

## Coordination Committees and Legislative Agenda-Setting Power in 31 European Parliaments

Frech, Elena; Sieberer, Ulrich

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:  
GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Frech, E., & Sieberer, U. (2023). Coordination Committees and Legislative Agenda-Setting Power in 31 European Parliaments. *Historical Social Research*, 48(3), 189-208. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.48.2023.30>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more Information see:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

---

# Coordination Committees and Legislative Agenda-Setting Power in 31 European Parliaments

*Elena Frech & Ulrich Sieberer \**

---

**Abstract:** »Koordinationsausschüsse und Legislative Agendasetzungsmacht in 31 Europäischen Parlamenten«. Agenda setting determines whether and how topics are discussed and voted in parliament. Many parliaments delegate this task to a specific body charged with coordinating parliamentary business. However, we know little about the composition and powers of these “coordination committees” (CC). This paper maps the existence, composition, and institutional powers of coordination committees across 31 European parliaments. It shows that CCs exist in most parliaments and have a relatively similar composition, usually including the president of parliament, their deputies, and party group representatives, but vary strongly in their agenda-setting powers. Exploring whether this variation is related to the functional need for coordination, we find limited evidence that larger sizes of parliaments and higher ideological polarization between parties are associated with stronger coordination committees. In terms of this HSR Special Issue, we show that CCs as horizontal collective actors exist even in a hierarchical organization such as a parliament and have relevant, albeit variable, resources.

**Keywords:** Agenda setting, collective actors, institutional power, European democracies.

---

## 1. Introduction

---

Parliamentary actors, i.e., individual members of parliaments and party groups, differ widely in their preferences on how to use one of the scarcest resources in any legislature – time. Thus, running a parliament requires a substantial amount of coordination and conflict resolution in order to circumvent the “plenary bottleneck” and allow parliament to come to collective decisions (Cox 2006). In many parliaments, this task of setting the

---

\* Elena Frech, Universität Bamberg, Bamberg, Germany; [Elena.Frech@Uni-Bamberg.de](mailto:Elena.Frech@Uni-Bamberg.de). ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7974-2976.

Ulrich Sieberer, Universität Bamberg, Bamberg, Germany; [Ulrich.Sieberer@Uni-Bamberg.de](mailto:Ulrich.Sieberer@Uni-Bamberg.de). ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4027-1393.

Acknowledgements: We gratefully acknowledge the excellent research assistance by Bernhard Fockel and Jakob Hirn as well as very helpful comments by other members of the RUECA Research Unit. This research was supported by the German Research Foundation, Grant SI 1470/8-1.

legislative agenda as well as other coordination powers are delegated to specific bodies that we refer to as “Coordination Committees” (CCs). CCs are parliamentary bodies usually comprised of the president of parliament and members from different political parties that collectively decide about questions of agenda setting and other aspects of parliamentary business that require coordination.

In the conceptual framework of this HSR Special Issue (see Gehring and Marx 2023), CCs are horizontal collective actors as their members hold systematically divergent preferences and reach decisions by means of coordination among equals rather than through hierarchy (as would, for example, be the case if agenda setting was delegated to the president of parliament alone). CCs are set up in a top-down fashion by a superior body (the parliament itself). The same superior body also delegates resources to the CC. Their core resources are instruments of agenda setting (e.g., the right to allocate speaking time to specific actors or to allow specific items on the agenda). In a hypothetical “legislative state of nature” (Cox 2006), these powers belong to individual members who have incentives to overuse them creating a common pool problem (Cox 2006). Thus, we can conceptually think of the creation and empowerment of CCs as a pooling of a specific resource (agenda-setting powers) under the collective control of a subgroup of co-equal members (the CC) with the goal of solving a collective action problem (Coleman 1990; Gehring and Marx 2023, in this special issue).

CCs thus serve a crucial role in making parliaments work and contribute to successful democratic representation and governance. However, these committees are severely understudied with regard to their composition, their resources, and their behavior. In this paper, we shed first descriptive light on CCs in European countries (and the European Parliament) as horizontal collective actors by analyzing their structure and resources to draw conclusions about their action capabilities (see Gehring and Marx 2023, in this special issue). We start by mapping CC existence and composition. While some parliaments lack such a committee altogether and delegate agenda-setting powers to the government or the president of parliament, extant coordination committees differ with regard to their membership. Most of them include the president of parliament and his or her deputies as well as party group representatives, but some also have committee chairs and even backbenchers as members. We then provide a first description of the agenda-setting powers of different CCs. These formal powers are the core resource that allow CCs to affect parliamentary business. Subsequently, we explore whether differences in the agenda-setting power of CCs (i.e., their resources) can be explained by a functional need for more coordination in parliament. We find some evidence that larger parliaments have stronger coordination committees, but find no support for our expectation that higher preference heterogeneity in parliament be associated with higher CC power. In the

concluding section, we briefly discuss the question how much autonomy one should theoretically expect for CCs and how this autonomy could be assessed in future empirical work.

---

## 2. Coordination Committees and Legislative Agenda Setting: State of the Art and Research Frontiers

---

We approach coordination committees from the perspective of legislative agenda setting. Legislative agenda setting is the process of putting topics on the parliamentary agenda and determining how they are dealt with in the parliamentary process (Döring 1995c, 2001; Sieberer 2006). By limiting attention to the parliamentary arena, legislative agenda setting is one element of the broader concept of agenda setting that refers to the choice of topics for political debate across different arenas (e.g., Baumgartner, Breunig, and Grossman 2019; Baumgartner and Jones 1993).

Legislative agenda setting is an essential feature of parliaments. In modern democracies, many more societal demands are potential objects of political action than can be dealt with in practice – time is a “scarce resource” in any modern parliament (Cox 2006; Cox and McCubbins 2011; Döring 1995c). Thus, getting onto the legislative agenda is a critical (and hard to achieve) precondition for seeing any legislative action. Furthermore, only topics that make it on the agenda gain the additional visibility of parliamentary proceedings that actors seek to promote issues for political and electoral competition.

Conceptually, Döring (2005) distinguishes three types of agenda-setting power: (1) *Topical agenda setting* refers to the power to influence the topics of political discourse in the political system (in line with the broader concept of agenda setting mentioned above). In pluralist democracies, this power is usually dispersed widely across political and societal actors such as political parties, interest groups, media outlets, and with the advent of social media even private citizens. (2) Setting the *voting agenda* refers to the power to determine which topics are ultimately voted upon in parliament and what voting method is used. This type of agenda power includes gate-keeping power (i.e., negative agenda control as defined by Cox and McCubbins [2011]) but also procedural choices such as whether a vote is taken openly or secretly or in what order multiple motions are voted. A large body of social choice scholarship indicates that such seemingly petty procedural details can affect voting outcomes, especially in contexts of multiple alternatives that are preferred by different majorities in the legislature (Arrows 1963; Mueller 2003; Rasch 2014; Riker 1982). Finally, (3) setting the *timetable agenda* concerns the allocation of plenary time as arguably the most precious

resource in busy legislatures (Cox 2006). Controlling the legislative timetable allows an agenda setter to curb obstruction (e.g., by limiting the time of debate) and to highlight specific topics by allocating a longer debate or an attractive time slot with high media attention (Döring 2005; Sieberer 2006). Furthermore, controlling which specific deputies get to speak in a debate enables party leaders to ensure unified support for the party line in plenary debates (Proksch and Slapin 2012).

In parliamentary democracies – the focus of our attention in this paper – most research focuses on the role of governments in legislative agenda setting (Cox and McCubbins 2011; Döring 1995a, 1995c; Heller 2001; Rasch and Tsebelis 2011; Tsebelis 2002). From this perspective, government agenda control is an instrument to protect government motions from change or even defeat in the legislative arena (Cox and McCubbins 2005, 2011; Döring 1995a; Heller 2001). Thus, agenda-setting prerogatives can also serve as an indicator of the institutional power of governments vis-à-vis parliaments, or more properly in the context of parliamentary democracies, of the governing parties vis-à-vis the opposition (Sieberer 2006; Tsebelis 2002).

Empirically, however, many European governments play a very limited role in determining the parliamentary agenda. According to Döring's seminal study of 18 Western European parliaments (Döring 1995c), only the British and Irish governments can set the plenary agenda by themselves. In all other countries, the agenda is set by parliamentary actors. This process requires interaction between the president of the chamber and party leaders.

Most parliaments have institutionalized specific committees that are charged with setting the agenda and often also with additional coordination tasks in parliament. As these committees go by very different names, we use the generic term “coordination committee” (CCs). As we will discuss in more detail below, we define CCs as permanent legislative bodies that hold politically relevant powers for coordinating the political aspects of parliamentary business and consist of co-equal members with diverse partisan preferences. However, CCs' internal rules differ with regard to the relevant decision rule ranging from simple majority to unanimity, thus giving opposition actors varying amounts of influence (Döring 1995c). In addition to these different decision procedures, some parliaments grant guaranteed access to the agenda after certain time limits or reserve some time slots for motions by opposition parties or individual deputies (e.g., opposition days in the British House of Commons).

Given the importance of agenda setting for legislative outcomes and the distribution of power within legislatures, we know surprisingly little about coordination committees as the primary arena for agenda setting in most parliaments. While there is a substantial literature on the Rules Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives (Bach and Smith 1988; Cox and McCubbins 2005; Dion and Huber 1996), research on European legislatures is much more

limited. Two comparative studies show institutional variation in committee design, membership, and formal resources based on a limited number of variables measured in the early 1990s (Döring 1995c; Jenny and Müller 1995). In addition, there are mostly descriptive studies of individual CCs, e.g., in the German Bundestag (Franke 1987; Loewenberg 2003; Petersen 2000), the Austrian Nationalrat (Widder 1972), and the recently founded Backbench Business Committee in the British House of Commons (Foster 2014; Russell 2011).

Coordination committees are not only a largely overlooked arena for legislative agenda setting; they are also a particularly interesting body from the perspective of collective agency that is the focus of this HSR Special Issue. Government agenda setting, for example in the UK, is a hierarchical process in which the government as a corporate actor with clearly defined policy preferences can impress its views on parliament. By contrast, coordination committees are collective actors whose members represent the entire range of viewpoints in the chamber (on the distinction between collective and corporate actors, see, e.g., Scharpf 1997). Depending on the institutional design of the CC, non-governing parties can have varying amounts of influence, e.g., if decisions are taken by supermajority rules or rules prescribe that the CC should aim for consensual decisions (as for example in Germany). Especially if such rules are combined with guaranteed minority access to the agenda (e.g., during reserved time slots or after certain periods), agenda setting becomes subject to negotiations between parties often resulting in package deals agreed among all parties (Loewenberg 2003; Petersen 2000; Sieberer 2006).

Conceptually, such deals constitute cases of horizontal collective agency, i.e., coordination among actors holding different preferences by means other than hierarchy. This type of collective agency gained much less attention than hierarchical coordination, even though many political phenomena display this kind of interaction (Gehring and Marx 2023, in this special issue). Studying horizontal collective agency across different empirical manifestations promises new insights into ways how political actors reach agreement and reconcile differences when interacting on equal footing. Within parliaments – usually considered rather hierarchical institutions in practice – coordination committees provide the prime example of a horizontal collective actor with the explicit task of providing coordination and ensuring a smooth operation of parliament despite often antagonistic preferences.

This brief review of pertinent literature showed several gaps in our knowledge about coordination committees, especially in comparative perspective. First, we lack a clear conceptual definition of coordination committees and their delineation from similar bodies such as a presidency or a standing order committee. Second, we need comprehensive and current

information on the composition of CCs, their array of powers within parliament, and their internal dynamics and decision-making procedures. Data for Western European parliaments from the early 1990s (Döring 1995b) may no longer be valid given the frequency of parliamentary rule change (Sieberer et al. 2016). For Central and Eastern Europe, we lack such data altogether. Third, there is very little research on how the existence and institutional design of CCs relate to general features of the parliament and the party system.

This paper takes initial steps towards filling these gaps. We first develop a conceptual definition of coordination committees based on their characteristic membership structure and task of coordinating politically relevant aspects of parliamentary business. Second, we provide novel institutional data on the composition and powers of coordination committees in 31 European parliaments. Finally, we explore how these powers are related to general characteristics of the respective parliament and party system.

---

### 3. Conceptualizing and Measuring Coordination Committees and their Role as Agenda Setters

---

In this section, we propose a conceptual definition of coordination committees and use it to identify coordination committees in 31 European parliaments. Furthermore, we develop indicators for institutional agenda-setting power and describe variation among European coordination committees.

Our conceptual definition of coordination committees rests on four characteristics: Its permanency as a formal parliamentary body, its membership, the coequal power of its members, and its politically relevant competencies regarding agenda setting and parliamentary coordination. First, to qualify as a CC, a body must be permanent. Thus, informal coordination meeting called to address specific questions are not considered coordination committees. Second, a CC must include a number of actors with potentially varying political positions. Usually CCs include the president of parliament<sup>1</sup> and representatives of all party groups (possibly with the exception of very small ones) so that all main opinions in the chamber are represented, including those of opposition parties. Thus, a small presidency consisting for example only of the president and two vice presidents that does not reflect the composition of the whole chamber does not qualify as a CC. CCs can include additional actors such as vice presidents or committee chairs. Third, the members of a CC hold formally coequal powers, i.e., make

---

<sup>1</sup> In Lithuania, the Romanian Committee of the Leaders of the Parliamentary Groups, and the UK Back-Committee, the president (or speaker) of the parliament is not included.

collective decisions rather than simply advising a president who ultimately decides alone. Thus, CCs are collective actors arriving at collective decisions. This being said, internal decision-making rules can differ, e.g., with regard to the majority requirements, so that the actual influence of its members can vary (e.g., providing governing parties with dominant influence in case of simple majority rule and a majority cabinet). Fourth, a CC must have at least minimal powers in the area of agenda setting and coordinating the political aspects of parliamentary business more broadly. This requirement excludes, for example, standing order committees that usually do not deal with agenda setting and purely administrative bodies that may deal with issues such as the parliamentary library, parliamentary staff, or visitor services.

Based on this definition, identifying CCs requires information on its composition and tasks. This data can be gathered from different sources. In this paper, we primarily rely on formal legal rules, especially the rules of procedure or standing orders of the respective parliaments. In some cases, we also consulted the official websites of the chambers for further information on membership and tasks. All data was<sup>2</sup> collected and coded by the authors and a group of student assistants at the University of Bamberg.<sup>3</sup>

Our data collection covers 31 parliamentary chambers: All current EU countries (with the exception of the presidential system of Cyprus), Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the European Parliament. In cases of bicameral parliaments, we focus on the lower chamber that directly represents the citizens. This tends to be the chamber that is somewhat more powerful in the legislative process and to which the government is responsible.

For all parliamentary chambers, we searched legal regulations as well as parliamentary websites and academic literature to identify potential coordination committees based on our criteria (concerning permanency, co-equal powers, composition, and tasks). There are only six parliaments for which we could not identify any CC: Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Norway, and Slovakia. In several parliaments, more than one body fit our formal criteria. In such cases, we opted for the body with the more encompassing membership.<sup>4</sup> Two cases deserve special mention: The Dutch parliament does not have a committee that formally involves party representatives but an extensive presidency consisting of the president and

---

<sup>2</sup> We are grateful for support by many parliamentary services, who provided us with documents and even did translated documents for us (e.g., Romania).

<sup>3</sup> We gratefully acknowledge the work by Bernhard Fockel und Jakob Hirn.

<sup>4</sup> In several cases, there are both the CC we study and an additional body consisting of a subset of the CC that holds mainly administrative tasks (e.g., the “Bureau” in France, Italy, and the European Parliament). Similarly, several parliaments constitute a collective presidency (consisting of the president and their deputies) in addition to a CC. In these cases, we focus on the CC because party group representatives are formally involved in this body in contrast to the presidency.



vice presidents of all party groups. As this body fulfills several typical coordination tasks, we treat it as coordination committee.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the Backbench Business Committee in the British House of Commons is a special case as it does not involve the Speaker or party leaders and only decides on the agenda for a very limited amount of backbench time whereas the largest share of the plenary agenda is controlled by the government (Russell 2011). As this is the first attempt to institutionalize any kind of business committee in the Commons, we included it nonetheless, not least to see how it differs from CCs with a more encompassing array of tasks.

For all CCs, we coded their composition in terms of the types of members. In doing so, we distinguish three sets of actors: (1) The president and vice-presidents of the chamber, (2) formal party group representatives, and (3) chairs of standing committees. Table 1 shows the composition of the CCs covered by their composition.

**Table 1** The Composition of Coordination Committees

Presidency only	Presidency + Party Groups	Presidency + Party Groups + Committee Chairs	Other
Iceland	Austria	France	Finland (presidency + committee chairs)
Netherlands	Belgium	Greece	Lithuania (party groups only)
	Bulgaria		Romania (party groups only)
	Czech Republic		UK (backbenchers only)
	European Parliament		
	Germany		
	Hungary		
	Ireland		
	Italy		
	Luxembourg		
	Malta		
	Poland		
	Portugal		
	Slovenia		
	Spain		
	Sweden		
	Switzerland		

According to our data, the dominant model is a CC consisting of the president of the chamber, their deputies, and party group representatives, often the leaders of the parliamentary party groups. This composition is consistent with the main function of CCs as coordinating bodies as it brings together the presidency (that is formally in charge of many parliamentary processes) and the party groups as the most powerful political actors in party-centered parliaments. Two countries (France and Greece) also add committee chairs

<sup>5</sup> We thank Tom Louwerse and Simon Otjes (Leiden University) for advising us on the role of the presidency and confirming our choice to treat it as equivalent to a CC.

to the CC and thus include actors that derive their influence from the horizontal division of labor within parliaments rather than from the hierarchical organization of party groups. Two countries (Iceland and the Netherlands) by contrast rely solely on an encompassing presidency in which all parties are represented via vice presidents or (in the Icelandic case) observers that act as party representatives. The Finnish case is unusual as its CC includes committee chairs but not party leaders. Lithuania and Romania have CCs consisting solely of party-group representatives without involvement of the president. Finally, as discussed above, the British Backbench Business Committee is an outlier as it consists only of backbenchers with no involvement of the Speaker or party leaders.

Let us now turn to the institutional power of these committees. We coded six competencies of CCs as agenda setters. In terms of Döring's (2005) classification of agenda control types, the first two powers refer to the topical agenda, the third and fourth powers relate to the voting agenda whereas the last two speak to the timetable agenda.

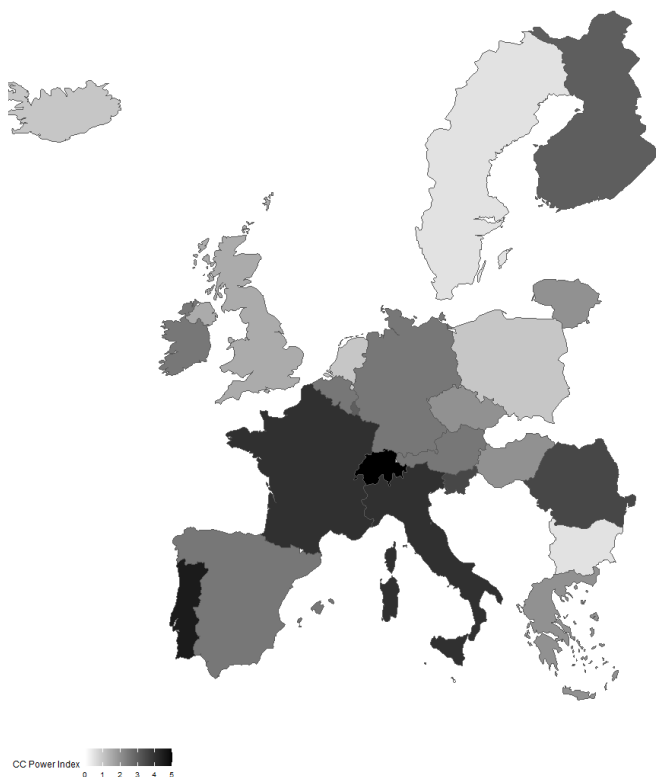
- 1) The right to establish the parliamentary agenda (determine which motions get on the plenary agenda).
- 2) The right to put own proposals on the plenary agenda irrespective of existing motions.
- 3) The right to determine the voting procedure to be used for a vote in the plenary.
- 4) The right to distribute speaking time in debates to parliamentary party groups.
- 5) The right to establish a long-term (usually annual) schedule for parliamentary sessions.
- 6) The right to schedule extraordinary sittings of parliament.

All six variables are coded 1 if the CC holds this power and can execute it autonomously, 0.5 if it holds this power only for some issues and/or other bodies are involved in the process, and 0 if the CC does not hold this power. To arrive at an overall index of CC agenda-setting power, we sum the six variables. The final index thus theoretically ranges from zero, indicating a very weak CC, to six, identifying a CC that holds all of the above powers.

Figure 1 visualizes the distribution of institutional agenda-setting power of CCs in Europe and shows ample variation. While no CC reaches the theoretical maximum, the committees in Portugal and Switzerland hold five out of the six powers, followed by those in France and Italy with a score of four. By contrast, the CCs in Sweden, Bulgaria, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Poland are weak with scores of one and below. At the extreme end, the CC of Malta does not hold any of the powers coded for the index.

**Figure 1** The Power of Coordination Committees in Europe

CC Power Index of Coordination Committees in Europe



---

#### 4. Towards Explaining CC Resources: Do the Powers of Coordination Committees Follow the Functional Need for Coordination?

---

In this section, we explore how the institutional power of the European coordination committees relates to characteristics of the parliament. This exploratory analysis serves as a first step towards identifying potential reasons for the observed power differences of CCs.

We focus on factors that influence the need for coordination in parliament. The general expectation is that higher need for coordination should correlate with stronger CCs. Thus, we assume that parliamentary structures, in this

case the design of coordination committees, follows a certain functional logic. Theoretically, we claim that this functional match is the result of political actors designing institutions to serve their purposes (Diermeier and Krehbiel 2003; Shepsle 2006; Sieberer et al. 2020). As all parliamentary actors have a basic interest in an operative parliament, the decision to build coordinating structures should be relatively uncontroversial, i.e., constitute a case of efficient institutional design (Tsebelis 1990, Ch. 4). Note that we focus on the formal powers of CCs as collective actors, i.e., the question what these bodies may do, but do not analyze internal decision-making rules within CCs or informal decision-making. As these rules have strong distributive consequences, their design should be much more controversial.

Which factors drive the need for coordination in parliaments? We focus on two variables here: The size of the chamber and the heterogeneity of parties' ideological positions, i.e., party polarization.

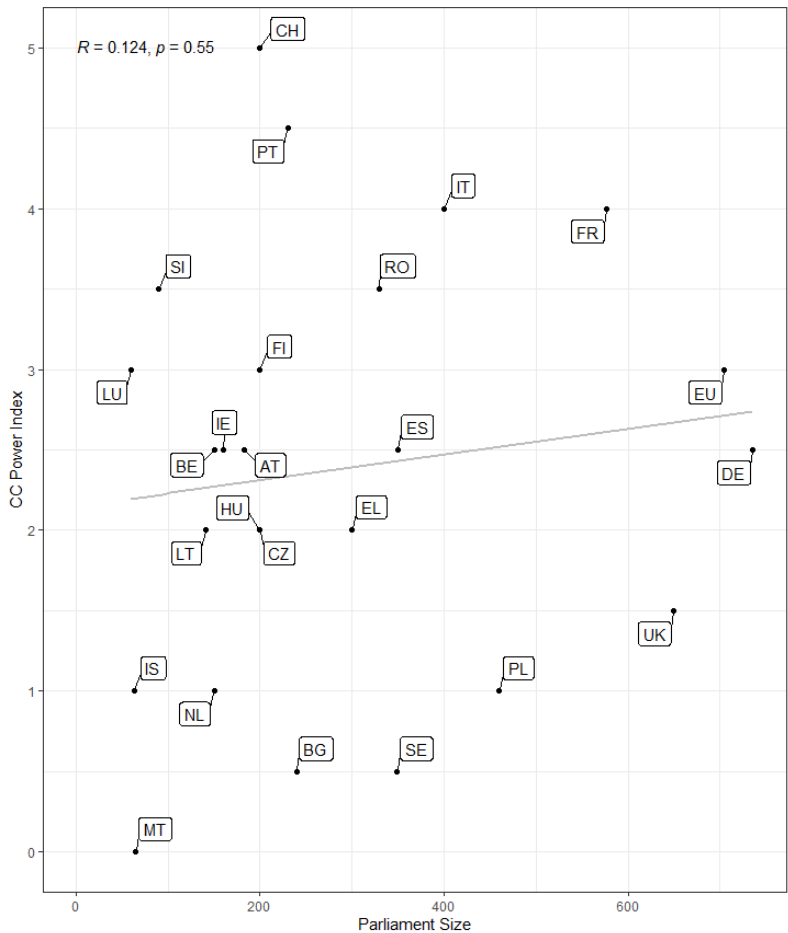
First, the need for a strong coordination body should increase with the size of parliament. Small parliaments might not need a special committee for the coordination of agenda setting but may rely on informal mechanisms (for a similar argument on the relationship between size and institutionalization in the case of the U.S. Senate, see Wawro and Schickler 2006). Thus, they should either have no CC at all or allocate less power to a potentially existing coordination body.

Figure 2 summarizes the relationship between agenda-setting power and parliamentary size in European parliaments. The figure does not include the six countries without CC.<sup>6</sup> As expected, we find a positive correlation, which is however substantively very weak and statistically insignificant. These results provide no evidence that large parliaments have stronger CCs. Instead, we observe substantial variation in the power of CCs for parliaments of similar size, in particular in the case of small chambers.

---

<sup>6</sup> The appendix contains graphs that include the six countries without CCs with a power score of zero. The correlation strengthens but is still not significant.

**Figure 2** CC Power and Parliamentary Size



Second, the need for coordination should depend on the distribution of preferences within it. The more polarized the viewpoints of political parties are, the more conflictual we expect the agenda-setting process to be, thus raising the need for a strong coordinating body. A good measure for preference diversity in parliaments is the polarization index by Dalton (2008).<sup>7</sup> We expect a positive correlation between the polarization of the party system and the power of CCs.

<sup>7</sup> Data is from the ParlGov database (Döring, Huber, and Manow 2022).

**Figure 3** CC Power and Political Polarization

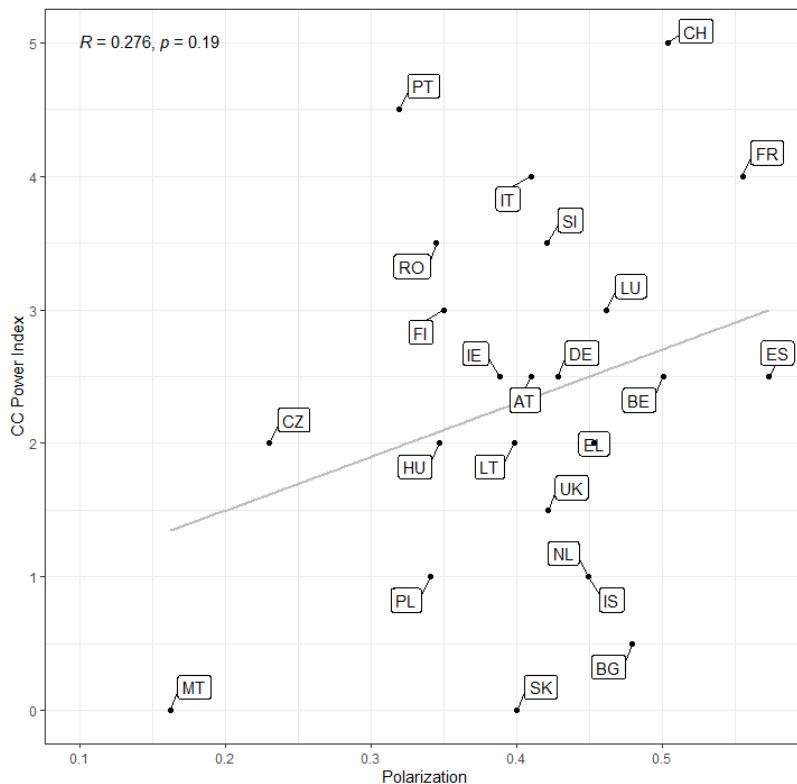


Figure 3 shows a positive relationship between CC power and the polarization of the party system. The effect is statistically insignificant, which may however be due to the small number of cases. The strength of the correlation is still weak but more than twice as high as in the case of parliamentary size. Thus, we find some indication that need for coordination due to partisan conflict is a more important driver for CC power than coordination needs arising from the sheer size of the chamber.

## 5. Conclusions and Outlook

In many parliaments, legislative agenda setting as well as other political coordination tasks are delegated to a Coordination Committee (CC). While these collective parliamentary actors play a crucial role in parliamentary decision-making, their composition, their resources, and their behavior are

severely understudied. This paper shed first light on CCs in 30 European countries (and the European Parliament) by describing their composition and formal agenda-setting power as well as the empirical relationship between their power and more general characteristics of the parliament and the party system.

Our analyses reveal that CCs exist in most European parliaments. They typically consist of the president of the parliament and representatives of the party groups. However, some exceptions also contain the chairs of the standing committees or exclusively the committee chairs or party group representatives. We constructed an index capturing the power these CCs enjoy along different dimensions of agenda setting. Despite relatively similar composition, these bodies enjoy strikingly different amounts of agenda-setting power. Finally, we explored whether differences in CC power can be explained by different needs for parliamentary coordination deriving from characteristics of the parliament. We found limited evidence that CCs are more powerful in larger parliaments and in parliaments with higher degrees of ideological party polarization. However, these effects are substantively rather weak and statistically insignificant (which arguably is also due to the relatively small number of observations). Thus, we conclude that the need for coordination has some influence but the question of what explains the striking variation in CC power remains open.

As this is a first paper on the broad topic of coordination committees as agenda setters, we are quick to acknowledge its limitations. On the data side, we rely on institutional data obtained from formal rules, especially parliamentary standing orders or rules of procedure. Thus, the paper does not capture informal practices that may diverge from or add to formal powers. Collecting data on such practices is a crucial task for future research. Second, our analysis of the relationship between the design of coordination committees and general characteristics of the parliament is merely exploratory and correlational at this point. While we do offer some theoretical argument for why the variables should be related, we leave a thorough explanatory analysis to future work based on more fine-grained measures of CC power that include informal practices.

In terms of the concept of horizontal collective agency developed in this HSR Special Issue, this paper demonstrates that horizontal collective actors exist also in generally hierarchical organizations such as parliaments. In line with general arguments on the role of pooling resources as a means to allow group action in contexts of collective action problems (Coleman 1990), we find that many parliaments delegate the task of setting its agenda and coordinating business in the shadow of a common pool problem to CCs as horizontal collective actors. Our analysis focused on the resources of these bodies showing considerable variation to be explained in further research.

In the current paper we did not address the question whether and to what degree CCs develop autonomy in using these resources. According to the concept of collective agency developed by the Research Unit on the Emergence of Collective Agency (RUECA), horizontal collective actors increase their autonomy to the extent that their collective decisions are more than a mere aggregation of members' preferences, e.g., because they are affected by internal decision rules, precedent, or considerations on the level of the entire group (Gehring and Marx 2023, in this special issue). In the case of CCs, high autonomy implies that the committee's decision on agenda setting are systematically different from the agenda one would observe if it was set by the plenary, i.e., the superior body itself. As majority rule is the standard decision rule in almost all parliaments, the agenda preferences of the parliamentary majority can count as the relevant reference point. Thus, the question is whether agenda setting by a CC leads to more influence of opposition actors that would occur in the plenary.

We can think of two main factors that could bring about such autonomy of CCs: the internal decision rules of the CC and a strong collective identity in the committee that leads members to include collective concerns ("we-intentions" in the terminology of Tuomela 2020) into their decision rationale. Previous research suggests that both of these mechanism may be operative at least to some extent. Parliamentary rules often prescribe super-majoritarian decision rules in CCs or require these committees to search for a consensus (Döring 1995c). Furthermore, qualitative studies suggest that members of parliamentary committees including CCs are socialized into committee-specific norms and informal rules of behavior that put a premium on consensus seeking (e.g., Fenno 1962; Petersen 2000; Schöne 2010; Sturm 1985). However, the strength of these mechanisms and thus the autonomy of coordination committees is an open empirical question that should be assessed systematically in future research.

---

## References

---

- Arrows, Kenneth. 1963. *Social Choice and Individual Values*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bach, Stanley, and Steven S. Smith. 1988. *Managing Uncertainty in the House of Representatives. Adaptation and Innovation in Special Rules*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., Christian Breunig, and Emiliano Grossman, eds. 2019. *Comparative Policy Agendas: Theory, Tools, Data*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 1993. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics. American politics and political economy series*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.



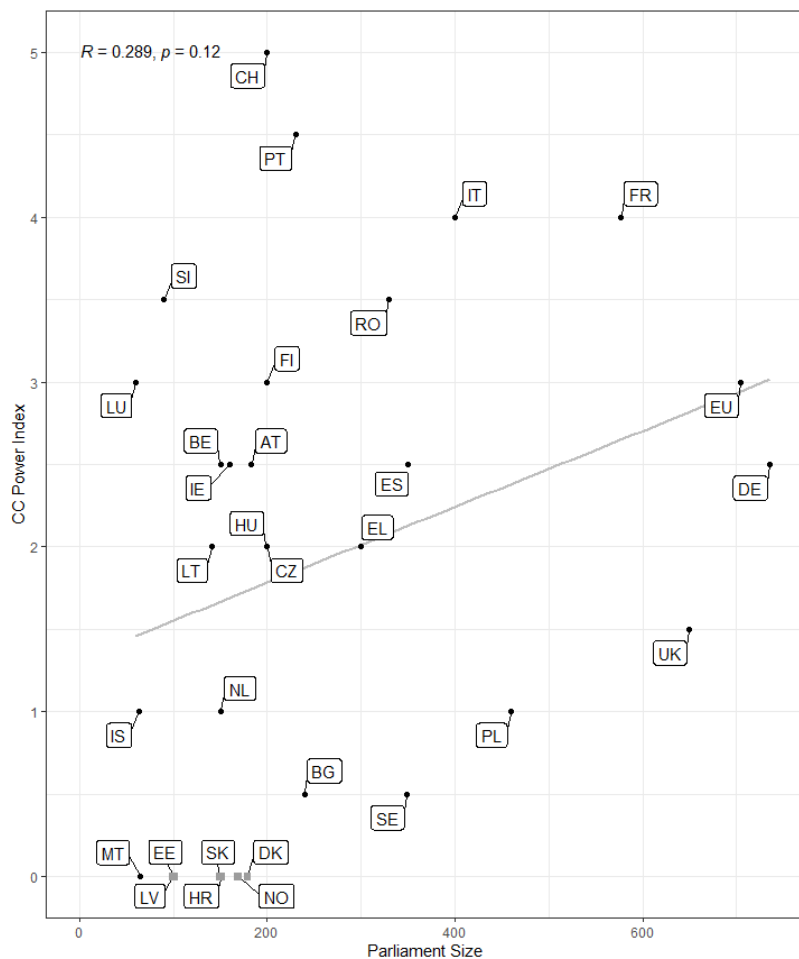
- Coleman, James S. 1990. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Cox, Gary W. 2006. The Organization of Democratic Legislatures. In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, ed. Barry Weingast and Donald Wittman, 141-61. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cox, Gary W., and Mathew D. McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the Agenda. Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cox, Gary W., and Mathew D. McCubbins. 2011. Managing Plenary Time: The U.S. Congress in Comparative Perspective. In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Congress*, ed. Eric Schickler and Frances E. Lee, 451-72. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dalton, Russel. 2008. The Quantity and the Quality of Party Systems. *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (7):899-920.
- Diermeier, Daniel, and Keith Krehbiel. 2003. Institutionalism as a Methodology. *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 15 (2): 123-44.
- Dion, Douglas, and John D. Huber. 1996. Procedural Choice and the House Committee on Rules. *Journal of Politics* 58 (1): 25-53.
- Döring, Herbert. 1995a. Is Government Control of the Agenda Likely to Keep 'Legislative Inflation' at Bay? In *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, ed. Herbert Döring, 654-87. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Döring, Herbert, ed. 1995b. *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Döring, Herbert. 1995c. Time as a Scarce Resource: Government Control of the Agenda. In *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, ed. Herbert Döring, 223-46. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Döring, Herbert. 2001. Parliamentary Agenda Control and Legislative Outcomes in Western Europe. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26 (1): 145-65.
- Döring, Herbert. 2005. Worauf gründet sich die Agenda-Setzer-Macht der Regierung? Theoretische und vergleichende Perspektiven auf den deutschen Fall. In *Mechanismen der Politik. Strategische Interaktion im deutschen Regierungssystem*, ed. Steffen Ganghof and Philip Manow, 109-48. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Döring, Holger, Constantin Huber, and Philip Manow. 2022. "ParlGov 2022 Release." Harvard Dataverse, V1. UNF: 6:YqVhBSeQ5eXs0aujzjdgRA== [fileUNF]. doi: [10.7910/DVN/UKILBE](https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/UKILBE).
- Fenno, Richard F. 1962. The House Appropriations Committee as a Political System: The Problem of Integration. *American Political Science Review* 56 (2): 310-24.
- Foster, David H. 2014. Going 'Where Angels Fear to Tread'. How Effective was the Backbench Business Committee in the 2010-2012 Parliamentary Session? *Parliamentary Affairs* 68 (1): 116-34.
- Franke, Harald. 1987. *Vom Seniorenkonvent des Reichstages zum Ältestenrat des Bundestages*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Gehring, Thomas, and Johannes Marx. 2023. Group Actors. Why Social Science Should Care About Collective Agency. *Historical Social Research* 48 (3): 7-39. doi: [10.12759/hsr.48.2023.23](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.48.2023.23).
- Heller, William B. 2001. Making Policy Stick. Why the Government Gets What It Wants in Multiparty Parliaments. *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (4): 780-98.

- Jenny, Marcelo, and Wolfgang C. Müller. 1995. Presidents of Parliaments. Neutral Chairmen or Assets of the Majority? In *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, ed. Herbert Döring, 326-64. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Loewenberg, Gerhard. 2003. Agenda-Setting in the German Bundestag. Origins and Consequences of Party Dominance. *Journal of Legislative Studies* 9 (3): 17-31.
- Mueller, Dennis C. 2003. *Public Choice III*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Petersen, Sönke. 2000. *Manager des Parlaments. Parlamentarische Geschäftsführer im Deutschen Bundestag - Status, Funktionen, Arbeitsweise*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Proksch, Sven-Oliver, and Jonathan B. Slapin. 2012. Institutional Foundations of Legislative Speech. *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (3): 520-37.
- Rasch, Bjorn E. 2014. Institutional Foundations of Legislative Agenda Setting. In *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*, ed. Shane Martin, Thomas Saalfeld, and Kaare W. Strøm, 455-80. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rasch, Bjorn E., and George Tsebelis, eds. 2011. *The Role of Governments in Legislative Agenda Setting*. London: Routledge.
- Riker, William H. 1982. *Liberalism Against Populism. A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*. San Francisco, CA: Freeman.
- Russell, Meg. 2011. 'Never Allow a Crisis Go To Waste'. The Wright Committee Reforms to Strengthen the House of Commons. *Parliamentary Affairs* 64 (4): 612-33.
- Scharpf, Fritz W. 1997. *Games Real Actors Play. Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research. Theoretical lenses on public policy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Schöler, Helmar. 2010. *Alltag im Parlament. Parlamentskultur in Theorie und Empirie*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A. 2006. Old Questions and New Answers about Institutions. The Riker Objection Revisited. In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, ed. Barry Weingast and Donald Wittman, 1031-49. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sieberer, Ulrich. 2006. Agenda Setting in the German Bundestag. A Weak Government in a Consensus Democracy. *German Politics* 15 (1): 49-72.
- Sieberer, Ulrich, Julia F. Dutkowsky, Peter Meißner, and Wolfgang C. Müller. 2020. 'Going institutional' to overcome obstruction: Explaining the suppression of minority rights in Western European parliaments, 1945-2010. *European Journal of Political Research* 59 (4): 886-909.
- Sieberer, Ulrich, Peter Meißner, Julia F. Keh, and Wolfgang C. Müller. 2016. Mapping and Explaining Parliamentary Rule Changes in Europe: A Research Program. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41 (1): 61-88.
- Sturm, Roland. 1985. Entscheidungsstrukturen und Entscheidungsprozesse in der Haushaltspolitik. Zum Selbstverständnis des Haushaltsausschusses des Deutschen Bundestages. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 26 (3): 247-69.
- Tsebelis, George. 1990. *Nested Games. Rational Choice in Comparative Politics*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Tsebelis, George. 2002. *Veto Players. How Political Institutions Work*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Tuomela, Raimo. 2020. Actions by Collectives. In *Social Ontology in the Making*, ed. Pekka Mäkelä, Raul Hakli, and Raimo Tuomela, 89-112. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- Wawro, Gregory J., and Eric Schickler. 2006. *Filibuster. Obstruction and Lawmaking in the U.S. Senate*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Widder, Helmut. 1972. Die Präsidialkonferenz des Nationalrats. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 1 (1): 105-28.

## Appendix

**Figure A1** CC Power and Parliamentary Size (Including Parliaments without CCs)



**Figure A2** CC Power and Polarization (Including Parliaments without CCs)

