

# Extra-coalitional Policy Bargaining: Investigating the Power of Committee Chairs

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**Abstract.** Previous research found that coalition partners do not only control each other within the government, but also use instruments of the legislative arena. While the literature has mainly concentrated on parliamentary scrutiny, much less is known about the power of committee chairs in the policy-making process. Therefore, this paper examines if parties use committee chairs to control their coalition partner. We hypothesize that cross-partisan committee chairs will increase the probability that a legislative proposal is changed by the committee. Our theoretical expectations are tested with the help of a newly compiled, comprehensive data set of committee decisions on legislative proposals from 15 German *Bundesländer*. The case selection allows us to hold important institutional characteristics constant while increasing the variance of the variables on the government level. Our results confirm that committee chairs act as supervisory body and thus add empirical evidence to our understanding of oversight mechanisms in coalition governance.

## Introduction

In representative democracies, citizens delegate the vast majority of public policy-making to elected politicians and their political parties. After a given period, they are able to hold these representatives accountable at free and fair elections and may punish or reward a political performance. This delegation process lies at the heart of every representative and democratic system. Yet, it is only a condensed statement of a long chain of delegation. In a parliamentary system, the elected parliament delegates power to the prime minister who then delegates to her ministers who lead their departments (Strøm 2000: 269). The functioning of a democratic system hinges substantially on a smooth handover from one actor to the other. It thus comes with little surprise, that scholars have devoted much of their efforts to analyze each step of this delegation process. A growing literature has looked at the program-to-policy linkage to highlight the factors that make the fulfilment of election pledges more likely (e.g. Naurin et al. 2019, Thomson et al. 2017). Others have studied the time of government formations to understand – and to predict – the composition of a new cabinet after the people’s vote (e.g. Martin and Stevenson 2001). Many scientists have focused on governance during the legislative period (e.g. Strøm et al. 2008) and finally, some specialized in incidents of early government terminations (e.g. Saalfeld 2008).

Most of these studies have dealt with cases of coalition governments in which two or more parties share executive power and therefore, the process of delegation increases in complexity. In order to ease political cooperation and to keep tap on each other’s actions, government parties most commonly implement a variety of control mechanisms (Müller and Strøm 2000). Within the principal-agent framework, Müller and Meyer (2010) categorized these control mechanisms that are available to ruling parties in parliamentary democracies. *Ex ante* control mechanisms (screening, contract design) are instruments to organize power sharing and minimize the risks of conflict before a coalition takes office. *Ex post* mechanism (institutional checks, monitoring) are implemented to control each other during the government period. Screening means keeping a watchful eye on the coalition partner’s future ministers. Case studies have shown that this control mechanism largely depends on party’s power within the negotiation process as well as the designed prime minister’s leadership style (Narud and Strøm 2000, Nousianien 2000, Saalfeld

2000, Lupia and Strøm 2008). In most cases, however, coalition partners are free to appoint their ministers and hence, screening is the weakest of all instruments (Müller and Meyer 2010). Contract design refers to the coalition agreements. These documents contain the policy compromise as well as procedural rules that the coalition parties agreed upon during the negotiations. Although they are not legally binding, they exert great political power. Studies have shown that longer agreements lead to more stable coalitions (Krauss 2018) and that policy proposals that are already part of the coalition agreement have a higher chance of fulfilment (Praprotnik 2017, Thomson 2001).

Institutional checks are often employed as so-called watchdog junior ministers, i.e. junior ministers that reside in the coalition partner's ministries. These junior ministers are able to prevent the agency loss caused by the distribution of portfolios between the coalition partners (Falcó-Gimeno 2014, Greene and Jensen 2014, Lipsmeyer and Pierce 2011, Thies 2001). Recently, two studies in Germany and the UK have furthermore shown that coalition partners also keep tabs on each other by relying on parliamentary questions (Hömann and Sieberer 2020, Martin and Whitaker 2019). Finally, monitory refers to the parliamentary oversight of the executive and the parliamentary committees as most relevant actors in that respect. However, only few studies have shown whether they are an effective checkpoint of the coalition deal outside the governmental arena (but see Martin and Vanberg 2004, 2005; Fortunato et al. 2017).

The present study wants to shed additional light on the role of committees as a control-mechanism and asks whether coalition parties use their committee chairs to scrutinize the legislative proposals of their coalition partners. We add to the existing literature by presenting the first study that examines the committees' role in coalition governance at the sub-national level. More specifically, we look at the German states (*Länder*) and compile a new data set of government proposals in the fields of education and transport (N=169). We focus on the effect of committee chairs that belong to the coalition partner (or to the opposition side) on policy change during the parliamentary phase. Furthermore, we consider committee strength and expect to find a stronger effect on policy change in situations where the coalition partner presides stronger committees.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: The subsequent section will elaborate on our hypotheses. Based on the literature on control mechanisms in coalition governments, we derive expectations on the influence of committee chairs and committee

strength on policy-making. Next, we present our newly compiled data set of policy-making in the areas of education and transport in the German states. The descriptive analyses already reveal that substantial policy change is introduced during the parliamentary stage resulting in longer policy-making process for altered government proposals. The analyses section presents binary logit models that explain the change of government bills. The data support our main assumption that committee chairs belonging to the coalition partner (and not the relevant minister drafting the proposal) will lead to a higher chance of substantial policy change during the parliamentary stage. This result is explained by the committee chairs' role as control mechanism, since there is no substantial effect if the committee chair belongs to an opposition party. Stronger committees render policy-change more likely, although there is no interaction with the coalition partner's role as chair. The last section is devoted to the discussion of our findings.

### **The role of committee chairs**

Political parties are rational actors that try to maximize their benefits. These benefits consist of electoral votes, public offices such as ministries or the enactment of specific policies (Strøm 1990). In addition, it is reasonable to assume that the value parties attribute to each of these three goals varies over time (Strøm and Müller 1999). In the run-up to an election, votes will be most important, since they are key in claiming government offices and political power. After the closing of the polling stations, parties will primarily strive to enter the government and fill prestigious ministerial posts or even the position of the prime minister. These offices may hold an intrinsic value in themselves or provide parties with the opportunity to enact their preferred policies. Finally, during the legislative period, parties will aim to fulfill their electoral promises (Naurin et al. 2019, Thomson et al. 2017). Again, pledge fulfilment might be seen as a value in itself or as a means to an end that will increase parties' chances at the subsequent election. In this paper, we are looking at political parties at the beginning of a legislative term. The elections were fought and a coalition government was built. The parties involved employed the aforementioned *ex ante* control mechanisms and agreed upon a coalition agreement (Moury 2011, Strøm et al. 2008) as well as a selection of ministers. At this point, we understand these political actors as policy-seekers.

In order to maximize their benefit during their time in office, they will try to determine public policies to the greatest extent possible. Yet, while the parties were powerful in choosing their own ministers, their influence over their coalition partner's political personnel was limited. Due to this setting, coalition governments posit special challenges to the process of delegation in general and the principal-agent-relationship more particularly. A minister does not only have one but two principals: her own party and the coalition as a whole (Müller and Meyer 2010).

Ministers in coalition governments might be motivated to follow the preferences of their own party rather than implementing the coalition compromise. The rationale behind this is twofold. First, the minister's ideal point on a specific policy is most likely closer to her own party than to the negotiated policy deal with the coalition partner(s), and second, the minister is ultimately dependent on her own party for reelection (Müller and Meyer 2010). Hence, there are strong incentives for the minister to shirk from prior coalition policy deals. Moreover, ministers are known to have the ability to draft away from coalition policy deals since they are equipped with a strong ministerial apparatus of workforce and expert knowledge in the policy area (e.g. Laver and Shepsle 1996).

At this moment, the *ex post* mechanisms, discussed in the introductory section of this paper, come into play. Especially in the most relevant portfolios such as the ministry of finance, parties employ watchdog junior ministers that belong to the other party than the respective minister. The ample literature in that field has shown that cross partisan junior ministers are an effective tool in order to keep tabs of each other (Thies 2001). Another way of an *ex post* control mechanism for ministerial policy-making activity are legislative committees. Committees play a central role in policy-making. It has been argued that they can be used by opposition parties as well as coalition parties to have an influence on legislation. Strøm (1984, 1990) and Powell (2000), for example, have shown that, especially under minority governments, opposition parties are able to influence policy-making by relying on the legislative committee systems. André, Depauw and Martin (2016) point out that strong committees are especially common in parliamentary systems with regular multiparty coalition governments. They argue that due to delegation problems and ministerial autonomy, coalition parties might also rely on committees to keep tabs on their partners.

Especially with regards to drafting legislative proposals, keeping tabs on partners is important. Due to the complexity of policy-making in modern political systems, drafting policy proposals is in the scope of responsibility of the respective ministerial office. With the help of the legal and domain experts working in the ministry, ministers commonly prepare legislative drafts without consulting the other ministries or coalition parties (see e.g. Laver and Shepsle 1994, 1996). Legislative committees are therefore a perfect mechanism through which coalition parties can gather more information about the policies their partners are pursuing under their ministerial responsibility.

Previous research suggests that the way through which coalition parties can control their partners is the position as a committee chair (Carroll and Cox 2012, Kim and Loewenberg 2005). Committee chairs enjoy quite substantial institutional powers, such as being the main point of contact between the committee members and the minister, having control over the committee hearings, and being able to speak up at any time (Fortunato et al. 2017, Ismayr 2012, Beyme 1997). This means that they not only enjoy agenda-setting power but also have actual influence on the policy-making progress. Hence, holding the position of the committee chair comes with important privileges and opportunities. Fortunato et al. (2017) therefore suggest that it is important who actually occupies the committee chair. Specifically, they argue that

‘[...] committee chairs may: (1) attempt to steer committee deliberations in ways that strengthen their own party and (2) attempt to limit the ability of parties with opposing interests to scrutinize and affect legislation within the jurisdiction of their committee’ (Fortunato et al. 2017, p. 4).

For legislative scrutiny of coalition parties, this means two things. First, if the committee chair party is from the same party as the minister, she is able to act as a gate-keeper for the interests of other parties in the committees. Second, if the committee chair is from a different party as the minister, she will be able to direct the committee meetings to a more thorough investigation of the bill. However, this is of special importance for coalition parties. Since committee membership is typically awarded based on the parliamentary seat share of parties, the coalition parties control the committee majority, too – at least under majority governments. While opposition parties thus have little possibilities to

influence policy proposals, coalition parties can use this position of power to exert influence and control their partners.

Moreover, we argue that due to this influential position, parties are able to amend drafts proposed by their coalition partner, which differ from the previously compromised policy. The rationale behind this is that coalition parties act as partisan veto players (Tsebelis 2002) and policies can only be changed if all coalition parties agree. Therefore, coalition parties are known to install their own party members as committee chairs in order to shadow their coalition partners (Carroll and Cox 2012, Kim and Loewenberg 2005). Accordingly, our first hypothesis states:

*Hypothesis 1: The likelihood that a proposal is changed during the committee process is higher, if the committee is chaired by the coalition partner.*

We further know from previous research that there are significant differences in the strength of legislative committees (e.g. André et al. 2016). Strong committee systems enable parties to access more information in the policy-making process and to effectively amend legislative policy proposals. Martin and Vanberg (2011) argue that the structure of committees is a conditioning factor on the ability of political parties to scrutinize policy proposals of their coalition partner. They show that in strong committees the time of parliamentary debates on controversial policies increased and the number of amendments rose. However, in contrast, in parliaments with a weak committee structure the number of amendments on controversial policy proposals did not change. Based on the “keeping tabs” argument, André, Depauw, and Martin (2016) demonstrate that strong committees are especially common in parliaments where we can frequently observe coalition governments. They strengthen their point with a case study on the committee reform in the Irish *Oireachtas* as an example to underline the importance of (strong) committees in the intra-coalition policy monitoring.

Building up on the previous literature, we argue that cross-partisan committee chairs are especially powerful if they operate in committee systems which equip them with strong resources to scrutinize legislative policy proposals, i.e. to access and gather important information and to effectively rewrite policy proposals. Hence, we expect that

amendments on policy proposals are more common if coalition parties shadow their partners in stronger legislative committee systems. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2: The effect of the influence of a cross-partisan committee chair is stronger, the more powerful the committee is.*

### **Empirical basis: The case of the German states**

In order to answer our research question on extra-coalitional policy bargaining, we collected data on policy proposals in the German states (*Länder*). We thus present the first study that tests the effect of committee chairs as control mechanism in coalition governments at the sub-national level. Moreover, this case selection seems favorable, since the German states hold much variation with respect to our variables of interest (i.e. government composition), while at the same time they share relevant context factors (i.e. political culture). This allows us to test slim, yet comprehensive multivariate models. Our concluding section will return to this point and discuss the generalizability of the findings to the German national level and other countries.

The construction of the newly compiled data set rests on the following considerations. We took the political responsibility in Germany into account and regard only policy fields that lie within the sole jurisdiction of the *Länder*. These are education – including universities – and transport (see e.g. Stecker 2015). As shown by Gross and Krauss (2019), both areas are relevant elements in state coalition agreements: they are among the top five policies with regard to attention in the coalition agreements at the state level. Within these fields, we expect to see relevant and from the national course of action independent policy-making that has the potential to cause policy disagreements within a coalition.

Since we are interested in policy conflicts that are carried on from the governmental into the parliamentary arena, we included only government proposals related to the relevant policy areas identified above. Private member bills, i.e. policies proposed by parliamentarians, regardless whether they belong to the government or the opposition parties, are not part of our data. The relevance of content was determined by its primary



allocation to the education or transport committee. With respect to the time frame, we selected the most recently completed legislative period in each state in which a coalition government was in office. This empirical strategy provides us with precise and complete data availability regarding our variables of interest. The information comes from the legislative databases that are operated by the state parliaments and can be accessed through the parliaments' websites. The databases hold information on all government proposals and the respective decision-making processes. Table 1 lists all relevant government period and the partisan composition of the coalition.

**Table 1. The case of the German states**

<b>State</b>	<b>Legislative period</b>	<b>Government parties</b>
Baden-Württemberg	05/11-05/16	Greens, SPD
Bavaria	10/08-10/13	CSU, FDP
Berlin	11/11-12/16	SPD, CDU
Brandenburg	11/09-11/14	SPD, Left
Hamburg	05/08-08/10	CDU, GAL
Hesse	01/14-10/18	CDU, Greens
Lower Saxony	02/13-10/17	SPD, Greens
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	10/11-09/16	SPD, CDU
North Rhine-Westphalia	06/12-05/17	SPD, Greens
Rhineland-Palatinate	05/11-03/16	SPD, Greens
Saarland	05/12-03/17	CDU, SPD
Saxony	09/09-08/14	CDU, FDP
Saxony-Anhalt	04/11-03/16	CDU, SPD
Schleswig-Holstein	06/12-05/17	SPD, Greens, SSW
Thuringia	11/09-09/14	CDU, SPD

*Note: SPD=Social Democratic Party of Germany; CSU=Christian Social Union in Bavaria; FDP=Free Democratic Party; CDU=Christian Democratic Union of Germany; GAL=Alliance 90/The Greens Hamburg; SSW=South Schleswig Voters' Association; Bremen is not part of our analyses due to lack of data.*

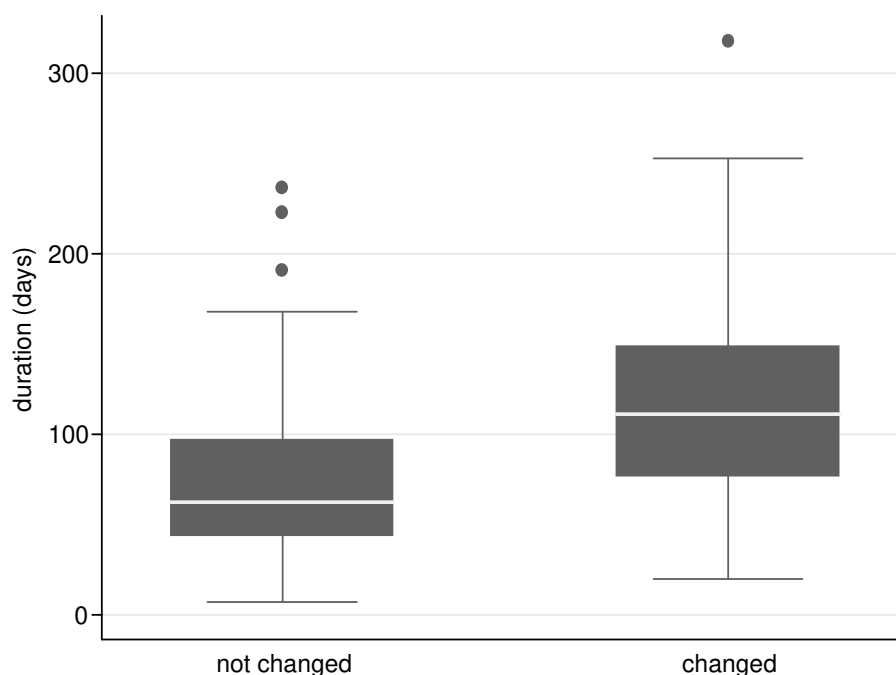
*Source: State parliaments' websites.*

In the final data set, each observation reflects a government proposal in the fields of education and transport. Our dependent variable *Change* holds the information whether or not the committee changed the proposal during the parliamentary stage. Note that this refers to a substantial revision of the proposal and only technical corrections – such as spelling mistakes or layout improvements – are not treated as change. The binary nature

of the explained variable leads to the application of binary logit models as presented in Table 3 in the subsequent section.

Before we discuss the independent variables, Graph 1 inspects the distribution of the Change variable with respect to the duration of the policy-making process. If extra-coalitional policy control happens during the committee stage, then we would expect that this is reflected in a longer policy-making process as well. While the box plot on the left side shows the duration process for proposals that remained unchanged, the box plot on the right side includes all proposals that were altered during the parliamentary phase. A t-test confirms the general picture in Graph 1: The mean duration of unchanged proposals (MD=75 days, SD=6.1) is significantly lower compared to the mean duration of changed proposals (MD=94 days, SD=4.5;  $t(167)=-5.64$ ,  $p<0.00$ ). This first bivariate inspection supports our initial assumption of relevant policy change during the committee stage.

**Graph 1. Duration of policy-making processes in the German states**



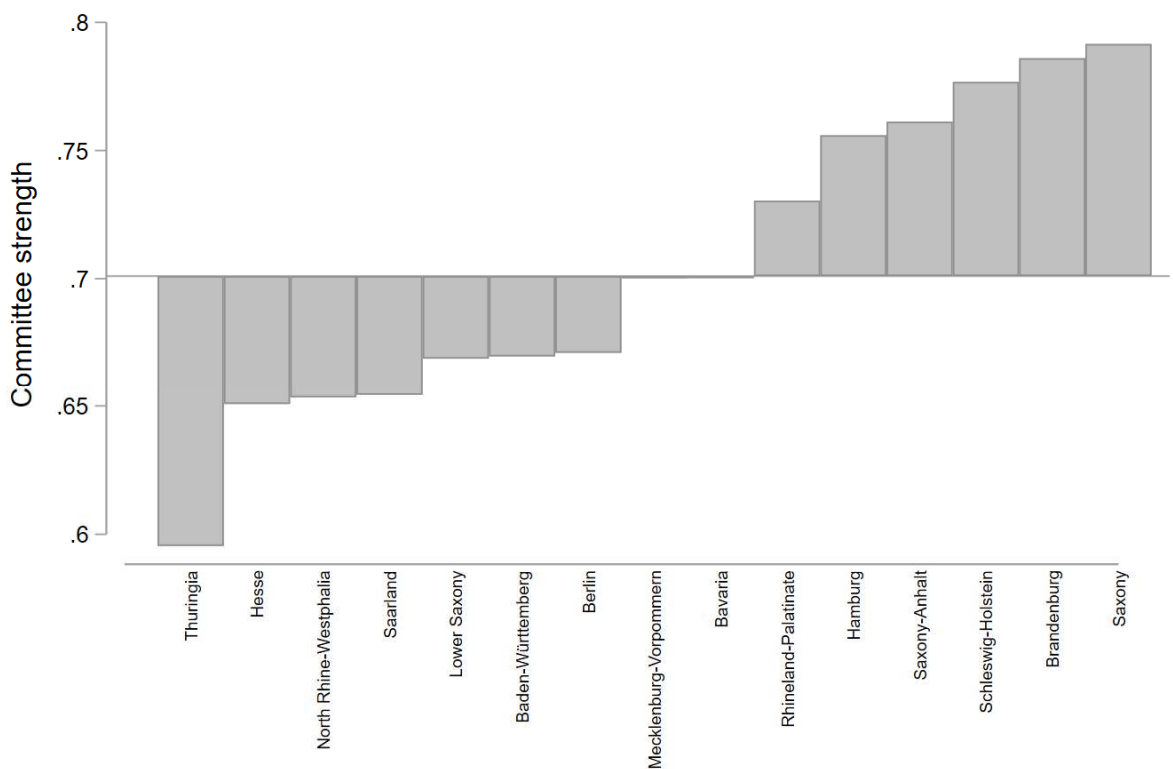
*Note: Box plots by Change variable.*

Our first variable of interest, *Committee chair*, distinguishes between policy-processes in which the relevant minister at the federal level and the committee chair belong to (i) the

same party, (ii) the party of the coalition partner or (iii) an opposition party. Independent members of parliament are treated as committee chairs of the opposition. In our models, the reference category is the first situation in which minister and committee chair are identical.

In order to measure *Committee strength*, we follow Andre et al. (2016) and apply their operationalization of national committee strength to the German state committees. The authors identified nine structural characteristics and political powers of committees. These span the fields of information acquisition (number of committees, correspondence between committees and portfolios, power to compel ministers and civil servants and committee staff), rewrite authority (right to initiate, right to rewrite, time of committee involvement), and control of the committee timetable (power to control the timetable). In order to code these variables, we consulted German state constitutions and parliamentary laws. In addition, we reached out to the state parliaments to complement our results, especially with respect to the committee staff.

**Graph 2. Committee strength for 15 German states**



Graph 2 shows the strength of the legislative committees for the 15 Länder investigated in this study. The mean value of committee strength (0.70) is indicated by the horizontal line. The committee system with the lowest score according to our strength variable is in Thuringia (0.60), while Saxony has the highest score (0.79) and thus strongest committee system in parliament.

On the question of relevant control variables, we decided to include an additional actor that could be relevant in the decision-making process: the prime minister. The powerful position of the prime minister is described in the literature on coalition formation and policy-making. Dunleavy and Rhodes (1990: 5-8) argue that as “prima inter pares”, the prime minister and hence her party plays a pivotal role and has the ability to influence coalition decisions according to her own preferences. However, the empirical evidence to their thesis is somewhat mixed. While studies on government formation corroborate the prime ministerial model (e.g. Diermeier and Feddersen 1998), studies on policy-making are less supportive and instead highlight the power of the ministers (e.g. Praprotnik 2017). Taking the theoretical arguments for a powerful prime minister into account, we decided to implement the dummy variable *Prime minister* in our models since Germany is known for strong prime ministerial competencies, the so-called *Richtlinienkompetenz*. The variable contains the information whether the committee chair belongs to the party of the prime minister. Our findings will add to the question whether the prime minister’s influence goes beyond the process of coalition formation.

Finally, we control for the ideological divisiveness of the coalition cabinet. Especially if the coalition is ideologically diverse, proposals put forward by the government might be highly controversial, not only for the opposition parties but also for the coalition partner. Hence, change in the committee stage might be more likely, the more ideologically diverse the coalition cabinet is. *Ideological divisiveness* is operationalized as the distance between the left-most and right-most party in the cabinet. The data was provided by Bräuninger et al. (2019, 2020).

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics (N=169)**

Variable	Values	Frequencies in row percent			Mean (s.d.)
		0	1	2	
Change	0/1	55.6	44.4	-	
Committee chair	0/1/2	16.6	59.8	23.7	
Committee strength	[59.5-79.2]				70.1 (5.5)
Prime minister	0/1	55.0	45.0	-	
Ideological divisiveness	[0.1-5.5]				2.1 (1.7)

*Note: Percentages not always add to 100 due to rounding.*

The coding of government proposals in the most recently terminated legislative period in the German states led to 169 cases that are the basis of our analyses. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables described above. In the subsequent section, we present the multivariate models.

### **Analyses: Committee chairs as control instruments**

The present paper asked whether government parties use their committee chairs to control policy-making. In order to answer this research question, Table 3 presents two binary logit models that are based on 169 cases of policy-making in the German *Länder*. Since our observations are clustered into 15 different states, we include clustered robust standard errors in our models to account for the fact that observations within a state might be more similar to each other than observations between states. In both models, the dependent variable distinguishes between those proposals that were amended and those that were left unchanged during the committee stage. While Model I tests the main effects (H1), Model II includes the interaction effect between committee chair and committee strengths as hypothesized in H2. Recall that our independent variable Committee chair is categorical and the reference category Same party is compared to situations in which the committee chair is not affiliated with the relevant minister's party, but belongs to the coalition partner's party or the opposition party. Overall, our models hold relevant

explanatory power as they predict about 65 percent of the cases (Model I, 63 percent in Model II) correctly.

**Table 3. Explaining extra-coalitional policy bargaining**

	Model I		Model II	
Committee chair				
Same party		<i>Reference category</i>		<i>Reference category</i>
Coalition partner	3.357*	(2.32)	0.027	(0.37)
Opposition party	1.651	(1.64)	0.000	(0.00)
Committee strength	1.090**	(0.04)	1.001	(0.19)
Interaction effect				
Same x Strength				<i>Reference category</i>
Coalition x Strength			1.072	(0.22)
Opposition x Strength			1.172	(0.24)
Prime minister	1.511	(1.00)	1.324	(0.90)
Ideological divisiveness	1.195	(0.19)	1.177	(0.20)
<i>N</i>		169		169
pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		0.066		0.072

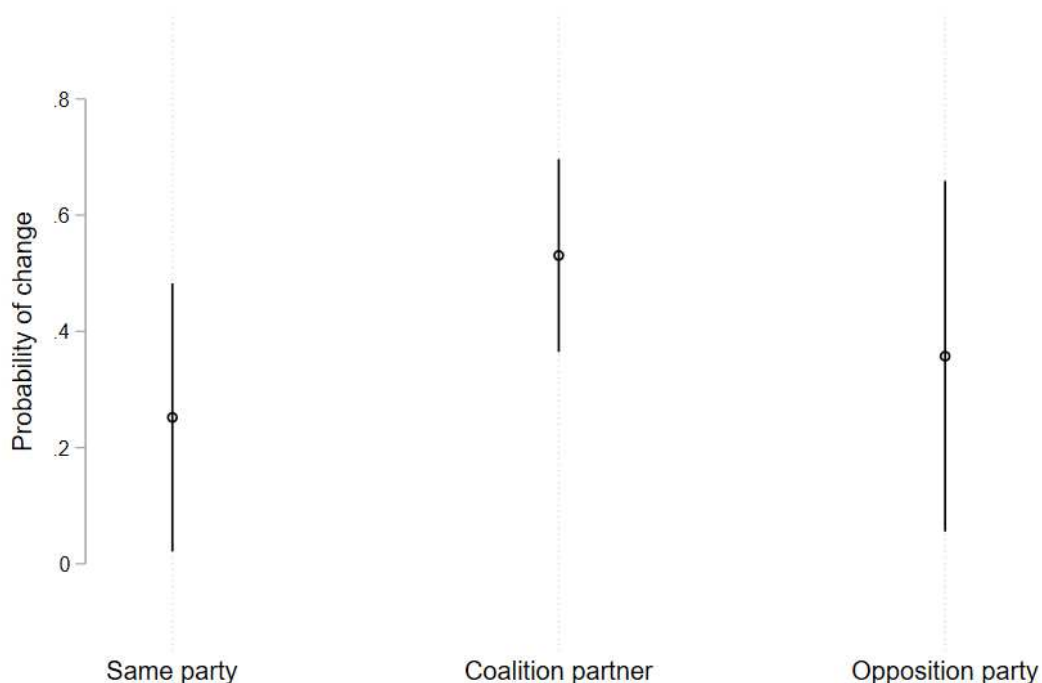
*Note: Binary logit models; exponentiated coefficients; clustered robust standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .*

It can be seen from the data in Table 3 that our first hypothesis finds support in the analyses. The coefficient Coalition partner is greater than 1 and significant in Model I. As hypothesized in H1, if the committee chair belongs to the coalition partner then a change during the parliamentary stage becomes more likely. At the same time, a committee chair who belongs to an opposition party does not increase the likelihood of change. The corresponding coefficient Opposition party fails to meet standard levels of significance. In order to allow for a more substantial and intuitive interpretation of these results, we calculated the predicted probabilities of change. The results can be found in Graph 3. Holding all other variables constant, the predicted probability that the proposal is changed in situations where the relevant minister and the committee chair belong to the same party is about 25 percent. Hence, changes in the committee can even be observed if the committee chair belongs to the same party as the minister. One potential explanation can be that the coalition partner still gains some insights during the committee procedure even

if not occupying the position of the chair and therefore can demand changes. Another possible factor could be that there are intra-party differences about a policy. Thus, if the minister and the committee chair belong to different factions of the same party, the probability of change might increase. Still, the probability of change is comparatively low if both positions, the committee chair and the ministry, are held by the same party.

In contrast, the probability of change raises to 53 percent if the committee chair does not belong to the relevant minister but to the coalition partner. Thus, a policy is twice as likely to be changed if the committee is led by coalition party. If the opposition leads a committee, the probability of change is not significantly different from a committee that is led by someone from the same party as the responsible minister (36 percent). Consequently, the committee chairs are able to use their power during the policy-making process, but only if they belong to the government parties. Opposition parties fail to exercise their power as committee chair. This finding is not unexpected since we only include majority government coalitions.

**Graph 3. Predicted probabilities of change by committee chair**



*Note: Predictions are based on Model 1 while holding everything else constant (mode values). The graph was produced by relying on the plotplain scheme for Stata (Bischof 2017).*

The result with respect to the coalition partner adds to and extends the work by Martin and Vanberg (2004, 2005, 2014) that consistently revealed the government parties' influence during the committee stage (but see Fortunato et al. 2017). In their models on policy-making at the national level, government issue divisiveness came out as a significant predictor of both the duration of the legislative process (2004) and the number of altered (sub-)articles during the committee stage (2005, 2014). Our study further shows that the effect on government sponsored bills increases as the committee chair belongs to a different party than the relevant minister. Hence, extending the previous result on government issue divisiveness irrespective partisan affiliation of the committee leadership, we show that the committee chair is an effective *ex post* control mechanism.

With respect to the opposition chair, this finding is somewhat in contrast to Fortunato et al. (2017) and their models of policy-making at the national level. Although their main model reveals no effect of an opposition chair on the number of altered (sub-)articles, they report an influence when the policy distance between the opposition chair and the responsible minister is at the median level. Further work is needed to examine whether the negative influence of opposition parties in committee leadership positions is explained by the specific policies under scrutiny and/or by the sub-national character of our study. Recall that we were only interested in the two main issue areas at the sub-national level: education and transport. It is reasonable to expect that state governments will draw great attention to these two areas and will ensure the enactment of the coalition compromise. Fortunato et al. (2017), however, looked at policy-making at the national level across all issue areas. Here, some bills might be less controversial and give greater discretion to the committee chair even if she belongs to the opposition. It is important to note that any amendment requires a majority vote in the committee that includes the approval of the coalition partners.

Looking at Model II, we see that the model does not support our expected interaction effect between the Committee chair and the Committee strength (H2). The coefficients are insignificant and we do not gain explanatory power as measured in cases correctly predicted by adding this interaction. We interpret this negative finding as an additional piece of evidence that the committee chair is an important step in coalition policy-making that coalition partners know to use regardless the specifics of a legislative system. Hence, the results suggest that it is about the strength of parties and not



necessarily about the strength of committees when it comes to the powers of the committee chair. Additional studies will be needed to see whether this result travels beyond the present case.

The same holds true for our control variables Prime minister and Ideological divisiveness. In the theoretical section, we have argued that the powerful position of the prime minister as well as the ideological divisiveness of the cabinet might have effects on policy changes during the parliamentary stage and that our models should control for them. The coefficients Prime minister and Ideological divisiveness in both models yields a number bigger than 1 making changes more likely. However, the results are not significant.

In order to make sure that the influence of the committee chair is not a relic of the most influential control mechanism, the coalition agreement, we include the share of procedural rules in these agreements (see e.g. Bowler et al. 2016). The more procedural rules there are in the coalition agreement, the higher the probability that the agreements cover rules for committee chairs. The coalition agreements were provided by the Political Documents Archive (Benoit et al. 2009, Gross 2018). Procedural rules do not have an influence on the probability that a proposal is changed (see Appendix, Table A.1). We ran two models, one with clustered standard errors and one without. Our main explanatory variable just so fails to reach the 10 % significance level in the clustered model but is significant in the non-clustered model. Note that the procedural rules variable only varies on the state level, meaning that additionally including state clusters have overspecified the model.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have posed the question whether coalition parties make use of committees in order to keep tabs on their coalition partners. We have argued that committees are another control mechanism for coalition governments as committee chairs are equipped with important functions such as agenda-setting power. Following this argument, we have hypothesized that a change of a bill proposal is more likely, if the committee chair belongs to a different party than the minister. Additionally, we have also argued that the strength of the committee should play a role. More specifically, we have

hypothesized that the influence of the control function of the committee chair should be stronger, the more powerful the committee is.

By relying on original data of bill proposals in 15 German states, we have shown that a change is more likely, if the committee chair belongs to the coalition partner, which lends support to our first hypothesis. Although stronger committees make policy amendments during the parliamentary stage more likely, the strength of the committee does not interact with the influence of the committee chair.

Our results, in some ways, also contradict the findings by Fortunato et al. (2017). While they find support for opposition party influence, their coalition partner hypothesis is not supported. However, they only find this influence when the ideological divisiveness is at the median level. Additionally, we only look at the two most important issue areas for the sub-national level so the differences might be explained by the fact that Fortunato et al. (2017) are looking at proposals from all issue areas. Future research should therefore test whether this difference is due to the specific characteristics of the regional level.

These differences also speak to the question of the generalizability of our results. While it is irrevocably true that the German multi-level system is unique in many ways, there are good arguments for why we should also find similar relationships in other countries. First, we included only those policy areas in which the states basically have exclusive legislative competences. Second, the state-level parliaments in Germany are not substantially different from other federal or state-level legislatures elsewhere, especially with regard to coalition governance.

The findings in this paper have important implications for control mechanisms in coalition governance and policy-making. First, the results indicate that coalition parties use committees in order to control their partners. Yet, it remains to be analyzed how this control actually influences the content of policies. Second, it seems that, at least on the state level, opposition parties are not able to use committees to control the government.

## Literature

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## Appendix

**Table A.1. Additional control: Procedural rules**

	<b>Model A.I</b> <b>(robust std.err.)</b>		<b>Model A.II</b> <b>(std.err)</b>	
Committee chair				
Same party	<i>Reference category</i>		<i>Reference category</i>	
Coalition partner	2.888	(2.20)	2.888*	(1.71)
Opposition party	1.368	(1.48)	1.368	(1.07)
Committee strength	1.067	(0.06)	1.067	(0.04)
Prime minister	1.394	(0.97)	1.394	(0.72)
Ideological divisiveness	1.184	(0.20)	1.184	(0.13)
Procedural rules	1.141	(0.21)	1.141	(0.13)
<i>N</i>	169		169	
pseudo $R^2$	0.072		0.072	

Note: Exponentiated coefficients; (robust) standard errors in parentheses \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .