



HAL
open science

Connecting Government Announcements and Public Policy

Christian Breunig, Emiliano Grossman, Tinette Schnatterer

► **To cite this version:**

Christian Breunig, Emiliano Grossman, Tinette Schnatterer. Connecting Government Announcements and Public Policy. Frank Baumgartner; Christian Breunig; Emiliano Grossman (eds.). Comparative Policy Agendas: Theory, Tolls and Data, Oxford University Press, pp.300-316, 2019, 9780198835332. <10.1093/oso/9780198835332.003.0030>. <hal-02381046>

HAL Id: hal-02381046

<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-02381046v1>

Submitted on 19 Jan 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 - Attribution - Non-commercial use - No Derivative Works - International License

Connecting Government Announcements and Public Policy

Christian Breunig, Emiliano Grossman, and Tinette Schnatterer

Governments regularly make announcements; important public speeches punctuate political life. The American State of the Union or the British Queen's Speech are moments that draw wide political attention as they outline the policy programs for months and, sometimes, years to come. In most advanced democracies, these speeches set policy goals and fix priorities on the government agenda. A close link between government announcements and legislative capacity of governments is often assumed (Breeman et al., 2009; John and Jennings, 2010; Mortensen et al., 2011) and a few studies have already looked into this link for individual countries (Chaqués-Bonafont, Palau, and Baumgartner, 2015; Lovett, Bevan, and Baumgartner, 2015). A comprehensive cross-national study on the way policy announcements are translated into policy output is, however, still missing.

The present chapter provides a systematic study on the link between governments' announcements in speeches and their actual legislative behavior. Drawing on a growing literature on the link between electoral pledges, made by parties in their election programs, and actual policy outcome, we extend the debate on the "program to policy link" to "the announcement to policy link." In this chapter we consider speeches as work programs presented by governments and investigate how these work programs are transformed into political action. The focus of this study therefore is pledge fulfillment of governing parties in-between elections.

We also examine a number of alternative mechanisms for law production based on the literature on institutional effects on legislative activity (Carey, 2008; Martin and Vanberg, 2011). We consider governments' majority status, the disproportionality of the electoral system, and the proximity to the next election. Based on the recent experience in many European countries that

shows that an unfavorable economic context can depress the influence of other variables, we pay special attention to the potential influence of the economic context on the legislative output. Testing systematically for the influence of other, institutional, political, and economic factors that could possibly influence the legislative capacity of parliaments, the present chapter contributes to a better understanding of law-making activities and connects works on legislative politics with studies of public policy. Adopting a longitudinal and cross-national research design, we are able to identify if common or diverging patterns across countries exist. The chapter brings together data on legislative outputs and government speeches coded thematically according to the Comparative Agendas Project for eight countries over the last twenty years. This dataset enables us to study government's policy commitments by analyzing how much they prioritize particular policy fields.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 30.1 broadens the literature on pledge fulfillment by including government speeches. Section 30.2 puts forward a series of alternative explanations to account for legislative capacity. Section 30.3 describe the data and highlights differences—in terms of productivity and prioritization—in legislative capacity across the eight countries. The results of a series of preliminary multivariate analyses show that introducing a political topic during a government speech substantively impacts the number of laws voted in this policy domain. We close by offering venues for future research that highlight the close link between literatures on pledge fulfillment, legislative politics, and public policy.

30.1 Expanding the “Program to Policy Link”

Electoral pledges made by parties in their election programs can be linked to actual policy outcomes or effective outputs (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge, 1994; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Mortensen et al., 2011; Naurin, 2011; Royed, 1996; Thomson et al., 2012). Hofferbert and Budge (1992) show for instance that party platforms are correlated with spending priorities, irrespective of diverging political structures, even in countries with supposedly weak parties such as the United States. Different studies for individual countries come to similar conclusions. Analyzing eighteen articles on election promise fulfillment in North America and European countries Francois Pétry and Benoît Collette come up with an average fulfillment rate of electoral pledges of 63 percent. These findings suggest that the “program to policy link” (Thomson, 2001) works, and that examining actual policy output is important. At the same time, this proposition contradicts other studies showing that policy responsibility based on government power is much more

important for governments' issue agendas than their partisan composition (Mortensen et al., 2011).

As the general assumption underlying most democratic theory is that voters will give a mandate to their representatives to implement a given policy program, studying the extent to which these pledges are congruent with subsequent government policy is intrinsically important. When it comes to predicting legislative capacity, however we argue that political intentions, as expressed in party manifestos, may not necessarily be the appropriate outlet for making pledges. Changes in the economic situation, social movements, or interest-group activity are all factors that can have an impact on the capacity of governments to fulfill their promises while others, such as external events and intra-party competition can create new incentives to change priorities in between elections. Naurin (2011) considers therefore that the apparent discrepancy between the high degree of pledge fulfillment observed in many studies and the widespread image of unreliable politicians can be explained by the absence of studies on non-electoral promises. Based on this observation, some studies have recently extended research on pledge fulfillment on the way coalition agreements in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy are translated into policies (Calvo, 2014; Timmermans, 2006) as well as on the factors that determine whether legislative pledges made by Polish governments actually become laws (Zubek and Klüver, 2015). While the latter approach has the advantage of covering the whole legislative period, what these studies have in common is that they focus exclusively on coalition governments.

We argue that government speeches are an appropriate tool for assessing what governments plan to actually do because they signal the government's initial intention and incorporate necessary adjustment of promises once they are in power. Government speeches are obviously exercises in political communication. Voters are likely to hold the executive accountable for their work program. As a regular—typically yearly—exercise, speeches have to achieve the difficult exercise of tackling problems, as they emerge, and convincing the electorate that they are in line with the wider government program (Mortensen et al., 2011). That means that speeches can potentially reflect the political color of the government, but in speeches government may also anticipate or respond to voters' demands or may simply respond to problems as they emerge. Given the flexibility of adjustment, speech-making is thus an exercise in reconciling electoral pledges (situated further back in the chain of events and occurring only once in every election cycle) with a changing political and economic reality.

Most Western democracies feature some kind of yearly general policy speech by the head of government. These speeches usually outline the policy goals for the upcoming year or parliamentary session. They therefore are considered to be highly visible and important signals of government

priorities, an “annual snapshot of executive priorities” and are supposed to reflect the “commitment to specific legislative proposals” (Jennings, Bevan, and John, 2011). Systematic research on these executive policy agendas however remains “surprisingly limited” (Mortensen et al., 2011: 973) and very few studies on government speeches have taken a comparative perspective (Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008).

We contend that emphasis on particular policy domains in government declarations is translated into a higher legislative capacity in this policy domain. Because of the limited amount of legislative time available, governments have to prioritize their agenda for the forthcoming session of parliament (John and Jennings, 2010). Via government speeches the governments communicate their general priorities and the specific measures that the executive intends to address in the coming year. Hence our policy announcement hypothesis states that more emphasis in speeches leads to more legislative activity in the mentioned policy domain.

30.2 Institutional Features and the “Program to Policy Link”

Government’s capacity to keep its announcements does not depend on its goodwill only. Rather, the implementation of the stated promises depends on a number of facilitating or hindering factors that influence law production in particular policy domains. In order to determine which type of explanation is most convincing, we take a mainly exploratory approach to those questions. The first alternative explanation concerns the government status. Among the different types of government, the following order can be derived from the literature (Müller and Strom, 2003; Strom, 1990) that explores coalition politics and assignment of government responsibility. Generally speaking, we expect a single-party majority government to have the strongest capacity and incentive to implement its goals. Single-party governments face no or little opposition to legislate their preferences. Moreover, blame-shifting is more difficult under these circumstances, as the power is more concentrated in the hands of the head of government (Lijphart, 1999; Powell and Whitten, 1993). This also means that politicians should anticipate a stronger electoral sanction if they do not make good on promises (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010), which, in turn, should create a strong incentive in favor of sticking to the content of yearly announcements. For other types of governments, the danger of intra-coalitional struggles should on average lead to less legislative capacity in particular domains.

Minimum-winning coalitions, where the main party has enough leverage to impose major agreements, have to find compromise within the governing coalition in order to pass legislation. We accept that in most cases these

compromises have been made before governments promote their agenda in a speech. Single-party minority governments, under certain circumstances, are relatively efficient, as seminal work by Strøm (1990) shows. Surplus governments are more complicated. The legislative success of surplus governments is conditional on how a coalition comes together, the potential antagonism between coalition members, and the pivotal character of the party holding the post of prime minister. Taken together, we have the following expectation: single-party majority governments should have the greatest incentive and capacity to legislate in particular policy domains.

There is a large body of literature suggesting that the more fragmented a political system is, the less effective the government is likely to be (Calvo, 2014; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Tsebelis, 2002). Electoral systems are assumed to have a strong influence on the capacity of governments to produce working majorities in the legislature (Lizzeri and Persico, 2001; Reynolds et al., 2005). Since Duverger's work, it is generally assumed that proportional electoral systems lead to more fragmented party systems and therefore less effective government (Duverger, 1954). In line with this literature, we expect majoritarian electoral systems to result in a lower number of parties. This low level of fragmentation leads to a higher capacity to legislate in particular policy domains. In short, the more majoritarian an electoral system, the higher the capacity to legislate in particular policy domains.

Along with these institutional factors, the electoral calendar might affect the capacity to legislate in particular policy domains. Politicians seek to manipulate government activities in order to increase their chances of re-election (Blais and Nadeau, 1992). While existing studies mainly focus on the impact of the electoral cycle on the manipulation of the business cycles (Franzese, 2002; Nordhaus, 1975; Rogoff and Sibert, 1988), we assume that as elections come closer, the incentive to legislate increases as well. The benefits (and costs) of (not) making good on promises significantly increase as elections approach. Governing parties therefore strengthen their effort to carry out their program under these circumstances but also try to tackle ongoing legislative initiatives before the end of the legislative period. Therefore we expect that, compared to the rest of the legislative period, incentives to legislate in particular policy domains increase in the pre-electoral periods.

30.3 Data and Methodology

Several measures of government attention, legislative outputs, and institutional features need to be assembled in order to examine how government speeches and political institutions shape policy agendas. For key measures, we rely on the large database of the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP).

In particular, we were able to assemble two series of policy agendas—government speeches and legislation—from eight countries—Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States—for the period between 1983 and 2004. All agendas data were coded according to the CAP project Master Codebook. We achieved a cross-country and cross-topic amalgamation of the data by generating a new major topic called “national unity,” by placing all immigration-related codes into the major topic civil rights and liberties, and by pooling all major topic areas into seven macro topic areas (see also Bertelli and John, 2013). These seven topic areas are summarized in Table 30.1. All categories are mutually exclusive and complete.

We constructed the policy agendas variables in the following way. For speeches, we computed the proportion of all quasi-sentences for each macro area per quarter. We carried these proportions over to the following quarters until a new speech is delivered. For laws, we counted all passed legislation per macro topic for each quarter. The quarterly legislative output per topic is our measure of legislative capacity. In order to grasp this measure better, we present two visual aids. Figure 30.1a displays how many laws were passed in each macro topic area for each country. Between 1983 and 2004, nearly

Table 30.1. Generating the policy agendas macro categories

Macro category ^a	Policy Agendas categories
Economy	Banking and commerce Labor and employment Macroeconomy
Infrastructure	Energy Public lands Science and technology Transportation
Welfare	Culture Education Healthcare Housing Social welfare
Foreign policy	Defense Foreign trade International relations
Law	Civil rights and liberties Law, crime, and family issues
Environment	Agriculture Environment
Government	Government operations National unity State and local issues

Note: ^a Issues on the left are comprised of the issues on the right.

Source: Comparative Agendas Project codebook

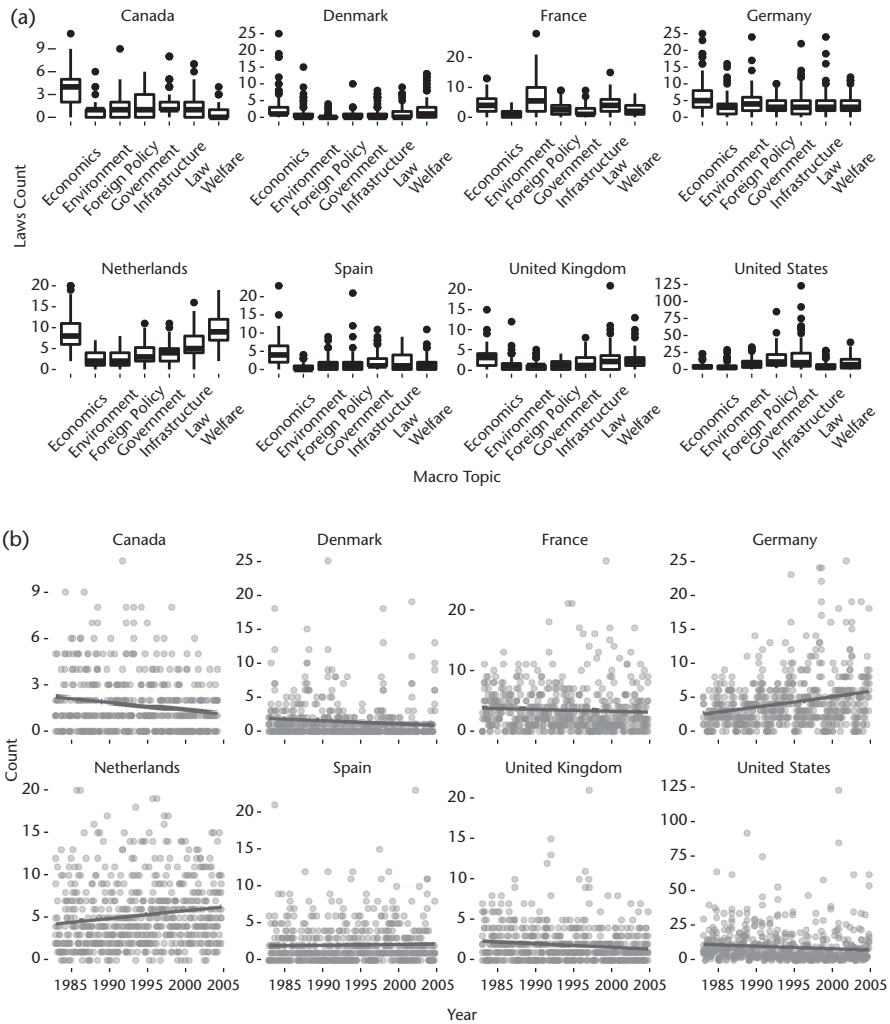


Figure 30.1. Legislative activities across countries

Notes: The boxplot (30.1a) displays the number of laws per topic in each country and quarter. The scatterplot (30.1b) displays the number of laws per quarter on each issue. The black line is the trend as a polynomial regression fit.

Source: Comparative Agendas Project

18,000 laws were passed in the eight countries. This ranged from 792 in Denmark to 5,974 in the United States with Spain and France being closest to the average. Among the countries studied here, 1,298 laws were passed in the topic area “environment,” while the most prominent area was “economics” with 3,380 laws. Figure 30.1 nicely illustrates that there is some variation in the different topic areas per country. For example, the areas “government”

and “infrastructure” are more heavily legislated in the United States than in most other countries. Likewise, France is quite active in foreign policy and Canada on economic issues. In fact, a χ^2 -test on the underlying contingency table indicates that statistically significant differences among topic counts exist across countries.

For comparison, Figure 30.1b plots the legislative activity for each country per quarter. The dots represent the number of laws passed for each macro topic area per quarter and the black line is the polynomial regression fit. The line suggests that legislative activity slightly increased over time in the Netherlands and Germany and slightly decreased in Canada and the United States. With the exception of the United States, lawmakers pass on average less than five laws in a particular topic area per quarter. The large dispersion of the data points for some countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain also shows that some countries are more prone to punctuation than others. For example, we can't easily find some positive outliers in quarterly topic counts in the Netherlands. Taken together, both plots suggest that quarterly topic-count data displays substantial variation across topics, countries, and time, confirming earlier observations made by Brouard et al. (2009).

We rely on a variety of secondary sources for our remaining covariates. We concentrate on two measures of institutions. First, at the electoral level, we used Gallagher's disproportionality index (Gallagher, 1991). Second, we capture government type using a fivefold classification: (1) single-party majority government, (2) minimal winning coalition, (3) surplus coalition, (4) single-party minority government, and (5) multiparty minority government. Note that the US presidential system is classified as single-party majority. We constructed a binary measure for campaign periods using an indicator for the quarter preceding the election. Arguments based on distinct spending patterns of governments (Blais, Blake, and Dion, 1993; Cameron, 1978) connect constituency preferences and electoral promises with government spending based on ideology. It is more difficult to develop an argument about why partisanship relates to legislative capacity. One line of reasoning would be that Leftists parties are more prone to rely on government for addressing market failures and other societal needs. We measure government ideology on a -100 to 100 scale and calculated as the weighted average of the number of seats of each party and their CMP-based left-right dimension score. The data and method are from Cusack and Engelhardt (2002). Finally, the misery index combines information on inflation and the unemployment rate (from the OECD). Based on the recent experience in many European countries we expect an unfavorable economic context to depress the influence of other variables. Put differently, in a context of economic recession, the economy will draw a lot more attention and put an end to “politics as normal.” The basic descriptive statistics are listed in Table 30.2. We removed thirty legislative

Table 30.2. Descriptive statistics, N = 4718

Statistic	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Laws	3.79	5.98	0	123
Government speech	0.13	0.12	0.00	1.00
Government ideology	6.37	16.67	-28.44	35.84
Government type	2.16	1.39	1	5
Campaign	0.22	0.42	0	1
Disproportionality	7.91	7.18	0.37	24.61
Misery	11.64	4.96	5.10	32.00

Source: Comparative Agendas Project

quarters because of legislative inactivity during that time. The resulting sample is a balanced panel with 4,718 observations and no missing values.

Our estimation strategy has to account for two important issues. First, the dependent variable is count data with a large amount of zero values. Second, the data structure is nested. The dependent variable measures the number of laws passed for a particular macro topic in a given country and quarter. Likewise, some of the covariates are hierarchically structured. In order to account for both issues,¹ we rely on a zero-inflated negative binomial estimation (Agresti, 2013; Zuur, 2009). A Vuong test indicated that a zero-inflated negative binomial is superior to other modeling alternatives.

The estimation contains a two-part mixture model that accounts for the zeros from the point mass as well as from the count component. For our models, both parts contain all covariates. While we test several model specifications below, the full model can be described as: $y = Xb + Zg + e$ where y are the quarterly count of passed laws in a topic area, X is the matrix of the following covariates—speeches, government ideology, campaign, disproportionality, government type, misery, and Z is the design matrix for the fixed effects for topic, country.

30.4 Results and Discussion

We estimated a zero-inflated negative binomial model predicting quarterly count of laws per topic from the introduced covariates. Table 30.3 presents the results from three models in order to ascertain the robustness of our findings. The table illustrates that the estimated effects are stable across model specifications. Given this stability, our interpretation concentrates on the full model (Model 3) and within that model on the component that estimates the counts of legislative activity.

The core theoretical expectation of this chapter is that policy proposals introduced by governments in their annual speeches are translated into

Connecting Government Announcements and Public Policy

Table 30.3. Regression results from a zero-inflated negative binomial

Count component	Model		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Government speech	6.99*** (.16)	0.31* (0.17)	0.30* (0.16)
Government ideology			0.01*** (0.001)
Single-party majority government			0.03 (0.13)
Minimal winning coalition			-0.05 (0.22)
Surplus coalition			0.08 (0.20)
Single-party minority government			0.22 (0.15)
Multiparty minority government			0.11 (0.21)
Campaign			0.54*** (0.04)
Disproportionality			0.03*** (0.01)
Misery			0.02*** (0.01)
Economy		0.85*** (0.07)	
Environment		0.17** (0.07)	1.04*** (0.06)
Foreign policy		0.39*** (0.09)	-0.46*** (0.06)
Government		0.41*** (0.07)	-0.43*** (0.06)
Infrastructure		0.53*** (0.07)	-0.33*** (0.06)
Law		0.46*** (0.07)	-0.39*** (0.06)
Welfare		0.49*** (0.07)	-0.36*** (0.05)
DE		0.94*** (0.07)	1.39*** (0.20)
DK		0.31*** (0.09)	0.49** (0.20)
ES		0.22*** (0.07)	0.24** (0.11)
FR		0.74*** (0.07)	0.75*** (0.13)
NL		1.14*** (0.07)	1.74*** (0.21)
UK		0.20*** (0.07)	0.09 (0.08)
US		1.81*** (0.07)	1.91*** (0.10)
N	4,718	4,718	4,718
Log likelihood	-12,724.84	-10,509.97	-10,352.12

(continued)

Table 30.3. Continued

Zero component	Model		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Government speech	-1,328.47*** (413.61)	-0.55 (2.46)	-0.20 (2.43)
Government ideology			-0.001 (0.01)
Single-party majority government			-13.99
Minimal winning coalition			-9.68 (1,146.26)
Surplus coalition			-9.50 (996.87)
Single-party minority government			-10.23
Multiparty minority government			-11.11 (1,146.26)
Campaign			-0.53 (0.35)
Disproportionality			0.07 (0.16)
Misery			-0.11 (0.07)
Economy		-9.49** (4.80)	
Environment		-6.10* (3.37)	7.93
Foreign policy		-3.38 (3.58)	10.65
Government		-5.84* (3.43)	8.16
Infrastructure		-5.73* (3.35)	8.30
Law		-6.16* (3.39)	7.79
Welfare		-6.71* (3.46)	7.19
DE		-8.26 (51.47)	-12.40 (1,149.57)
DK		5.67* (3.33)	3.74 (1,147.01)
ES		0.39 (3.63)	-0.20 (2.13)
FR		-8.62 (65.38)	-16.20 (915.66)
NL		-9.56 (109.97)	-18.49 (2,243.11)
UK		2.47 (3.26)	2.52 (4.13)
US		-5.87 (34.77)	-8.44 (114.83)
N	4,718	4,718	4,718
Log likelihood	-12,724.84	-10,509.97	-10,352.12

Note: * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01.

Source: Comparative Agendas Project

legislative action. Our estimation suggests that we can't reject the policy announcement hypothesis, i.e., the estimated effect is statistically different from zero *ceteris paribus*. The estimates indicate that as the proportion of a particular topic in a government speech increases, legislative activity on that topic increases too. The estimated effect on the log count of laws is about 0.30. Given this finding, we are able to offer some empirical evidence that directly links governments' annual promises with their action. A simple representational linkage therefore seems intact.

In order to gauge the predicted size of these effects, Figure 30.2 plots the range of speech shares on a topic with the predicted number of laws on a topic using the estimates from model 3. In order to make this prediction we hold all continuous variables at their mean and use economic issues in Germany by a minimum winning coalition government as typical values for the three nominal variables. The figure suggests that even when government does not discuss a topic during a speech, it is likely that, on average, seven laws on that topic are passed. On the other hand, if an executive leader just speaks on one topic (i.e., speech share = 1.0), the model predicts that over nine laws are passed on that topic. Our estimates indicate that substantive differences exist, especially when we recall that lawmakers pass on average about five laws per topic in a quarter in our sample. The substantive impact of executive speeches is even more remarkable if we compare it to the estimated effect of economic downturns. Our estimates indicate that even in the worst economic situations lawmakers just pass eighteen laws on a topic.

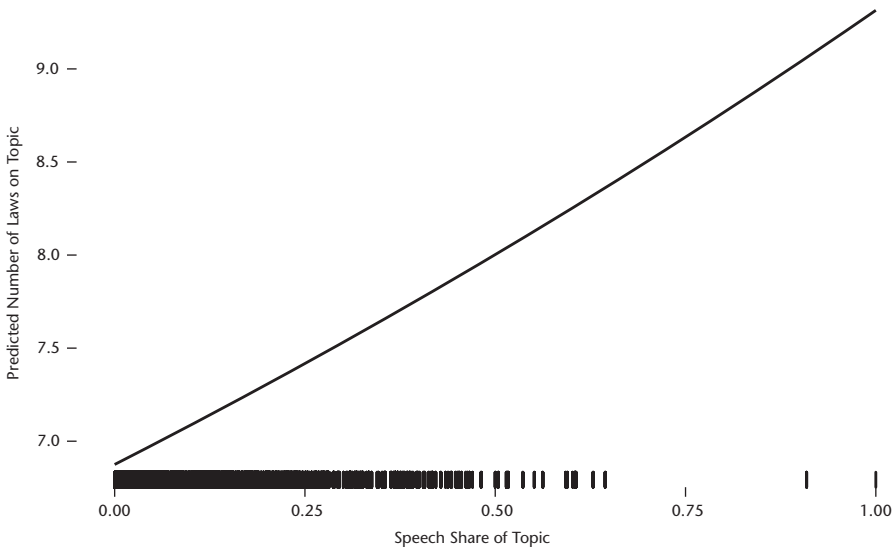


Figure 30.2. Predicted number of laws on a topic (full-count model)

Source: Comparative Agendas Project

In addition to government speeches, the theoretical section put forward that two sets of institutions—government type and the electoral disproportionality—influence the content of policy agendas. We proposed that more centralized power would lead to more legislative activity. In particular, out of the institutionalist literature emerged the notion that single-party governments should pass more legislation than minority and/or coalition governments. However, our estimation suggests that government type has no statistically significant relationship with law counts once we include country and topic fixed effects. We also considered the influence of the electoral system and argued that electoral systems that lead to more fragmented governing stymies legislative activity. Our estimates are inconclusive here. In both models, the estimates are statistically significant, but the sign of the coefficient changes once we include country and topic fixed effects. In Model 3, the expected change in the $\log(\text{count})$ for a one-unit increase in disproportionality is 0.03. This estimation suggests that more disproportional electoral systems produce more laws, which runs counter to our proposed hypothesis.

For the remaining hypotheses, the following results stand out. First, conservative governments are more active in passing laws than left governments. This estimate is statistically significant but relatively small in size. Again, this estimate is contrary to our expectation. It remains challenging to develop an argument why the ideological composition of government *per se* should affect legislative activity. Second, the electoral cycle hypothesis cannot be rejected. Governments pass more legislation in pre-election times. In the last three months before an election the expected $\log(\text{count})$ is 0.54 higher than at other moments of the legislative period. This might be the case because they want to push through remaining issues on their legislative agenda or showcase their ability to govern when campaign season starts. Third, for the misery index—i.e., the combination of unemployment rate and inflation—we also find a positive and statistically significant effect. When the economy is in trouble, government passes more legislation across different topics in order to deal with apparent and electorally salient real world problems.

The “fixed effects” also merit some attention. With regard to policy area, our descriptive assessment is confirmed. Across the eight countries, in comparison to economic topics, the estimated $\log(\text{counts})$ are lowest for environmental and foreign policy topics. Infrastructure issues come closest to economic topics in terms of expected counts. Finally, compared to the reference category of Canada, all other countries are estimated to legislate a higher number of laws in particular policy domains. The estimated effects confirm the conventional wisdom that the United States legislates more than most other democracies. The United Kingdom and Canada are estimated to produce less topic-specific legislation. These estimates go well with the arguments put forward in Baumgartner et al. (2009), which suggest that some countries are

more likely to engage with policy problems more incrementally than others. Overall, the statistically significant effects of the topic and country dummies suggest that legislative production depends to a substantial part on issue area and national peculiarities that are not captured in our model so far echoing the work of Matt Grossmann (2013) on issue-area differences in policymaking in the United States.

Finally, we offer some sense of how substantive the estimates effects for each covariate is vis-à-vis each other. Figure 30.3 displays the changes in predicted counts based on Model 3. For continuous variables, we use the minimum and maximum value for predictions and for nominal variables, we display the factor with the smallest and largest prediction. For speeches, the first difference is close to five; when there is no speech on a topic, on average, eight laws are passed, but when a speech is on a single topic nearly thirteen laws are passed on that issue. The change in the number of predicted laws on a topic increases from about seven for an extreme left to an predicted number of eleven laws for an extreme right government. The figure also shows that government passed more laws in times of economic turmoil (circa 15 vs 8 in the best times). Similar predicted counts are obtained for disproportionality. Government type did not produce statistically different estimates and the substantive difference between the least and most active government type is also fairly small. Finally, topic and country effects are huge, highlighting again that legislative activity varies substantively by issues area and institutional differences, beyond government type and electoral system.

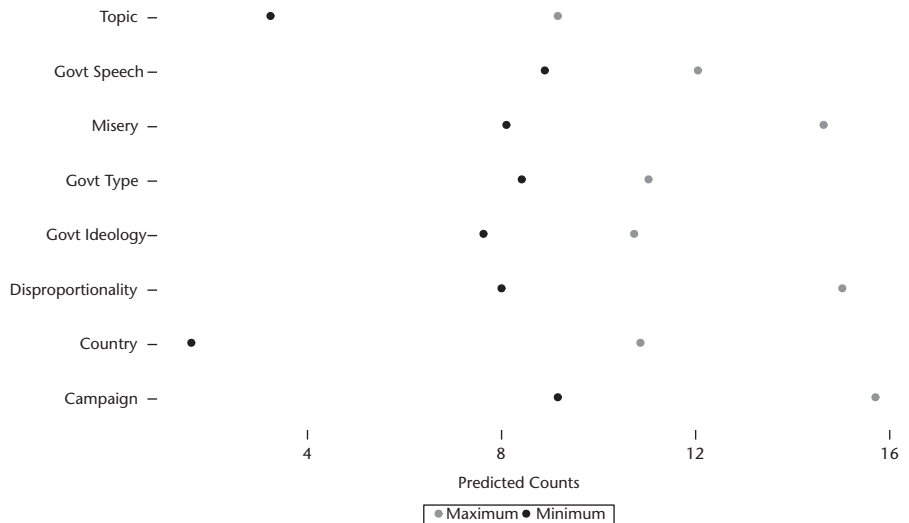


Figure 30.3. Predicted number of laws on a topic (mean values)

Source: Comparative Agendas Project

30.5 Conclusion

The exploratory analysis in this chapter delivered some important insights and opened new perspectives for the research on the pledge–policy outcome link. We extended previous work in comparative politics on the linkage between party programs and government action. In contrast to previous work, we argued that government speeches provide a tighter and more appropriate link between government promises and their legislative capacities because government speeches occur in short time periods and thereby enable government to readjust their work program given the multiple of political, social, and economic changes. Our regression results highlight that introducing a political topic during a government speech substantively impacts the number of laws voted in this policy domain. Government announcements on economic issues even turned out to have a stronger influence on the number of economic laws than the effect of the actual economic situation of the country. Our longitudinal and cross-national approach thereby clearly illustrated that government speeches are a useful precursor for legislative capacity. As the work of the executive is not limited to law-making activities, further research should extend these analyses to other types of government activities such as the conclusion of treaties, decrees, troop deployment, budgetary measures, and so on.

The chapter raises additional questions for future research. In particular, it would be interesting to compare party manifestos of governing parties and government speeches in order to identify the differences and overlaps. While the identification of individual pledges was beyond the scope of this chapter, tracking pledges through the policy process could provide important insights into the dynamics of pledge fulfillment. Another promising research direction could consist in looking into the interaction of the announcement effect of speeches and political, institutional, and economic control variables in order to identify factors that determine whether an announcement is realized or not. In all of these endeavors, data generated by the Comparative Agendas Project should provide a fertile ground.

Note

1. Another way to model the complexities of the data-generating process would be using a zero-inflated generalized linear mixed model for count data (ZIGLMMs) or a fully Bayesian strategy.

References

- Agresti, A. (2013). *Categorical Data Analysis*. 3rd ed. Hoboken: Wiley & Sons.
- Baumgartner, F. R. et al. (2009). Punctuated Equilibrium in Comparative Perspective. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(3): 603–20.
- Bertelli, A. M., and John, P. (2013). Public Policy Investment: Risk and Return in British Politics. *British Journal of Political Science*, 43(4): 741–73.
- Blais, A., Blake, D., and Dion, S. 1993. Do Parties Make a Difference? Parties and the Size of Government in Liberal Democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(1): 40–62.
- Blais, A., and Nadeau, R. (1992). The Electoral Budget Cycle. *Public Choice*, 74(4): 389–403.
- Breeman, G. et al. (2009). Political Attention in a Coalition System: Analyzing Queen's Speeches in the Netherlands 1945–2007. *Acta Politica*, 44(1): 1–27.
- Brouard, S. et al. (2009). Comparer les productions législatives : enjeux et méthodes. *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 16(3): 381–404.
- Calvo, E. (2014). *Legislator Success in Fragmented Congresses in Argentina: Plurality Cartels, Minority Presidents, and Lawmaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cameron, D. R. (1978). The Expansion of the Public Economy: A Comparative Analysis. *American Political Science Review*, 72(04): 1243–61.
- Carey, J. M. (2008). *Legislative Voting and Accountability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chaqués-Bonafont, L., Palau, A. M., and Baumgartner, F. R. (2015). *Agenda Dynamics in Spain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cusack, T. R., and Engelhardt, L. (2002). The PGL File Collection: File Structures and Procedures. *Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung*. Working paper. https://www.wzb.eu/www2000/bal/usi/leute/cusack/pdf/pgl_structures_and_procederes_ce.pdf.
- Duverger, M. (1954). *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. London: Methuen.
- Franzese, R. (2002). Electoral and Partisan Cycles in Economic Policies and Outcomes. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 5: 369–421.
- Gallagher, M. (1991). Proportionality, Disproportionality and Electoral Systems. *Electoral Studies*, 10(1): 33–51.
- Grossmann, M. 2013. The Variable Politics of the Policy Process: Issue-Area Differences and Comparative Networks. *The Journal of Politics*, 75(1): 65–79.
- Hobolt, S. B., and Klemmensen, R. (2008). Government Responsiveness and Political Competition in Comparative Perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(3): 309–37.
- Hofferbert, R. I., and Budge, I. (1992). The Party Mandate and the Westminster Model: Election Programmes and Government Spending in Britain, 1948–85. *British Journal of Political Science*, 22(2): 151–82.
- Jennings, W., Bevan, S., and John, P. (2011). The Agenda of British Government: The Speech from the Throne, 1911–2008. *Political Studies*, 59: 74–98.
- John, P., and Jennings, W. (2010). Punctuations and Turning Points in British Politics? The Policy Agenda of the Queen's Speech, 1940–2005. *British Journal of Political Science*, 40(3): 561–86.

- Klingemann, H.-D. et al. (1994). *Parties, Policy and Democracy*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Lijphart, A. (1999). *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lizzeri, A., and Persico, N. (2001). Provision of Public Projects under Alternative Electoral Incentives. *American Economic Review*, 91: 225–39.
- Lovett, J., Bevan, S., and Baumgartner, F. R. (2015). Popular Presidents Can Affect Congressional Attention, for a Little While. *Policy Studies Journal*, 43(1): 22–43.
- Mansergh, L., and Thomson, R. (2007). Election Pledges, Party Competition and Policymaking. *Comparative Politics*, 39(3): 311–29.
- Martin, L., and Vanberg, G. (2011). *Parliaments and Coalitions: The Role of Legislative Institutions in Multiparty Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mortensen, P. B. et al. (2011). Comparing Government Agendas Executive Speeches in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, and Denmark. *Comparative Political Studies*, 44(8): 973–1000.
- Müller, W. C., and Strom, K. (2003). *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Naurin, E. (2011). *Election Promises, Party Behaviour and Voter Perceptions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nordhaus, W. D. (1975). The Political Business Cycle. *Review of Economic Studies*, 42(2): 169–90.
- Powell, Jr., Bingham, G., and Whitten, G. D. (1993). A Cross-National Analysis of Economic Voting: Taking Account of the Political Context. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(2): 391–414.
- Reynolds, A., Reilly, B., and Andrew, E. (2005). *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook*. Stockholm: International IDEA.
- Rogoff, K., and Sibert, A. (1988). Elections and Macroeconomic Policy Cycles. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 55(1): 1–16.
- Royed, T. (1996). Testing the Mandate Model in Britain and the United States: Evidence from the Reagan and Thatcher Eras. *British Journal of Political Science*, 26: 45–80.
- Soroka, S., and Wlezien, C. (2010). *Degrees of Democracy : Politics, Public Opinion, and Policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Strom, K. (1990). *Minority Government and Majority Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomson, R. (2001). The Programme-to-Policy Linkage: The Fulfilment of Election Pledges on Socio-Economic Policy in the Netherlands, 1986–1998. *European Journal of Political Research*, 40(2): 171–97.
- Thomson, R., Royed, T., Naurin, E. et al. (2012). The Program-to-Policy-Linkage: A Comparative Study of Election Pledges and Government Policies in Ten Countries.
- Timmermans, A. (2006). Standing Apart and Sitting Together: Enforcing Coalition Agreements in Multiparty Systems. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45: 263–83.
- Tsebelis, G. (2002). *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Zubek, R., and Klüver, H. (2015). Legislative Pledges and Coalition Government. *Party Politics*, 21: 603–14.
- Zuur, A. F. (2009). *Mixed Effects Models and Extensions in Ecology with R*. New York: Springer.