government proposal, we are accustomed to being informed about the opposition's stand as well. In fact, nothing seems to distinguish democratic from non-democratic regimes as much as the institutionalized dichotomy of government and opposition. As Dahl pointed out, the existence of an opposition can be regarded 'as very nearly the most distinctive characteristic of democracy itself' (Dahl 1966: xvi).

Despite the fundamental political importance of opposition, our knowledge on the subject is still in its infancy (for similar assessments over the decades see Ionescu/de Madariaga 1968, von Beyme 1987, Blondel 1997, Kaiser 2008, Andeweg 2013). Notwithstanding Dahl's early seminal contribution, oppositions have received only very little attention in political science. Political science remains focused on governments, considering oppositions at best only implicitly. Consequently, we not only lack a 'theory of political opposition', but even a classification of countries with regard to the power of their oppositions. This article seeks to take some steps to fill this gap. To gain a deeper understanding of oppositions, one must analyse the institutional settings in which oppositions act (to know what they *can do*), as well as the characteristics of oppositional actors (to know what they *de facto do*). Due to space limitations and the early stage of the literature, this article concentrates on the former aspect: institutional opportunity structures. Following a well-established consensus (Hall/Taylor 1996), I conceive of institutions as structuring elements of political action. Moreover, my focus here is not on all kinds of political opposition, but rather on *parliamentary* oppositions, defined here as *those parties, fractions, or members of parliament that are neither part of the government nor keep it in office*[i]. Non-parliamentary oppositions are disregarded here, but touched upon in the concluding discussion. The central question is: What institutional opportunities do parliamentary oppositions have in Western democracies?

These opportunity structures are certainly not accidental; rather, we can expect that they reflect certain goals in the respective systems. In order to create a parsimonious analytical framework, I argue that the three often cited goals of parliamentary oppositions (*critique*, *control*, and

alternative) can be reduced to two: oppositions *attempt to control* governments, and they *present alternatives* to governments. Criticism is not a goal per se; rather, it serves as a means for the other two objectives. Every instrument in the hands of the opposition is suited either to controlling the government or to presenting alternatives.

Empirically, this framework is used to analyse the institutional opportunities of parliamentary oppositions in 21 democracies: Do some political systems mainly offer the opposition opportunities to control the government, while oppositions in other systems lack control powers but can forcefully stress alternatives? In order to answer this, I focus on the five most important institutions for the oppositions in a comparative analysis. The empirical results are summarized in three indices: the *Opposition Control Index* measures the institutional opportunities of parliamentary oppositions to control the government, the *Opposition Alternative Index* measures the institutional opportunities of oppositions to present alternatives, and the *Opposition Power Index* summarizes the overall strength of parliamentary oppositions. These indices, which are – to my knowledge – the first direct comparative measures of oppositional power, can be used fruitfully in a variety of other research (e.g., in institutional analyses and welfare state research, as well as in research on party competition and voting behaviour).

Substantially, I find support for the two theorized dimensions and demonstrate that four country-groups can be identified. Oppositions in Southern Europe are comparatively weak in both dimensions, while oppositions in Nordic Europe and Germany can draw on a wide variety of institutions to control the government and present alternatives. Moreover, I show that stereotypical characterizations of Westminster-style oppositions as 'entirely powerless' may be overly hasty. Although oppositions here are indeed rather weak in terms of *control* opportunities, Westminster democracies stand out by offering strong opportunities to present alternatives. Finally, consociational democracies offer significant opportunities to control the government, but hardly any opportunities to present distinct alternatives to the government's course.

While some of these results are not entirely surprising as they mirror findings from the 'government-focused' literature (e.g., Lijphart 1999, Steffani 1979, Andeweg 2000, Tsebelis 2002), this article makes several important contributions. First of all, it calls attention to oppositions as an extremely important but scientifically largely neglected political phenomenon. Second, it is the first systematic comparison of oppositions' opportunity structures, offering a parsimonious framework as well as novel empirical evidence. It argues and demonstrates that two dimensions of opposition influence must be distinguished. This finding challenges the common belief that democracies can be located on a uni-dimensional scale between the ideal-types of majoritarian and consensus democracies (Lijphart 1999). In addition, when one analyses oppositions not only to understand their functioning but, as Dahl (1966) suggested, also as a *research perspective*, the study of

oppositions can contribute to a better understanding of seemingly well-explored phenomena, as it sheds light on them from a unfamiliar perspective. A systematic analysis of oppositions can therefore help to deepen our understanding of political systems as such.

The next section provides a literature review and introduces the analytical framework. The third part justifies the selection of the institutions, countries, and data examined. This is followed by in-depth analyses of the institutions that are most important for oppositions. The fifth section reports comparative results, summarizes them in three indices, and probes their validity. The final section concludes and shows how the results can easily and fruitfully be utilized in many research fields. It also discusses the limitations of a purely institutional approach and outlines how future research could expand the state-of-the-art by bringing actors into the analysis and by aiming to trace developments in the power constellations over time.

Opportunity Structures of Political Oppositions

Literature Review

Parliamentary opposition is a modern phenomenon. Historians assert that its origins lie in eighteenth-century Britain (Foord 1964) with the shift of governing power from the monarch to parliament. This transition caused significant changes also within parliament: Two parliamentary groups formed, one governing, the other opposing. Thus, the earlier dualism (between the monarchy and its ministers on the one hand and parliament on the other) transformed into the antithetical relationship of a parliamentary government and a parliamentary opposition. In the aftermath, this British innovation of two parliamentary groups travelled around the world, establishing itself in all parliamentary democracies.

Despite this political triumph, research followed only dilatorily. Although early contributions appeared in the immediate post-war era (Kirchheimer 1964), the first systematic comparison was the volume *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* edited by Dahl (1966). This ground-breaking contribution is structured inductively, offering explorative case studies on oppositions in several countries, which Dahl then systematizes in two concluding chapters. Dahl uses six criteria ‘to classify the patterns of opposition revealed in this volume’ (Dahl 1966: 332):

1. The *cohesion* of the oppositional actor(s) (their number and internal coherence),
2. Their *competitiveness*, indicating ‘the way in which the gains and losses of political opponents in elections and in parliament are related’ (Dahl 1966: 336),
3. The *setting* where government and opposition collide (e.g., parliament, elections, the street),

4. The opposition's *distinctiveness* (or *identifiability*), depicted on a continuum from a system in which the opposition is so conspicuous that we can speak of '*the* Opposition' (cf. Potter 1966) to systems in which the difference between government and opposition is indistinguishable (on this aspect cf. also Andeweg 2013),
5. The *goals,* and
6. The *strategies* of oppositions.

Thus, Dahl's volume sheds light on a variety of important factors in the comparison and analysis of political oppositions. Nevertheless – as publications on oppositions never tire of mentioning – there has been no intensive consideration of oppositions in the sixty-odd years since. Although a great deal has been written on the subject of oppositions (Kluxen 1967, Ionescu/de Madarigada 1968, Barker 1971, Oberreuter 1975, Kolinsky 1987, Steffani 1991, Blondel 1997, Helms 2002, 2004, 2010, Gel'man 2005, Norton 2008, Kaiser 2008, 2009, and a recent special issue cf. van Biezen/Wallace 2013), and although many single-case studies have been conducted (excellent examples include: Bale/Bergman 2006, Mújica/Sánchez-Cuenca 2006, Christiansen/Damgaard 2008, Church/Vatter 2009), most of these studies at best offer empirical updates to Dahl's edited volume. Systematic comparative empirical analyses and new theoretical insights are rare (for similar assessments see Ionescu/de Madariaga 1968, von Beyme 1987, Blondel 1997, Kaiser 2008, Andeweg 2013).

Four exceptions, however, stand out. Oberreuter (1975) offers a simple typology by distinguishing between 'competitive', 'cooperative', and 'issue-oriented ad-hoc' opposition. It should be noted that Oberreuter understood these divisions as characterizations of the *strategies* of oppositions; thus, he only sought to systematize Dahl's sixth factor. Subsequent publications have often missed this point, applying the terms 'competitive', 'cooperative', and 'ad-hoc' to characterize opposition in political systems in general. Secondly, Blondel (1997) and Gel'man (2005) argue that Dahl's six criteria are not independent of each other (as Dahl himself suggested) and condense them into fewer dimensions. Blondel suggests a simple typology using two criteria: 'the distance of the goals of the agents of opposition from those of the government' and 'the relative strength of the bodies which constitute the opposition' (1997: 470-471). While a simplification of Dahl's criteria is highly desirable, it is questionable whether Blondel's proposal still includes all of Dahl's main points. I doubt this, especially because his typology focuses on actors and entirely disregards institutions. The same criticism applies to Gel'man (2005), who tries to systematize oppositions by distinguishing between 'goals' (on a continuum between pure office-seeking and radical anti-system positions) and 'means' of achieving these goals (classified as loyal, semi-loyal, or disloyal); moreover, this latter categorization is normative and not analytical.

The fourth exception from my critique are Kaiser's (2008, 2009) analyses of government-opposition relations in Westminster democracies. Kaiser systematically compares institutional opportunities and actor preferences across countries and time, finding substantial differences with regard to the oppositions' opportunities in Westminster democracies. He concludes: 'as soon as we consider a larger number of indicators for oppositional influence in parliament, the findings are more differentiated than summary indices would have us believe' (2008: 27-28). Nevertheless, his analysis falls short, as it remains limited to a special type of democracy and does not allow generalization for other countries. Moreover, as Kaiser takes institutions *and* actors into account in order to paint a comprehensive picture of parliamentary oppositions, his study of institutions focuses on only a few very general factors.

Summing up, our knowledge of oppositions is still crude. There has been no convincing encompassing theoretical approach and while several excellent case studies have shed light on oppositions in single countries, comparative empirical accounts remain very rare. Moreover, we even lack a classification of oppositions comparatively describing their key features in various countries. Even Dahl's much-praised work can be criticized on several grounds. First, his conclusion offers neither a typology (as the various criteria remain unconnected) nor a classification (as he gives many examples but never classifies each country into a certain pattern). In fact, Dahl argues that 'the patterns of opposition … are too complex to repose easily within any classification scheme' (Dahl 1966: 332) – a verdict that subsequent literature seems to have shared (implicitly). Second, Dahl does not distinguish between actors and institutions, which would have analytically sharpened his analysis. Third, his approach mixes causes and effects – for example, *strategies* and *distinctiveness* of oppositions (the latter being at least partially an effect of the former). Finally, Dahl's framework is too complicated to be applied empirically. In essence, while Dahl's work was the first to systematically investigate oppositions, expanding the horizon of possible questions, his volume is more useful as an eye-opener than a comprehensive analytical framework (as Dahl himself emphasizes). Hence, it is hardly an exaggeration to conclude that political science is still in its infancy when it comes to understanding oppositions (see also Ionescu/de Madariaga 1968, von Beyme 1987, Blondel 1997, Kaiser 2008, Andeweg 2013).

From the 'Trinity of Opposition' to a Parsimonious Analytical Framework

In order to begin filling this gap, I aim to shed more light on oppositions. Given the complexity of the topic and the limitations of space, this article of course cannot offer an all-encompassing analysis of political opposition, but must severely limit its focus. Therefore, I concentrate on the analysis of *institutions*, disregarding actors. This focus means of course a major limitation, but

allows more careful empirical analysis; in the concluding discussion I sketch how future research could complement the present analysis by bringing actors into the analysis and by including other forms of opposition. In line with Kaiser (2008, 2009), I use the term *opportunity structure* to describe the institutional set-up of political systems. The concept in this meaning stems from research on protest movements (for an overview, see Meyer 2004) and seems to be the most appropriate expression because it characterizes institutions as *resources for political action*. Moreover, the analysis focuses on *parliamentary* oppositions (lower houses in bicameral systems) and disregards opposition outside parliament. Finally, parliamentary opposition in the narrow sense is a phenomenon of *parliamentary democracies* and does not appear in presidential democracies. This results from the core feature of parliamentary democracies: parliament's ability to dismiss government (for political reasons) (Steffani 1979). All governments, even minority governments, therefore need governmental majorities to remain in office. In response, a counterpart is also created: the parliamentary opposition. In presidential democracies, in contrast, this two-bloc logic does not automatically apply, as a governmental majority is not necessary to keep a government in office.[ii] Consequently, my analysis focuses on a comparison of the institutional opportunity structures of parliamentary oppositions in the lower houses of parliamentary democracies (in Dahl's terminology: the 'setting' of opposition). Many other important parts of political oppositions (e.g., non-parliamentary opposition) are thus disregarded here, which limits my analysis in scope, but allows more thorough empirical investigation.

Lacking an analytical framework to conduct empirical analyses, I propose a simple and straightforward way to compare the opportunity structures of oppositions across countries. I present my argument in four steps. My starting point is the theoretical (partly normative) literature on the 'functions of oppositions'. Three main functions of parliamentary oppositions are usually mentioned in the literature: control, critique, and alternative. First described by Sternberger (1956), these three goals are generally assumed as common knowledge in the theoretical literature on oppositions and parliaments. As they are seldom questioned, concretized, or criticized, I refer to them as the *Trinity of Opposition*.

At first glance, the *Trinity of Opposition* seems plausible: Oppositions control governments (e.g., by closely monitoring government actions, by controlling governmental power, or by helping to design and shape policies), oppositions criticize governments (by emphasizing their shortcomings, methods, style, etc.), and oppositions present alternatives (in terms of policy goals, policy means, and personnel, sometimes even by creating a highly visible 'shadow cabinet').

Upon closer examination, however, the *Trinity of Opposition* loses some of its tempting plausibility. First, are these three functions really distinct? In particular, it remains unclear why critique is considered to be a separate function, especially when one considers the respective goals of the

functions: *Control* is targeted at supervising and monitoring policy-making, as well as influencing, shaping, sanctioning, and limiting it. *Publicizing alternatives* seeks to present different policies, different methods to achieve the same goals, or alternative political personnel (Friedrich 1962). In contrast, *critique* does not seem to have a goal per se. It seems more plausible to expect that oppositions will criticize either *in order to control* or *in order to present alternatives*.[iii] Thus, criticism is not a distinct goal; rather, it can be subsumed under the control and the alternative functions. I conclude that parliamentary oppositions have two main goals: controlling the government and presenting alternatives.

Second, how are controlling the government and presenting alternatives related? There seems to be a certain tension: Political actors seeking to remain credible cannot shape policy-making and simultaneously criticize and present distinct alternatives to results that they themselves have shaped; other political actors would highlight the opposition's inconsistent behaviour. Consider, for example, a strong committee system in which the opposition can influence policy-making by bargaining with the governing parties (behind closed doors). In this constellation, the opposition could control the government and influence its course. However, this would simultaneously limit the opposition's opportunities for presenting alternatives, as the policy proposal would be at least in part designed by the opposition itself (cf. also Andeweg 2013, who identifies a trade-offs between opposition parties' behaviour in the electoral and in the parliamentary arena). The same logic can be easily applied to other institutions as well. Hence, as mechanisms, controlling and presenting alternatives seem to be at odds for oppositions.

Third, I argue that institutions differ in their usefulness in terms of these two functions: Some institutions offer better opportunities to control government, while others are more suited to presenting alternatives, as the committee-system example illustrated. Consider, as a second example, the possibility to challenge governmental politicians during an institutionalized question time that is broadcast live and covered by the major news media. Such a question time offers an excellent opportunity for the opposition to present alternative policies and alternative personnel ('shadow cabinet'). It is, however, not suitable for directly controlling the government's policy-making.

Bringing these three arguments together we might expect that some political systems will primarily offer institutions that enable the opposition to control the government at the cost of limited opportunities to present alternatives. In contrast, the opposition in other systems might have few powers to control, but many opportunities to present alternatives. In other words, there may be a trade-off between controlling the government and presenting alternatives. I deduce the following empirical implication from the arguments made above: Oppositions in some political systems can mainly rely on institutions that offer opportunities to control the government, while oppositions in

other political systems can mainly rely on institutions that offer opportunities to present alternatives to the government.

Does this argument entail a functionalist assumption, namely that institutions are *intended by design* to fulfil certain functions? Although this relationship might empirically be true,[iv] my argument does not rest on this assumption. The analysis uses the two functions simply as an analytical framework to compare the opportunity structures of oppositions, testing whether some political systems offer better control mechanisms while others tend towards alternatives. Future research could investigate whether this reasoning holds not only analytically but also historically.

Research Design

I use this framework, distinguishing control powers and opportunities to present alternatives, to study the opportunity structures of parliamentary oppositions in 21 democracies. A few words must be said about the empirical strategy. Political systems provide a variety of institutions that oppositions can use to exercise influence. Which institutions should be included? We can distinguish between 'internal opportunities' (inside the parliamentary arena) and 'external opportunities' (outside the parliamentary arena). Both of these taken together constitute the opportunity structure for parliamentary oppositions. As discussing a large list of institutions in detail is not possible in a single article, I focus on *internal* opportunities and specifically on the institutions that are most important for oppositions (cf. Döring 1995a, Helms 2002, Kaiser 2008, 2009): committee systems, opportunities to pose written and oral questions, parliamentary question times, and influence over the parliamentary agenda.[v]

In order to analyse these institutions in detail, I compiled a large variety of data from various sources (IPU 1976, 1986, Laundy 1989, Döring 1995a, 1995b, Mattson/Strøm 1995, Schnapp/Harfst 2003, 2005, Salmond 2004, Wiberg/Koura 1994, Wiberg 1994, 1995, Russo/Wiberg 2010). While comparisons across both countries and time are desirable, the existing data unfortunately restricts us to a cross-country comparison, as comparative data tracking institutional change over time is unavailable[vi]. Thus, the data is far from perfect. Nonetheless, the available data is promising as it is the to date only available data source and it is neatly comparable, as all sources refer to time points in a rather narrow period (1986, 1990, 1999). Hence, while we cannot investigate institutional stability and change over time and should be careful in drawing conclusions for other time points (cf. Sieberer et al. 2014, 2016), the results nicely depict the status quo of a certain roughly ten-year time span between the late 1980s and 1990s. The reported findings might also hold for other time periods, but this needs to be investigated empirically in future work (cf. also Sieberer et al. 2014, 2016 and the discussion in the endnotes below). I included all

established parliamentary democracies for which a sufficient amount of data was available for the key variables, i.e. 21 countries.[vii]

Comparing the Opportunity Structures of Parliamentary Oppositions in 21 Democracies

What opportunities do parliamentary oppositions have in the advanced democracies? The following section reports in-depth results for five institutions: committee systems, written questions, oral questions, parliamentary question time, and agenda-setting procedures. The findings for the individual institutions will then be analysed comparatively in Section five. Before presenting empirical results, the sections on each institution discuss why the institutions are important (for the opposition).

The Committee System

Committee systems are key elements of parliamentary systems (Laundy 1989, Mattson/Strøm 2004, Sieberer 2011). They are, moreover, highly important for parliamentary oppositions (Strøm 1990: 43), mainly because they offer significant opportunities to monitor and control governmental policy-making. Mattson and Strøm (1995) and Schnapp and Harfst (2003, 2005) offer comparative data on committees, extending IPU (1976, 1986)[viii]. In order to analyse committee systems as an opportunity for oppositions, I propose distinguishing two dimensions: the *strength* of the committees and the *opportunities of the opposition* within the committees. Having many opportunities in the committees would not help the opposition much if the committees were not powerful. The relationship can thus be depicted mathematically as a multiplicative term (the square-root of the result is extracted to make the distances between the values more comprehensible).

Committee System Index =

$$\sqrt{\text{Committee System Strength} * \text{Opposition's Opportunities in the Committees}}$$

In order to measure the strength of the committees and the opportunities of the opposition therein, I used theoretical criteria to construct two measures. Statistical tests confirmed the theoretically constructed measures.[ix] For reason of limited space availability, I focus in the main text body here on an explanation of how the indices are constructed; in Online Appendix A I offer a justification for the selection of the respective aspects and variables and a detailed and necessarily technical discussion of their operationalization. Here, it suffices to say that in the construction of the indices, I largely follow the primary literature (Mattson/Strøm 1995, Schnapp/Harfst 2003, 2005).

To measure *Committee System Strength*, four factors were included: the number of committees, their size, whether they mirror the ministries, and their resources in terms of personnel. Using these

four factors, we construct a measure that represents the strength of the committee system. It is the arithmetic mean of the four values and takes values between zero (no control power) and one (strong control powers).

Committee System Strength =

$$\frac{1}{\mathrm{n}}\sum_{i=1}^{\mathrm{n}}\left(\begin{array}{c}\text{efficient number of committees } + \text{ efficient committee size}\\ + \text{ committees mirror ministries } + \text{ number of staff per committee member}\end{array}\right)$$

To operationalize the *opposition's opportunities in the committees*, I also included four elements: whether committee chairs are allocated proportionally to the parliamentary seat shares, whether an opportunity to publish minority reports exists, whether the committees meet publicly or behind closed doors, and what information rights committees have (for details and additional literature, see Online Appendix A). Using these four factors, I construct a measure that depicts the opportunities of the opposition within the committee systems. As a simple arithmetic mean, it takes values between zero (no opportunities) and one (many opportunities).

Opposition's Opportunities in the Committees =

$$\frac{1}{\mathrm{n}}\sum_{i=1}^{n}(\text{proportional chair allocation } + \text{ minority reports allowed } + \text{ nonpublic meetings } + \text{ information rights})$$

[Table 1 here]

Due to the abundance of information on the different variables, I cannot discuss the distribution of the countries for each individual variable and point interested readers to Table A in the Online Appendix as well as to the primary literature. I focus on the main results of the overall Committee System Index (Table 1, second column): In the five top ranks, we find three Nordic countries, Austria, and Germany. At the lower end of the continuum, indicating weak institutional opportunities, we find the classical Westminster democracies (the UK and Ireland), as well as three Southern European countries. While this suggests a very clear pattern, we also find some surprises: Denmark scores much lower than the other Nordic countries, while Italy, Portugal, and Canada exhibit very high values even though some systems supposedly similar to these are located at the bottom of the distribution.

Interpellations

As a second important institution for oppositions, I examine interpellations, i.e., questions posed in parliament directed at the government. Interpellations are a powerful and increasingly often used tool (Wiberg 1995), as 'a parliamentary question often gets much more publicity than an ordinary

speech' (Wiberg/Koura 1994: 22). Interpellations can be used by governing parties, but they are especially important for oppositions: In particular opposition MPs make use of interpellations (Norton 1993, Wiberg 1994, Sánchez de Dios/Wiberg 2011). Martin even argues that without parliamentary questions, 'opposition parties would have great difficulty extracting information from the executive branch' (2011: 265). Hence, interpellations are a key element of oppositions' institutional opportunities.

What differences do we find empirically? Wiberg and Koura (1994), Wiberg (1994, 1995), and Russo and Wiberg (2010) gathered comparative data on interpellations; however, the quality of this data is problematic because of the complexity of the investigated phenomena, as procedures for interpellations vary tremendously across countries (see, e.g., the online appendix of Russo/Wiberg 2010). Thus, we should interpret the available data with caution.

Written Questions

All parliaments included here offer opportunities to submit written questions. However, the devil is in the details, specifically 'the time limit for the government to give a reply' (Russo/Wiberg 2010: 229). Time rules are of major interest, as it matters a great deal whether the opposition must wait a few days or a few weeks for its answers (let alone rules setting no time constraints). Detailed information on the different time rules can be found in Table B in the Online Appendix. The data shows that only Portugal imposes no restriction on when answers are due. All other countries set time limits, but differ significantly in design. Overall, three groups appear: In six countries (Germany, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, the UK), answers must be given within a week. In a second group governments are allowed 20 to 30 days to answer (Finland, Spain, Italy, Greece, Luxembourg, Belgium, France). Finally, in the Netherlands, Portugal, and Austria we find even looser restrictions (42 or more days). The Written Questions Index (Table 1, third column) summarizes these findings:

Written Questions Index =

0 if governments have at least 42 days to answer;

1 if there is an obligation to answer within one week;

0.5 if governments have more than a week but less than 42 days (empirically: 20-30) to answer

Oral questions

What do we find regarding *oral* questions? Wiberg and Russo (2010) distinguish between several types of oral questions, depending on whether they can be submitted spontaneously (defined as an obligation to answer the same day) or must be submitted in advance, whether debates are allowed

after the question is posed, and whether a vote on the content of the question can be taken at the end of the debate. These details are important because they enhance the importance of the question. Hence, I follow Russo and Wiberg's *Confrontation Index* (2010: 224ff.), which summarizes elements of major importance in an additive index (1 = strong opportunities, 0 = few opportunities):

Oral Questions Index =

$$\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n}(\text{debate on oral questions possible} + \text{spontaneous questions possible} + \text{debate on spontaneous questions possible})$$

The investigated political systems differ considerably (Table 1, fourth column). Seven countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Portugal) offer strong opportunities. In contrast, only very few opportunities exist in Italy, Greece, Germany, and Spain. The remaining countries lie between these extremes.

Parliamentary Question Time

In parallel with these publications on interpellations, Salmond (2004, 2011, and two unpublished manuscripts) investigated a related but distinct phenomenon: parliamentary question time (PQT). Coming from a Westminster democracy perspective, Salmond is referring to the regular clash between the prime minister and her 'shadow', the opposition leader. The prime minister (or her cabinet) must face the opposition's questions in an inquisition-like trial and provide answers under high pressure, as they otherwise become the focus of fierce critique and mockery from the opposition (and public). As PQT is often broadcast, it is 'the most visible part of parliamentary activity' (Kaiser 2008: 28). Moreover, Salmond demonstrates that 'highlights' from PQT are frequently used as footage in news reports; consequently, even when not following the full debate, interested citizens will be informed about the government's and opposition's performance during PQT. The importance of PQT in the political system and especially for the opposition is therefore evident (cf. also Norton 1993).

In a comparison of 21 democracies, Salmond investigates three elements of the institutional settings: Does PQT take place, and if so, how often? Can the opposition pose spontaneous questions? How many speeches per hour are held on average?[x] Using these three criteria, we can unequivocally rank-order the countries. This information is summarized in the Question Time Index (higher numbers indicate better opportunities):

Question Time Index =

Rank-order of countries (standardized between 0 and 1) based on whether spontaneous questions are allowed, how often PQT takes place, and how many speeches are held per hour

As the fifth column in Table 1 shows, we observe stark differences between countries, especially in the number of speeches (for details, see Online Appendix, Table C). All Westminster democracies are clustered at the upper bound of the continuum, offering strong opportunities. In addition to these countries, PQT is held several times weekly in Austria, Ireland, and Germany. In another group of nine countries, PQT is held once a week; however, these countries differ in the number of speeches per hour: The Nordic European countries are characterized by a high frequency of repartee (50-75 speeches per hour) whereas in Iceland, the Netherlands, and Spain, the interaction frequency is somewhat lower. At the lower end of the continuum, we find countries in which PQT offers only weak opportunities to the opposition: France, Belgium, Portugal, and Japan.

Agenda-Setting in Parliament

The final important element here is the opportunity to influence the parliamentary agenda, i.e. 'control over the design and selection of proposals that arrive for a vote' (Döring 1995b: 223). We know that agenda-setting is of fundamental importance (for many: Riker 1992). Döring and colleagues compiled information on agenda-setting procedures (Döring 1995b). Focusing on the opposition's power to influence the agenda, we can reduce this information to three key questions: First, can the government set the agenda alone, or does the opposition also have a say? Second, are there any restrictions on policy proposals? Döring (1995b) finds that in six countries (France, the UK, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Greece) the oppositions may not introduce 'money-bills', i.e., policy proposals that involve financial matters or include spending provisions. This certainly limits the opposition's opportunity to present alternatives. Third, do governments have the power to curtail obstruction attempts by the opposition? That is, when the opposition tries to delay or prevent a government proposal ('filibustering'), can the government end this delay (vividly entitled 'the guillotine')? An opposition is less powerful when the government can curtail its obstruction. We observe a strong correlation between these three characteristics (Spearman's Rho above 0.7) indicating that agenda-setting opportunities in the countries are all designed to either favour the government or the opposition. Hence, we can generate an index reflecting the oppositions' opportunities to influence the agenda:

$$\text{Agenda-Setting Index} = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n}(\text{direct opposition influence on agenda} + \text{no restrictions on money bills} + \text{no 'guillotine'})$$

Again, this index takes values between zero and one; the bigger the values, the more opportunities exist for the opposition to shape the agenda. Five country groups can be distinguished (see Table 1, column six): In the Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden, the opposition has strong opportunities to influence the parliamentary agenda. We then find a group consisting of Denmark, Iceland, Norway,

Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Italy that also offers considerable opportunities. Spain and Luxembourg are located in the middle of the distribution, followed by Portugal. Finally, the index shows that oppositions in France, Greece, Ireland, and the UK have scarcely any agenda-setting impact.

Comparative Analysis

How much power do oppositions have?

The previous section analysed five institutions in-depth and constructed indices to measure the opportunities they offer to oppositions. How are these various opportunities related? Do countries consistently show high or low values? To answer these questions, I constructed an overall index, the *Opposition Power Index* (OPI), as the mean of all five individual indices:[xi]

$$\text{Opposition Power Index (OPI)} = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n}(\text{Index Committee System} + \text{Index Written Questions} + \text{Index Oral Questions} + \text{Index Question Time} + \text{Index Agenda Setting})$$

[Figure 1 here]

Figure 1 depicts the results of the OPI (see also Table 1). Before discussing these results, it should again be emphasized that some data was missing for certain variables (see Table 1 for details). To address this problem, I imputed means for the respective variables, which necessarily pulls countries with missing values towards the sample mean. Nevertheless, I chose this imputation procedure over more elaborate procedures because it entails the weakest theoretical assumptions, which seems advisable due to the little existing empirical knowledge on the phenomenon at hand.[xii] Table 1 shows the findings once with and once without the imputations so that interested readers can compare the findings in detail. Here, it suffices to say that the imputation procedure is likely to *under*estimate the 'true' country-variety and therefore should be regarded as a 'lower-bound estimation'. Future research could try to make more data available (cf. for example current efforts by Sieberer et al. 2014, 2016), which would probably even strengthen the found country-variation and which might add a temporal perspective.

As Figure 1 shows, the 21 investigated systems show impressive differences. On the left-hand side, we find the four Southern European countries, which offer only weak opportunities for parliamentary oppositions. At the other extreme, the four Nordic European countries stand out as providing strong opportunities. This is a very clear, novel, and interesting finding that points to a systematic difference in the institutional opportunities of parliamentary oppositions in these

systems. Whereas the 'government-focused' literature is mainly concerned with the difference between majoritarian and consociational/consensus democracies (Lijphart 1999, Andeweg 2000) or the number and type of veto-points (Tsebelis 2002), my results show that when we investigate parliamentary oppositions' opportunity structures, the largest difference lies between Northern and Southern Europe.

In between these two extremes we find a rather heterogeneous group of continental European and Westminster democracies. Even a freshman student of comparative politics might be surprised to find that the Westminster democracies – having nothing 'but their words' (Klingemann et al. 1994) – do not rank at the bottom, but rather are in the middle of the distribution. While this can partly be explained by the mean-imputation for missings, which pushes Australia, Canada, and New Zealand towards the mean, a more significant substantial reason is at work: The OPI covers not only control powers, but also opportunities to present alternatives. In the latter sense, oppositions in Westminster democracies are extremely powerful, as the in-depth analyses showed: Oppositions are highly visible and clearly distinct from the government, they can forcefully express alternatives, and they can ensure high levels of publicity, *because they are equipped with outstanding institutional opportunities to do so*. In short, oppositions in Westminster democracies might only have their words, but depending on the institutional opportunity structure, words can be powerful weapons (Salmond 2008, Kaiser 2008, 2009).

Are the results of the OPI valid? As we lack a comparative measure for oppositions' institutional opportunities, case studies on single countries or country groups are the only possible source for validation. Comparing the OPI with these studies lends a great deal of support to my results: The results of the OPI closely match earlier studies demonstrating that oppositions in Scandinavia can draw on a wide range of instruments (Christiansen/Damgaard 2008, Kurian 1998), but that comparably few opportunities are available in France (Huber 1996), Portugal (Colomer 2008), Greece (Zervakis/Auernheimer 2009), and Spain (Mújica/Sánchez-Cuenca 2006). Furthermore, the index is not only plausible 'at the edges', but also in the middle of the distribution. Japan, for example, scores rather low, mirroring Scheiner's (2005) assessment of 'opposition failure in a one-party dominant state'. Germany's relatively high position also correlates well with country-specific studies (Schmidt 1996, Sieberer 2006). Moreover, the medium-high ranks of the oppositions in the three 'consociational democracies' seem reasonable; only the Netherlands scores lower than qualitative studies might suggest (Döring 1995a, Andeweg et al. 2008). In sum, the OPI seems to provide a highly plausible and valid comparative measure of parliamentary opposition power[xiii].

Controlling the Government vs. Presenting Alternatives

The previous section demonstrated that oppositions in some countries (Northern Europe) can rely on strong opportunities, whereas oppositions elsewhere (Southern Europe) have only very limited opportunities. Next, I investigate whether there is empirical support for the theorized trade-off between control powers and opportunities to present alternatives. To analyse this, we must first determine whether the investigated institutions are better suited to control the government or to present alternatives. I argue that committee systems, agenda-setting powers, and oral questions are particularly suited to control government, while PQT and written questions allow presenting alternatives. Committees can mainly be used by oppositions to control governments because they offer strong opportunities to monitor, shape, and control policy-making. As committees often meet behind closed doors oppositions cannot exploit them to present alternative policies or personnel to the public. PQT, in contrast, offers the diametrically opposed constellation: PQTs are not useful for directly controlling governments, but are extremely useful to present alternatives because they are highly visible and the opposition (leaders) can present themselves and their proposals. Thus, while committees represent a clear control opportunity, PQT is the paradigmatic example of an opportunity to present alternatives.

Concerning interpellations, I argue – following Russo and Wiberg (2010) and Rozenberg and Martin (2011) – that questions can be posed for several purposes: information-seeking, information-probing, and information-giving. *Oral* questions that are not part of an institutionalized PQT are significantly less visible and thus are less appropriate for information-giving purposes. Accordingly, they are less suitable to present alternatives. Nevertheless, they can be used for information-seeking and information-probing purposes and thus provide control opportunities, as government officials must justify their actions to the opposition. *Written* questions can also be used for information-seeking and -probing purposes. That said, they are also suitable for information-giving purposes, because oppositions usually make their questions public (e.g., by sending them simultaneously to the press). Finally, control over the parliamentary agenda offers oppositions strong opportunities to control governments, since it enables them to force governments to release information and address unwelcome topics, allowing oppositions to hold governments accountable.

If this reasoning holds, strong opportunities in the committee system should correlate with strong opportunities with regard to oral questions and agenda-setting power, as they all offer opportunities to control the government. Conversely, written questions and PQT opportunities should co-occur, as they offer means to present alternatives. The correlations in Table 2 clearly support this reasoning. Factor analyses show similar results. In sum, in some countries the political institutions seem to mainly offer control powers, whereas in other political systems the oppositions can mainly draw back on institutions to present alternatives.

[Table 2 here]

To summarize this information, I construct two indices: The *Opposition Control Index* (OCI) combines the measures for the committee system, for oral questions, and for agenda-setting power and measures oppositions' control influence (see Table 1):

$$\text{Opposition Control Index} = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n}(\text{Index Committee System} + \text{Index Oral Questions} + \text{Index Agenda Setting})$$

Similarly, the *Opposition Alternative Index* (OAI) comprises written questions and PQT and measures the strength of the opportunities for oppositions to present alternatives:

$$\text{Opposition Alternative Index} = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n}(\text{Index Written Questions} + \text{Index Question Time})$$

[Figure 2 here]

Figure 2 exhibits the findings in a scatter plot, revealing a highly interesting pattern:[xiv] It shows that although opportunities to control and to present alternatives correlate to a certain degree, the relationship is not strong, as we can observe all possible combinations and can identify four groups of countries: In the bottom left corner, we find all Southern European countries, characterized by neither good control opportunities nor institutional means of presenting alternatives. As a result, oppositions will be rather weak vis-à-vis governments (as the OPI indicated already). In the bottom right, we find the UK and Ireland, where oppositions have strong opportunities to present alternatives, but scarcely any control mechanisms. This fits very well with our understanding of ideal-typical Westminster democracies (Lijphart 1999). A third group of countries is located in the top right corner, indicating that oppositions here enjoy strong opportunities both to control government and to present alternatives. This is the case in all the Nordic countries (except Finland) and in Germany. Finally, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria form a fourth cluster, where oppositions can rely on effective control opportunities, but have limited opportunities to present alternatives, which is congruent with our understanding of consociational democracies, where we would expect the design of the political institutions to favour non-majoritarian consensual decision-making (Lijphart 1999, Andeweg 2000).

In sum, the Opposition Control Index and the Opposition Alternative Index are highly revealing and offer new insights into the institutional opportunities of parliamentary oppositions across the Western world. Some of the findings support evidence from the 'government-focused' literature,

demonstrating the diametrically opposed positions of majoritarian and consociational democracies. However, my findings also extend these existing studies by showing that controlling governments and presenting alternatives are two distinct dimensions, resulting in four groups of countries: weak control-weak alternatives (Southern Europe); weak control-strong alternatives (Westminster democracies); strong control-strong alternatives (Nordic Europe and Germany); and strong control-weak alternatives (consociational democracies). The results thus reveal – as predicted by Dahl (1966) – that the study of oppositions can uncover a new perspective on seemingly well-understood phenomena.

Conclusion and Discussion

Although we cannot imagine a political system without opposition, political science has largely neglected oppositions. While some excellent case studies have investigated oppositions in single countries, comparative analyses are still rare (see also Ionescu/de Madariaga 1968, von Beyme 1987, Blondel 1997, Kaiser 2008, and Andeweg 2013). In an attempt to address this gap, this article comparatively analysed oppositions' institutional opportunity structures and offered a parsimonious framework by differentiating two dimensions: controlling governments and presenting alternatives. I argued that oppositions can rely on several institutions, some of which are better equipped to control governments while others are more suited to presenting alternatives. Hence, I hypothesized that some countries might mainly offer institutions to their oppositions to control the government, while oppositions in other countries might solely be equipped with opportunities to present alternatives.

The empirical analysis applied this framework to 21 democracies. The most important institutions for oppositions were analysed in detail and summarized in measures capturing the oppositions' opportunities. The results were combined into three indices measuring the power of oppositions: an *Opposition Control Index*, an *Opposition Alternative Index*, and a general *Opposition Power Index*.

The findings reveal that parliamentary oppositions' opportunities vary considerably across the advanced democracies. In particular, the findings reveal that it is necessary to distinguish between opportunities to control the government and to present alternatives, because these constitute two distinct dimensions, resulting in four groups: In some countries, both control mechanisms and opportunities to present alternatives are comparatively weak (Southern Europe). In Nordic Europe, in contrast, oppositions are equipped with strong opportunities for both control and presenting alternatives. Moreover, we also find countries with strong control mechanisms but weak opportunities to present alternatives (consociational democracies). In a final country-cluster, we

find the majoritarian democracies, which stand out by offering oppositions powerful ways to present alternatives but only very limited control power.

Thus, the contribution of this paper is both theoretical and empirical. It should be emphasized, however, that I conceive of this article only as a starting point that hopefully stimulates subsequent, more fine-grained research. Three extensions seem particularly promising: First, extending the analyses to include *additional institutions* would be highly interesting. It seems especially promising to include *external* opportunities (e.g., oppositions' opportunities in second chambers, constitutional courts, or direct democratic procedures) to investigate how internal and external opportunities supplement or complement each other (see Kaiser 2008, 2009 for Westminster democracies; Helms 2010 for a theoretical discussion). Can external opportunities compensate for weak internal opportunities, as much of the political theory literature in the 1960s in the aftermath of the student riots has hoped (Habermas 1967) and as more recent literature has identified as a source of anti-democratic sentiments (Andeweg 2000, Mair 2007)?[xv] Moreover, the analysis should also be extended to include a *time dimension* and *more countries*, since the focus here was (due to data availability) on cross-sectional analyses of Western democracies. As discussed above, especially current work by Sieberer et al. (2014, 2016) seems to be a very promising data source in the near future. This or other data would enable researchers to study how and why the power of oppositions has changed over time (for some initial evidence see for example Sieberer 2014: Figure 5). Furthermore, historically motivated research could examine the *evolution of the respective institutions*. Were institutions *designed* for certain goals (Dahl 1966, Huber 1996, Pierson 2000)? How are the opportunity structures connected to the type of democracy and other political institutions (e.g., electoral systems)?

A second extension could take as a starting point the fact that the present analysis focused on institutions and disregarded political *actors*. As stated in the introduction and as is widely accepted in political science, more encompassing analyses need to simultaneously study actors and institutions, as well as their interaction. One could complement the present analysis by investigating – among other factors – the number of actors, their sizes, coherence, goals, strategies, usage of and influence on opportunities, and their interactions (cf. also Dahl 1966). This would be particularly interesting against the background of studies by Kaiser (2008, 2009), Andeweg et al. (2008), Helms (2010), Steinack (2011), Andeweg (2013), or van Biezen and Wallace (2013), who have shown that different actors can pursue different strategies even within the very same institutional setting. For example, Steinack (2011) analyzed parties in the Bavarian state parliament in detail and showed that the oppositional parties, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens (Die Grünen), behaved in fundamentally different ways in parliament: The SPD adopted a much more cooperative style, whereas the Greens concentrated on direct and fundamental confrontation with the government.

Both strategies had very different effects on the final policies, on people's vote decision, and on public opinion. A recent special issue edited by van Biezen and Wallace (2013) adds several additional oppositional conflict lines that could complement the analysis of institutional power. In short, a more encompassing study of political oppositions (as Dahl had envisaged) could thus benefit a lot from studying institutions and actors simultaneously.

Finally, one could *apply* the findings of this paper. Many arguments in political science refer – explicitly or implicitly – to the (control or alternative) power of oppositions. This article's indices offer concrete measures that can be easily applied to test these arguments. We illustrate this by outlining three examples. Consider Jensen and Seeberg's (2014) argument concerning 'the power of talk'. The authors demonstrate that the more left-wing opposition parties stress welfare topics, the fewer possibilities right-wing governments have to dismantle the welfare state. To capture oppositional strength, Jensen and Seeberg use opposition parties' seat-shares, assuming that equally sized oppositions will have the same influence across political systems. However, my results demonstrate that such an assumption cannot be made. Thus, their analysis could benefit from a direct measure of oppositional power.

A second example can be drawn from the field of coalition formation. Strøm (1984, 1990) claims that minority governments are more likely in systems 'where policy can be influenced even from opposition status' (Strøm 1984: 213) 'because they can shape policy without actually being in the cabinet' (Clark et al. 2009: 421f). To measure the control power of oppositions, Strøm focuses solely on committees, disregarding other institutions (similarly: Huber/Shipan 2002, Powell 2000). By applying the findings offered here, his argument (and related ones) could be tested more accurately.

The broad literature on party competition is a third field for applying my findings. Does the institutional setting under which oppositions act have an impact on parties' strategies? We know, for example, that voters punish and reward parties for their performance in government *and* opposition. How does the institutional setting influence this relationship (Powell/Whitten 1993)? Are parties that can control policy-making punished (or rewarded) more than parties lacking control powers? Are oppositions with much alternative power more visible in the media? These and many other highly interesting questions can be investigated by applying this paper's results.

By placing emphasis on oppositions, this study confirms Dahl's (1966: xix) dictum that a focus on oppositions can reveal new insights into seemingly well-understood political systems. Refining, extending, and applying its results can advance our understanding of politics and finally begin to counter Dahl's dictum (1966) (echoed by Ionescu/de Madariaga 1968, von Beyme 1987, Blondel 1997, Kaiser 2008, and Andeweg 2013) that political science is still in its infancy when it comes to political oppositions.

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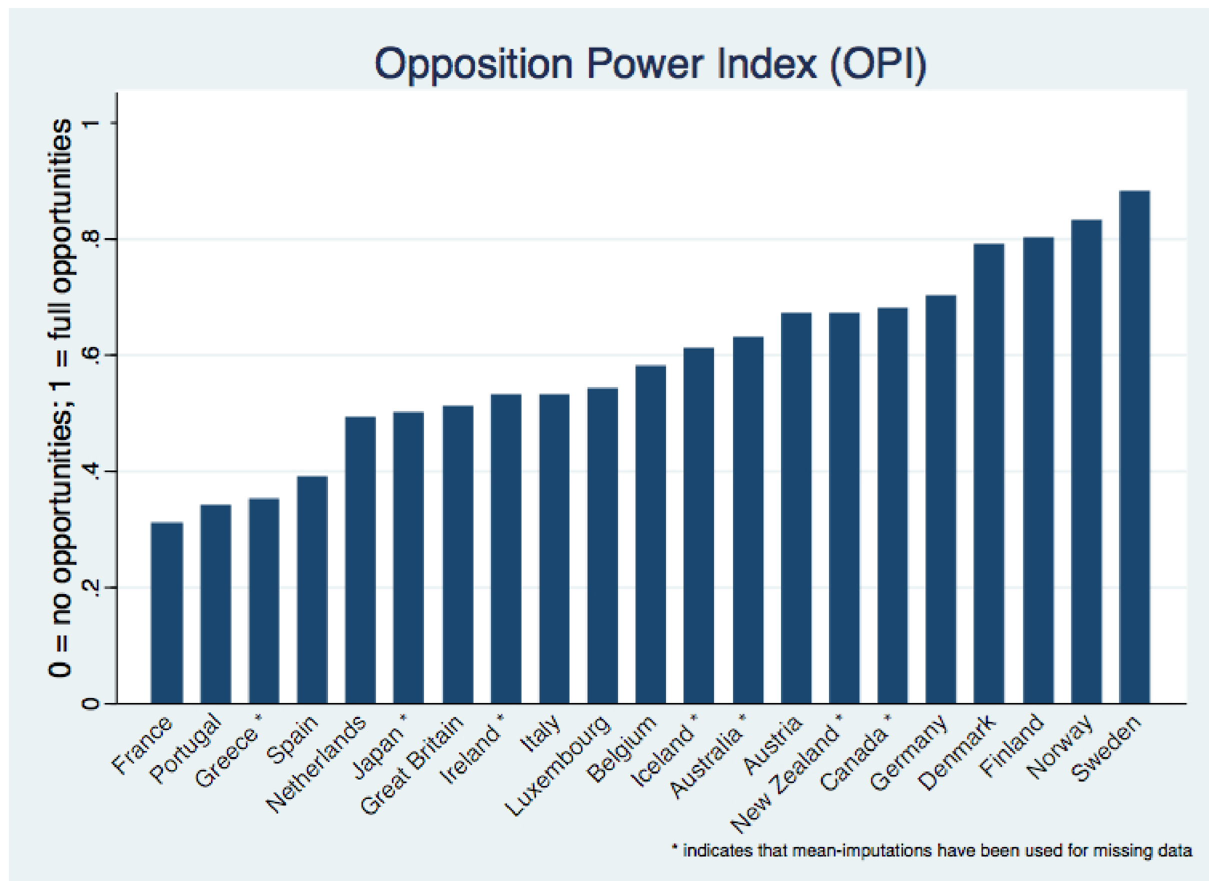
Table 1: *Comparing the Opportunity Structures of Parliamentary Oppositions in 21 Democracies*

	Indices for individual institutions					***Summarizing indices***					
						Without imputations			*With mean-imputations for missing values*		
	Com. System Index	*Written Questions Index*	*Oral Questions Index*	*PQT Index*	*Agenda Setting Index*	*Oppositional Control Index*	*Opposition Alternative Index*	*Opposition Power Index*	*Opposition Control Index*	*Opposition Alternative Index*	*Opposition Power Index*
AUS	0.49			0.72					0.61	0.66	0.63
AUT	0.64	0	1	0.83	0.86	0.83	0.42	0.67	0.83	0.42	0.67
BEL	0.44	0.5	1	0.11	0.86	0.77	0.31	0.58	0.77	0.31	0.58
CAN	0.53			0.97					0.62	0.78	0.68
DK	0.5	1	1	0.61	0.86	0.79	0.81	0.79	0.79	0.81	0.79
ESP	0.4	0.5	0.33	0.22	0.5	0.41	0.36	0.39	0.41	0.36	0.39
FIN	0.92	0.5	1	0.56	1	0.97	0.53	0.80	0.97	0.53	0.80
FRA	0.2	0.5	0.67	0.17	0	0.29	0.33	0.31	0.29	0.33	0.31
GER	0.63	1	0.33	0.67	0.86	0.61	0.83	0.70	0.61	0.83	0.70
GRE	0.4	0.5	0.33		0	0.24			0.24	0.5	0.35
ICE				0.33	0.86				0.70	0.46	0.61
IRE	0.2	1	0.67	0.78	0	0.29	0.89	0.53	0.29	0.89	0.53
ITA	0.56	0.5	0.33	0.39	0.86	0.58	0.44	0.53	0.58	0.44	0.53
JPN	0.53			0.06					0.62	0.32	0.50
LUX	0.52	0.5	0.67		0.5	0.56			0.56	0.5	0.54
NLD	0.53	0	0.67	0.28	1	0.73	0.14	0.49	0.73	0.14	0.49
NOR	0.84	1	1	0.44	0.86	0.90	0.72	0.83	0.90	0.72	0.83
NZ	0.48			0.97					0.60	0.78	0.67
POR	0.57	0	1	0.00	0.14	0.57	0.72	0.34	0.57	0	0.34
SWE	0.88	1	1	0.50	1	0.96	0.36	0.88	0.96	0.75	0.88
UK	0	1	0.67	0.89	0	0.22	0.94	0.51	0.22	0.94	0.51

Source: Author's calculations. For calculation details, see the text. In the last three columns, mean-imputations were used for missing cases.

Figure 1: *The Institutional Strength of Parliamentary Oppositions in 21 Democracies*

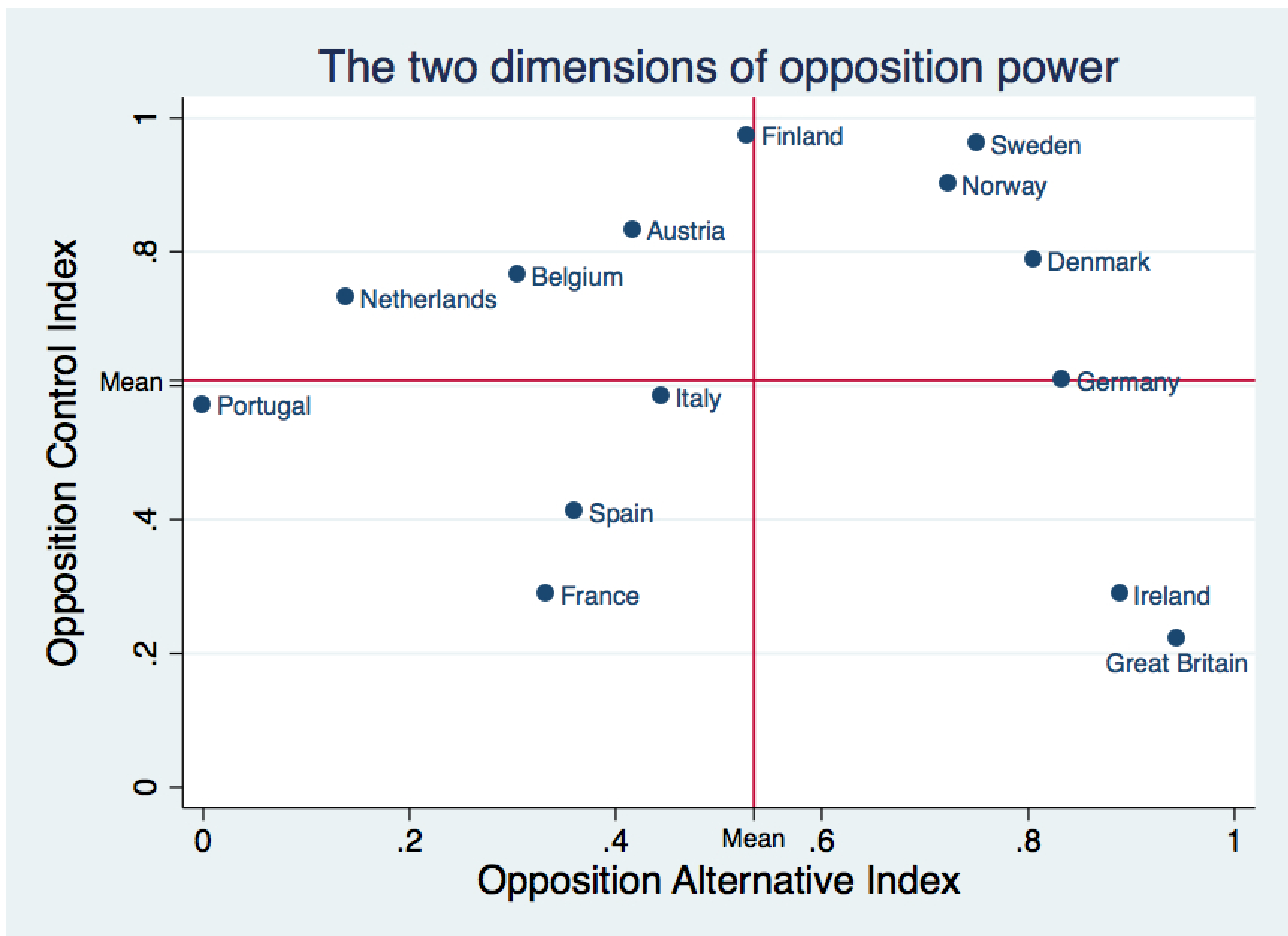


Source: Author's calculations; see descriptions in text.

Table 2: *Correlations (Spearman's rho) between the Indices*

	Committee system	*Oral questions*	*Agenda-setting*	*Written questions*	*PQT*
Committee system	1.00				
Oral questions	**0.47**	1.00			
Agenda-setting	**0.79**	**0.40**	1.00		
Written questions	-0.11	-0.03	-0.07	1.00	
PQT	0.08	0.04	0.00	**0.51**	1.00

Figure 2: *Oppositions' Control and Alternative Opportunities in 21 Democracies*



Source: Author's calculations; see text for formulas.

Endnotes

[i] In the literature, we also find other definitions. A main point of discussion is, for example, whether parties that are not (formally) part of the government, but help keeping it in office should also be regarded as part of the opposition or not. For the present purpose, it is important to highlight that all the findings reported here do not hinge on the definition provided here, but equally hold for more inclusive definitions. It also goes without mentioning that my analysis does not try to analyze all aspects of oppositions, but concentrates on parliamentary oppositions' institutional power. As sketched in the conclusion, many questions thus remain open for future research.

[ii] Empirically, we often find two clearly opposing blocs in presidential democracies; however, these are not necessary for government stability.

[iii] Some readers might think about anti-system parties or populist parties as a contradiction to this claim, as they often seem to criticize just 'for the sake of it' (cf. for example the contribution in the special issue: van Biezen/Wallace 2013). With Friedrich (1962), however, this can be conceived of being part of "presenting alternatives", as even these parties seem to (implicitly) suggest alternatives (policies, personnel, or even entire political systems).

[iv] Consider, for example, the genesis of the German constitution, which was designed as a "bulwark" against possible obstruction from totalitarian forces, therefore offering the opposition considerable influence (Schmidt 1996).

[v] Interviews with members of the *Bundestag* lend additional support to this selection, as the MPs listed exactly the institutions selected here when asked which institutions were most important for the opposition (transcripts available on request).

[vi] Current research by Sieberer et al. (2014, 2016) will fundamentally improve the data situation in the near future. Sieberer et al. developed theoretical and methodological approaches to comparatively analyze parliamentary rules and procedures across countries and time. The empirical dataset will cover at least 16 Western democracies over more than six decades, which will enable researchers to study parliamentary procedures much better over time. Particularly interesting for the present purpose (the analysis of the power of oppositions) is that the research team currently undertakes "a full content coding of all parliamentary rules in our 16 countries […] coding the effects of all changes on the distribution of institutional power between the parliamentary majority and minority" (Sieberer et al. 2016: 83). It seems possible to use this data to not only study government-legislative relationships, but also the power of oppositions (vis-à-vis the government). Unfortunately, however, this data is not available yet, but promises to be extremely interesting for future research.

[vii] Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Island, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.

[viii] Most data is provided in the discussed publications. For missings, I consulted the primary sources (IPU 1976, 1986). Data on the chair-allocation and accessibility of meetings in Australia, Japan, Canada, and New Zealand, and all data on information rights rely on IPU (1986); I did not consider Schnapp and Harfst's update, as their raw data was unavailable.

[ix] I used both factor analyses and PCAs. As seven of the eight variables are not metrically scaled, PCAs result in low factor loadings. Moreover, as the sample size is small, the results should be interpreted with caution.

[x] In a strict sense, "speeches-per-hour" is not an institution but actor behavior. Nevertheless, it is extremely important,

as it makes a tremendous difference whether, for example, two speeches (Japan) or more than 90 speeches hourly (e.g., New Zealand) take place. Consequently, we utilize a neo-institutionalist understanding of institutions, taking into account not only formal characteristics but also informal rules and real functioning.

[xi] The exact differences between the values cannot be interpreted substantially, as the index combines measures on different scale levels.

[xii] Of course, one could also try to impute values from "similar" countries, but we tried to avoid that kind of *a posteriori* approach, as which systems are similar with regard to opposition power is an empirically open question.

[xiii] In addition to these case studies, I also compare my OPI to a study by Laver and Hunt (1992) in Online Appendix II, because some authors have used this as a measure for oppositional strength (e.g., Powell 2000, Huber/Shipan 2002). I show, however, that the Laver/Hunt-results are for theoretical, methodological, and empirical reasons an ambiguous indicator that should not be used as a measure of opposition power.

[xiv] To facilitate interpretation, the figure only includes countries with complete data.

[xv] Andeweg's (2000: 533) expressed the concern that "the absence of true opposition within the system is likely to result in opposition against the system", which moreover might contribute to the rise of populist parties (ibid.). In a similar vein, Mair (2007: 7) criticized the lack of opposition in EU-institutions: "Once we cannot organize opposition in the EU, we are then almost forced to organize opposition to the EU" (2007: 7), which again seems to fit perfectly to current political trends.