

Elite domination or participatory democracy? Comparing the rules of the game within parliamentary party groups

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Abstract:

In recent decades, there has been a vibrant debate on the organization of decision-making and degree of democracy within parties. Compared with those efforts, little attention has been paid to the Parliamentary Party Groups (PPG). Although their importance for the functioning of representative democracies is widely acknowledged, most studies treat them as "parties behind closed doors" whose workings remain rather hidden. We address this research gap by focusing on the formal rules of the game within PPGs, i.e. their standing orders. Approaching those constitutional documents comparatively, we ask three main questions: First, to what extent are the group's decisions determined by their leadership? Second, to what extent can single members or minorities influence decisions on policy and other topics? In sum, how participatory or hierarchical are the formal decision-making procedures? More specifically, we develop a multi-faceted index with 34 items including leadership (de-)selection, voting discipline, and PPG agenda setting. The index is subjected to an empirical examination by drawing on an original data set that includes 56 standing orders from ten countries. We show that PPGs heavily differ in their institutional design. Interestingly, this is not a question of group size or standing order length but of rule formalization. The more regulated PPGs are, the less elite domination is implied by their rulebooks.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a vibrant debate on the internal organisation of parties and on how to measure democracy within those key institutions of representative polities. Studies focus even more on the normative standards and realities of intra-party democracy because of a perceived trend towards contested party systems throughout established democracies (see e.g. Berge *et al.* 2013; Scarrow *et al.* 2017; Ignazi 2020; Höhne 2021; Wolkenstein 2016; Cross and Katz 2013). Compared with those efforts, little attention has been paid to the parties inside parliament, the Parliamentary Party Groups (PPGs)³ and their internal decision-making. This is

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³ PPGs are first and foremost groups of MPs belonging to one party or to different parties who cooperate durably (like in the case of the European parliament or of the German Christian-democratic sister parties CDU and CSU). A more difficult issue, though, is whether pre-electoral and post-electoral party coalitions should be taken into account even if they only have a limited time span. Also, one might exclude cases when deputies from different parties only technically form a group to gain more seats or to obtain the status of a PPG without working together. Those questions of definition are beyond the scope of this paper since we only refer to PPGs as mentioned in the first sentence.

surprising since those groups are rather pluralistic entities trying to achieve uniform behaviour through internal procedures. Also, their importance for the functioning of representative democracies is widely acknowledged (Heidar and Koole 2000; Schüttemeyer 1994; Saalfeld and Strøm 2014).

Party-based groups of representatives are inherent to legislative assemblies since the creation of parties outside and inside of parliaments in 19th century Europe (Duverger 1954). Essentially, they facilitate joint action as they help MPs to interact and to coordinate their activities in order get better individual and collective results (Loewenberg 2011: 70). In this regard, they are forces that shape and stabilize legislative politics even in presidential systems (Cox and McCubbins 1993). Looking at political systems more broadly, PPGs help to ensure electoral and governmental accountability thus contributing to regime legitimacy (Heidar and Koole 2000: 4f.). Most scholars would also agree that PPGs are useful for facilitating democratic consolidation, given the functional benefits of party groups within legislatures, and given the general importance of legislatures for democratization (Fish 2006; Barkan 2009).

One reason why PPGs are often treated as monolithic units in comparative studies might be that their workings usually remain hidden behind closed doors. Perhaps, what has been missing is the right key to enter the black box in a cross-national perspective. We address the research gap on decision-making within PPGs by the comparative SOPiP project (Standing Orders of Parties in Parliament).⁴ As the acronym uncovers, it focusses on those groups' rules of procedure which have been rightly labelled "the legislative party's constitutional documents" (Saalfeld and Strøm 2014: 375).⁵ Approaching those rulebooks comparatively, this paper investigates the question how participatory or hierarchical decision-making procedures are within parliamentary party groups. Conceptually, we develop a multi-faceted index with 34 items including leadership selection, voting discipline, and internal agenda setting, among others. Empirically, we draw on 56 standing orders from ten countries (Armenia, Austria, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Mexico, and Switzerland).

The study contributes to the nascent comparative literature on the rules that govern PPGs in several ways. First, it offers a conceptual approach for comparing PPG decision-making. Second, we show that the rules of the game within parliamentary groups heavily differ as to the level of both elite domination and issue formalization (that is, the amount of rules). Third, the

⁴ The project follows a multi-faceted approach: Beyond examining the PPGs' constitutions by an international comparative approach, we shed light on the rulebooks' evolution and change by a longitudinal analysis for Germany starting in 1848 (see Schindler and Kannenberg 2020 for first findings). Furthermore, we examine the documents' significance through interviews with MPs and the administrative staff of party groups in parliament. See www.iparl.de/en/research/project-sopip.html.

⁵ We use the terms standing orders, rules of procedure and PPG constitutions interchangeably.

data reveal that more formalized PPGs are associated with more participation-friendly rules indicating that institutionalizing power counteracts elite politics. In the next section, we focus on the (relative) importance of the PPGs' formal rulebooks. Subsequently, we briefly describe the data for our analysis and introduce our conceptual approach and the comparative framework. Section 5 presents our descriptive results and some statistical analysis to see whether the level of elite domination/rank-and-file participation is related to other variables like group size or ideology. We end by drawing some general conclusion and sketching out the road ahead.

2. PPG standing orders as research object and data source

PPGs having formalized rules of procedure are not a recent phenomenon. Statutes for internal rules could be found as early as 1848 when PPGs emerged in the Frankfurt Assembly, the first democratically elected pan-German parliament (see also Sieberer and Herrmann 2020). At a minimum, those documents determined the conditions of membership, i.e. how to enter the group and how to be expelled from the group. Various PPGs in this mid-19th-century assembly also went further by regulating leadership selection and voting discipline (Schindler and Kanenberg 2020: 172). Yet, the internal rules of parliamentary groups have received hardly any attention so far whereas the standing orders of parliaments and constitutions of parties have become a subject of excellent research (Sieberer *et al.* 2016; Goet *et al.* 2019; Smith and Gauja 2010; Poguntke *et al.* 2016; Scarrow *et al.* 2022).

Let's begin our endeavour by pondering on what those documents do. Put simply, they prevent what Cox (referring to parliaments) termed the "legislative state of nature" (Cox 2009: 141) by regulating intra-group behaviour. At the most abstract level, rules shape interactions within large groups as they reduce uncertainty and complexity. They also help to overcome problems of collective action and, hence, enable PPGs to act in unison. Here, one might primarily think about the threat of defecting MPs and pressing conflicts that require some authority to be handled successfully. Yet, provisions on the groups' internal organisation and distribution of power are also to reach cost-efficient coordination within large groups. For instance, if there is no procedure for internal agenda-setting, everyone could talk about every issue in a largely unrestricted manner in the group's plenary session. Debating how to proceed in terms of topic and procedure, in turn, can inhibit or impair the conduct of legislative business. In order to serve the collective interest of the group, thus, it needs procedural rules and leadership to structure decision-making and to maintain some basic level of coherent behaviour (Cox and McCubbins

1993: 132; Calvert 1987: 84). Moreover, the absence of such rules can blend conflicts on procedure and conflicts on policy which opens a door to blatant manipulation threatening the legitimacy of both single persons and the entire group (Sieberer and Müller 2014: 315).

Regarding the distribution of authority, rules also do not only empower leaders, but specify the conditions for the use of power, i.e. they restrain power. Take the example of provisions on party unity which certainly help the leadership by determining that the group line has to be supported during parliamentary votes. However, the rulebook might also lay down the right to follow one's conscience in certain cases. Also, it is not only the leadership which can be defined as power-holder but also the whole group by installing majority rules or supermajority rules.⁶ Some German PPGs constitutions in 1848 for instance included the rule that there must not be defections if the group's majority declared some issue a "party matter" (Schindler and Kannenberg 2020: 175). Other examples for empowering the rank-and-file are provisions for the selection and deselection of the group's chairmanship or majority hurdles to expel members from the group. What is more, rules can give rights to intra-group minorities like in the case of proposal power for topics or positions.

In sum, standings orders enable like-minded MPs to act collectively by organizing the group's internal life. They structure and constrain intra-group behaviour by providing guidance and defining rights as well as the conduct of crucial processes. The formalization of rules ultimately ensures that the group does not have to rely on its members' wisdom or trustworthiness. Moreover, they serve as a constitutional document that can be referred to in case of conflict. Eventually, codified rules become transparent to all group members (including newcomer MPs) and more binding, which is why it has been rightly argued that "the truly important rules" in the parliamentary realm "are usually formalized" (Sieberer and Müller 2014: 311). A broader conclusion is, hence, that standing orders are a means for PPGs to gain value and stability, i.e. to institutionalize (Huntington 1968: 12).

Two objections might be raised at this point. For one, PPG constitutions are internal documents whose content is in most cases not legally enforceable. Yet, their internal character also provides arguments for the rules' bindingness. First, we deal with provisions for the operation of

⁶ Looking at the issue of leadership from another angle, PPG constitutions help to establish a viable principal-agent relationship. When the group (principal) delegates competencies to its leaders (agents) to act in the PPG's behalf, this delegation entails the risk that the latter does not pursue the group's best interest. To minimize the risk of such agency problems, the literature on delegation has identified several mechanisms (Kiewiet and McCubbins(1991); Strøm(2000)) which can also be related to the group's standing orders. For instance, the mechanism of contract design is touched upon if those documents specify sanctions to be applied against opportunistic leaders (like the right to recall the chairperson); screening and selecting directly refers to procedural rules how to choose the leadership; the mechanism of monitoring and reporting can be involved if rules induce leaders to share important information with the whole group.

power that groups impose on themselves. The fact that the PPG is both the author and addressee of rules supports the idea that standing orders actually become a shared point of reference. Second, those documents are hardly accessible and do not aim at the larger public.⁷ Accordingly, they are not to signal intentions to voters and potential members (like in the case of party constitution) or to bolster a group's external image (as has been argued for national constitutions, see Farber 2002). Third, PPG standing orders sometimes entail their own mechanisms of enforcement which could include reprimands, financial sanctions or expulsion from the group (Schindler and Kannenberg 2020: 174). Hence, there are strong reasons to expect rule obligation beyond those that stem from the documents' functional benefits.⁸

Similarly, one might also object that groups can and do rely on customs and conventions for their internal decision-making. Unquestionably, such informal rules are relevant for PPGs just like they are for parliaments or parties. Thus, the formal rulebook in neither case provides a complete picture of politics.⁹ Having accepted this caveat, we also acknowledge that the relationship of formal rules and informal ones deals with empirical questions beyond the scope of this paper. However, our main argument here runs: From what we have said above on the functional merits of PPG standing orders, it is safe to expect that those rules regulating procedures and intra-group power matter.

In sum, we do not argue that PPG standing orders are fully informative about how decision-making takes place on a day-to-day basis. Nevertheless, the importance of the groups' constitutions should not be underestimated as they establish the rules of the game and thereby help the group to do its business in an efficient and legitimate manner. Against this background, we make use of the PPGs' rulebooks to achieve a comparative understanding of the various "conceptions of organizational power, authority and legitimacy", as Katz and Mair (1992: 7) put it in their seminal work on party statutes.

3. Data and coding

We collected our data by reaching out to parliamentary party groups via email. Since we mainly aim at democracies, we chose all countries that achieved more than a 5 point score in the 2020

⁷ In rare cases, PPG standing orders must be published by law. Otherwise, good contacts, stamina, and the goodwill of the PPG are necessary to obtain the documents.

⁸ Even if there were differences between textual promise and practice, this is no direct threat to comparability since the degree of compliance can be used to explain the endurance of documents or some different functions they serve (see Elkins and Ginsburg(2021: 329)).

⁹ Besides, one has to bear in mind that informal norms can interact with formal provisions in various ways. In particular, they might not only substitute or undermine PPG standing orders but also reinforce them (see Helmke and Levitsky(2004) for an elaborated framework).

Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit (which ranges from 0 to 10).¹⁰ We got documents from 23 of the 96 polities involved (24 percent).¹¹ However, this study examines 56 PPG constitutions from ten countries since we only included states where we have access to more than one PPG standing order to ensure some minimum intra-country variation. We rely on full country samples from Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Mexico and Switzerland.¹² Moreover, we draw on standing orders from Armenia, Austria, France and Georgia for which we have at least two rulebooks (usually from the most important groups). Most standing orders stem from the years 2018 to 2020, but the data set also includes historical documents from Germany originating from the late 1940s and 1950s. Table 4 in the appendix provides an overview of the groups included as well as additional information, e.g. their size and ideological orientation.

The countries involved provide a limited but also varied sample. For example, they go beyond the classical established democracies (like Finland or Switzerland) by including such cases as Mexico or Armenia.¹³ Furthermore, they consist of differently designed regimes (parliamentary, semi-presidential, and presidential) and represent parliaments of different size. We are also aware that the content of standing orders can be influenced by country-specific factors. Accordingly, we look for some country patterns in our empirical investigation. In particular, one might see both high levels of intra-country homogeneity and of inter-country heterogeneity. To anticipate our conclusions, this does not seem to be the case though. However, we also acknowledge that a richer investigation of the documents requires in-depth-qualitative studies that consider, for instance, whether ordinary laws on MPs or on parties influence the parliamentary party groups' frameworks.

One third of all documents has been coded twice by both authors independently. The degree of intercoder agreement during this first step was very high. For the rare discrepancies that occurred we specified the coding instructions appropriately. Also, we consulted the documents' translators in a few cases to clarify language questions. Eventually, we established a review procedure if any author in the second coding round faced an interpretative issue which then was again laid down in the coding instructions to serve as "precedent" for forthcoming coding. In

¹⁰ See The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021, Democracy Index 2020: In sickness and in health?, <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/>

¹¹ The rather low response may also be due to the fact that we contacted the party groups in English.

¹² In Switzerland, a few lines in the SVP party constitution refer to the parliamentary group but a separate PPG standing order does not exist. That is why Switzerland is counted as full sample. For Italy, we did not include the standing order of the Gruppo Misto since this is a forced merger of MPs who do not belong to any other PPG.

¹³ Although this is not key to our study, four countries are ranked as full democracy (Austria, Finland, Germany, Switzerland), another four as flawed democracy (France, Italy, Latvia, Mexico), and two as hybrid regimes (Armenia and Georgia).

general, coders first delved into the whole document to get an all-embracing view on its rules. This proved important since some texts included ambiguities if one looks at single rules separately. In general, however, the constitutions' provisions were rather clear and did not require much interpretation as to our coding scheme.

4. Elite domination or participatory democracy? A comparative framework for analysing the rules of the game within PPGs

To investigate intra-party group decision making through the PPGs' standing orders, this study asks two related questions. First, to what extent are the group's decisions determined by their leadership? Second, to what extent can the rank-and-file or intra-group backbenchers influence the PPG's position on policy and other topics? If a small number of chairpersons controls all decision-making, we are close to what we term the model of elite domination. At the other end of the conceptual scale, we find the model of participatory democracy which emphasizes the empowerment and inclusion of all MPs in all matters. Of course, vigorous leadership and broad participation are both indispensable when we are dealing with democratic politics. There is no stable and effective decision-making without leaders who, as agents of their parliamentary troops, prepare and guide how to make choices. Conversely, every group member has to be entitled to take part in the formation of the group's will in order to fully function as representative of the people. As a consequence, pure elite domination and pure participatory democracy are neither an ideal nor anything we expect to find empirically. Instead, it is the *mixture* of leadership and participation what is most interesting from the scholarly point of view.

Before we sketch out how to measure both aspects of intra-party group decision making, we have to turn to our database again. While relying on PPG standing orders is a worthwhile endeavour given their status as constitutional documents, groups in different countries may not be equally inclined to formalize intra-group matters. We deal with this obstacle for comparisons in a twofold manner. To begin with, we do not include every conceivable issue of decision-making. Instead, we restrict ourselves to some core topics that, after having read all the documents, appear to have the best chances to be formalized among very different groups. In addition, we directly capture the formality of intra-group procedures by measuring formalization. Our analysis, hence, can be thought of as locating PPGs in a two-dimensional space by examining the extent of elite domination and membership participation (y axis) as well as the formalization of the issues investigated (x axis). It follows a simple logic: If an issue is not specified, the PPG moves on the x axis to the right towards the pole "no regulation" while its position on the y axis remains unchanged. So, the less issues are mentioned, the lower the formalization

score. If there is a relevant provision for the topic under investigation, the PPG's position on the x axis stays the same, but there is some movement upwards to the pole "elite domination" or downwards to the pole "participatory democracy".¹⁴ As to elite domination, we differentiate between the empowerment of the chairperson and the wider leadership body (usually the group's executive board). According to the item concerned, participation is facilitated in two ways: First, the whole PPG is involved in decision-making and the group's majority or even supermajority is required to adopt an issue. Second, a minority (less than 50 percent of group members) can influence decision-making by submitting proposals or initiate other actions. To get a more nuanced framework, we do not consider all issues (and their specifications) as equally important but weigh them by attributing the values 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1.0.¹⁵ For instance, making proposals can be a beneficial leadership right or minority right, but approving proposals, i.e. finally deciding on the subject matter, clearly merits a higher value. The list of issues, their specifications, and their quantification is presented in detail in table 1.¹⁶

For analytical reasons, we use four categories of topics. The first group of items deals with leadership (de-)selection. It includes the following questions: Who can select the chairperson and the second-highest¹⁷ leadership actor? Who is entitled to remove those leaders? Who can submit proposals for selection and deselection? Nominations for the executive board, for instance, may only come from the chairperson (like in some Italian cases) or by every group member (as in one Swiss PPG constitution). Does the leadership's term of office correspond to the parliament's electoral term or are leaders subject to more than one selection during the term? Shall the leadership be elected by secret ballot? If yes, we consider this as participation-friendly provision since one can express grievances more easily while open votes can be a means to discipline the rank-and-file.

Next, we investigate the rules for PPG membership and group discipline by the following questions: Who can make proposals for and decide upon the entry of new members, respectively the expulsion of current members? In both cases, entry and expulsion, the answers span from decisions by the chairperson to such by supermajorities. In addition, we ask whether an expulsion

¹⁴ More precisely, a positive or negative value is assigned to the PPG depending on whether a provision strengthens the leadership or promotes the participation of the group's grass roots.

¹⁵ The specification of values is derived from the Political Party Database Project. See Poguntke *et al.* (2016).

¹⁶ Importantly, the specifications for the codes included in table 1 capture the empirical variance we found so far or are included for logical reasons to have some analytical counterpart. For instance, we found no case in which the chairperson alone decides on the rank-and-file's committee membership. Hence, the highest code for elite domination are decisions by the executive board as collective leadership.

¹⁷ The leadership structure beyond the chairperson differs considerably among the PPGs. Sometimes, there is merely a vice-leader. In other cases, a single leadership board exists. More complex PPGs even have several leadership bodies (first executive board, extended board, etc.). The item refers to the second-highest leadership actor as presented in the PPG standing orders.

requires the hearing of the MP concerned (which we regard as form of participation) or, if no hearing is required, whether the standing orders enumerate the reasons for an expulsion (which restricts the leadership's manoeuvring space and provides transparency for all group members). Beyond expulsions, some standing orders name other sanctions like reprimands and financial fines. Therefore, we include the question who, the leaders or the group by (super)majority, can adopt other punitive measures in case of MP misconduct. While those issues already refer to group discipline, we consider three further issues: Is there a rule requiring obligatory attendance in PPG sessions? More importantly, we examine whether there are rules prescribing party line voting in parliament. Frequently, there is a general rule aiming at voting unity (as default option). However, in several cases the matter of voting discipline hinges on the group's decision by majority or supermajority or even the leader's decision (all variants can be found in Latvian standing orders, for instance). A separate question is how the rulebooks deals with deviating votes, that is whether they are prohibited, allowed, or restricted to special cases (which may also require informing the leadership in advance).

Third, a variety of abstract and concrete issues can be grouped together under the heading "regular decision-making". We begin by asking for two leadership prerogatives: Does any leadership actor have a tie-breaking vote in case all other votes are equally divided (which exists in Finland, for example)? Can any leadership actor take decisions in urgent cases (instead of the PPG plenary), and shall such decisions be approved ex post by the PPG? Also, we ask who can act as the group's representative externally (in the public sphere or in negotiations with others) which mostly belongs to the leader's or the leadership's rights. Next, we deal with agenda power which refers to the topical agenda (the issues to be discussed) but indirectly also to the timing of discussions and decisions (see e.g. Döring 2005): Who can make agenda proposals for the PPG plenary session and, more importantly, who finally decides on the agenda or has to approve proposals? A different but related issue is the question who initiates extra-ordinary PPG sessions thereby influencing the timing of decision-making. Furthermore, we examine who decides on legislative proposals submitted to the parliament's plenary assembly in the name of the PPG and who decides on the PPG's speakers in parliament. While a majority decision often is necessary in both situations, some standing orders also empower group minorities or give the leadership an absolute or suspensive veto right (like in various German cases).

The fourth category labelled special decision-making is dealing with issues that occur once or rather seldom during the parliamentary term. This concerns the question who adopts the PPG's budget (usually the whole group by majority decision). Additionally, we ask who decides on committee memberships and the selection of committee chairs (in case they fall to the group).

While the whole group usually has the final say, the decision sometimes is up to the PPG leadership (as in one French and one Swiss case). Finally, we pay attention to the rules to change the rules: Who can propose standing order amendments and whose consent is required to adopt them? We also consider who is in charge for deciding on the meaning of single provisions in case doubts arise over their interpretation (which ranges from the chairperson to the whole group by supermajority decision).

While those 34 items cover a broad set of topics, we used an additional flexible code for every four categories in our scheme. Typically, this extra code indicates the strength of elites. On the one hand, it was required since the PPG constitutions in some cases included further rules highly relevant for our research question. To provide two examples of such provisions that were usually found only once or twice: One document stated that members can only be expelled if the chairpersons, in addition to the group’s decision, give their explicit consent. In two other rule-books, the chairperson is empowered to appoint MPs to be responsible for certain topics (throughout the parliamentary term), hence, giving them exclusive patronage power. In both cases, the PPG was assigned another 0.75 points, so pushing them further towards to the pole elite domination. On the other hand, such flexible codes were exceptionally used to give an extra weight to rules that are inaptly captured by our quantification scheme. For instance, in a few groups, the chairperson alone can decide on who becomes part of the executive board. This is an immensely consequential provision given that leadership is critical to the conduct of collective decision-making. In these PPGs, the other board members might not play any role of checks and balances vis-à-vis the chairperson since their advancement and incumbency exclusively depend on the latter. They are responsible to the chair in the first place and may see him or her as their master (or principal).¹⁸ In this case, we attribute another 1.0 to the item “selection of 2nd highest actor” to include this powerful rule adequately. However, such extra weights have been a rare exception.

Table 1: Elite domination or participatory democracy? A comparative framework				
Item	No.	Issue	Specification	Value
(1) Leadership selection and deselection				
(de)selection: chairperson	1.1.	Selection decision by	leadership ¹ or party leadership PPG majority	1.0 -1.0
	1.2.	Selection proposal by	leadership PPG minority	0.5 -0.5
	1.3.	Term of office	more than one selection during parliamentary term (if selection by PPG) ²	-1.0
	1.4.	Deselection decision by	leadership or party leadership PPG supermajority	1.0 -0.5

¹⁸ In principal-agent terms, competition between those who could provide information to the group is largely diminished by such institutional design (see Lupia and McCubbins(1994: 370f.).

			PPG majority	-1.0
	1.5.	Deselection proposal by	leadership PPG minority	0.5 -0.5
(de)selection: second highest actor	1.6.	Selection decision by	chairperson other leadership body (like 2 nd board) PPG majority	1.0 0.75 -1.0
	1.7.	Selection proposal by	chairperson other leadership body (like 2 nd board) PPG minority	0.5 0.25 -0.5
	1.8.	Term of office	more than one selection during parliamentary term (if selection by PPG) ²	-1.0
	1.9.	Deselection decision by	leadership or party leadership other leadership body (like 2 nd board) PPG supermajority PPG majority	1.0 0.75 -0.5 -1.0
	1.10.	Deselection Proposal by	chairperson other leadership body (like 2 nd board) PPG minority	0.5 0.25 -0.5
	Election mode	1.11.	Selecting leadership	open election closed election (secret ballot)
(2) group membership and group discipline				
Entry of new MPs	2.1.	Decision by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG supermajority	1.0 0.5 -0.5 -1.0
	2.2.	proposal by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG minority	1.0 0.5 -0.5 -1.0
Expulsion of MPs	2.3.	Decision by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG supermajority	1.0 0.5 -0.5 -1.0
	2.4.	Proposal by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG minority	1.0 0.5 -0.5 -1.0
	2.5.	Expulsion procedure	expulsion requires hearing of MP reasons for expulsion mentioned (without hearing)	-0.5 -0.25
Sanctions (beyond expulsion)	2.6.	Adoption by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG supermajority	1.0 0.5 -0.5 -1.0
Voting discipline	2.7.	party line voting	if so decided by chairperson if so decided by leadership general rule for party line voting if so decided by PPG majority if so decided by supermajority	1.0 0.5 0 -0.5 -1.0
	2.8.	Deviating votes	not allowed restricted to special cases but requires notification restricted to special cases allowed but requires notification allowed (without further restrictions)	0.5 -0.25 -0.5 -0.75 -1.0
Attendance	2.9.	Obligatory attendance in PPG sessions	yes	0.25
(3) Regular decision-making				
Leadership prerogatives	3.1.	Tie-breaking votes by	chairperson	1.0
	3.2.	Urgent decisions on behalf of PPG by	chairperson leadership	1.0 0.75 0

			chairperson/leadership with later approval by PPG ³	
External representation	3.3	representation of PPG by	chairperson (only) leadership (only) also by PPG experts (in their area of responsibility) PPG minorities or everyone	1.0 0.75 0.5 -1.0
PPG Agenda	3.4.	Proposals by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG minority	0.5 0.25 -0.25 -0.5
	3.5.	Approval/decision by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG minority	1.0 0.5 -0.5 -1.0
Extra-ordinary sessions	3.6.	Initiating extra-ordinary sessions by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG minority	0.5 0.25 -0.25 -0.5
Legislative proposals	3.7.	Decision on legislative proposals	leadership veto leadership veto can be overruled by PPG majority by PPG majority by PPG minority by others (like expert groups)	1.0 -0.5 -0.75 -1.0 0
Plenary speakers	3.8.	Decision on parliamentary speakers	by leadership leadership veto leadership veto can be overruled by PPG majority by PPG majority by PPG minority by others (like expert groups)	1.0 0.75 -0.5 -0.75 -1.0 0
(4) Special decision-making				
PPG budget	4.1.	Approval by	chairperson leadership PPG majority	0.5 0.25 -0.5
Committee leadership	4.2.	Decision by	chairperson leadership expert group PPG majority	1.0 0.5 0 -0.5
Committee membership	4.3.	Decision by	leadership leadership but proposal by PPG majority PPG majority but proposal by leadership PPG majority but proposal by expert group PPG majority PPG majority but proposal by minority	1.0 0.5 0.25 0 -0.25 -0.5
standing orders	4.4.	Proposing amendments by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG minority	1.0 0.5 -0.5 -1.0
	4.5.	Adopting amendments by	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG supermajority	1.0 0.5 -0.5 -1.0
	4.6.	Interpretation of provisions	chairperson leadership PPG majority PPG supermajority	1.0 0.75 -0.75 -1.0

¹ The term “Leadership” in this table refers to any PPG leadership body beyond the chairperson.

² The case of leaders selected twice by others that the PPG, i.e. by some leadership body, did not occur.

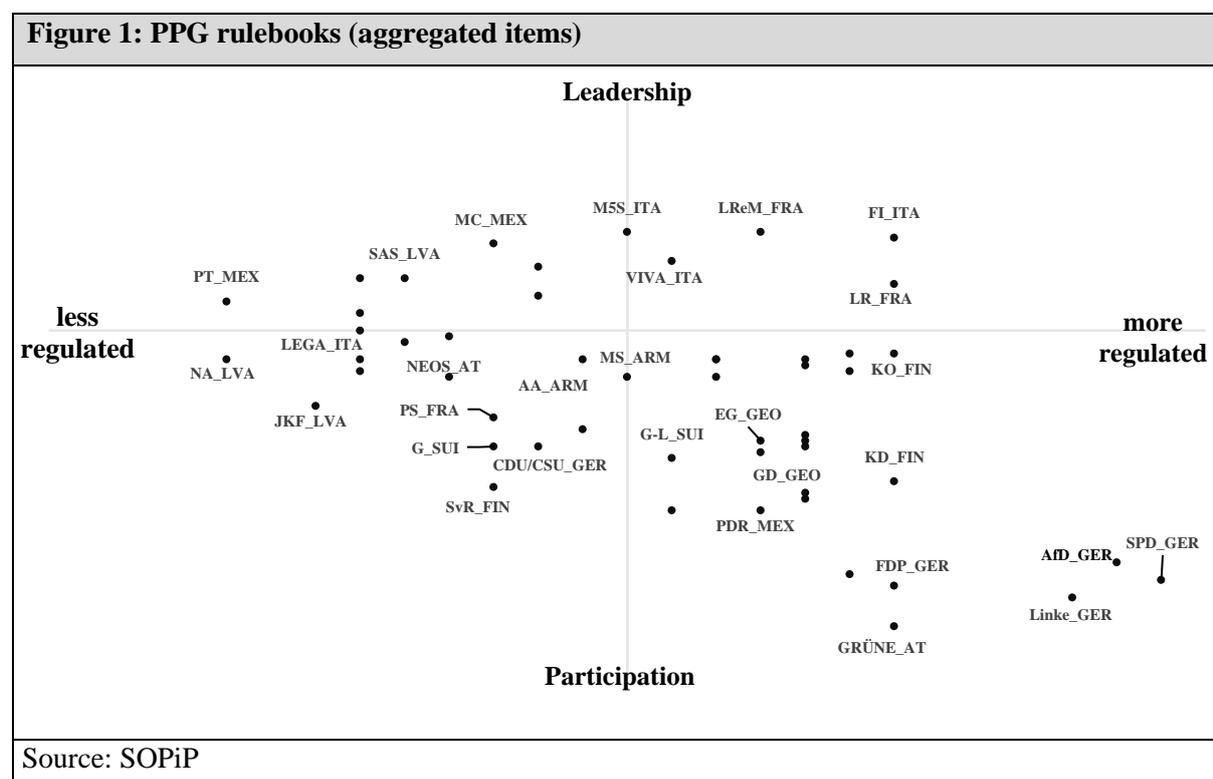
³ In this case, the leadership as well as the whole party group are involved. We assign the value of 0 which means that the PPG’s position neither moves on the x axis (since we have some regulation) nor on the y axis. Things

differ if there is no rule at all for urgent decision-making which entails that a PPG moves on the x axis to the right.

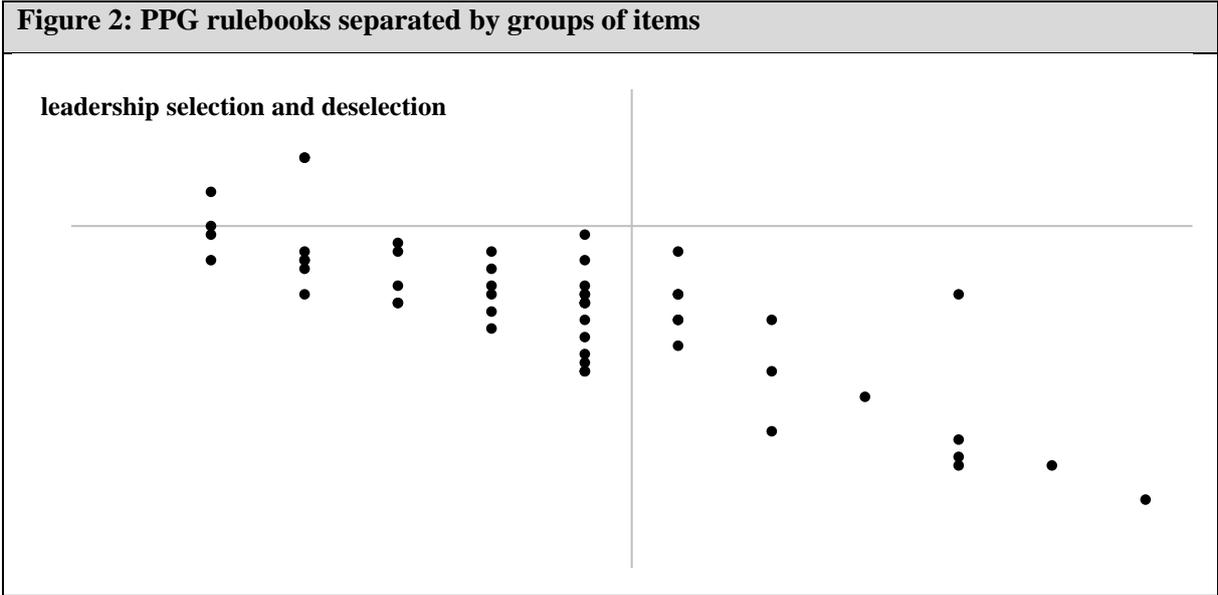
5. Empirical findings

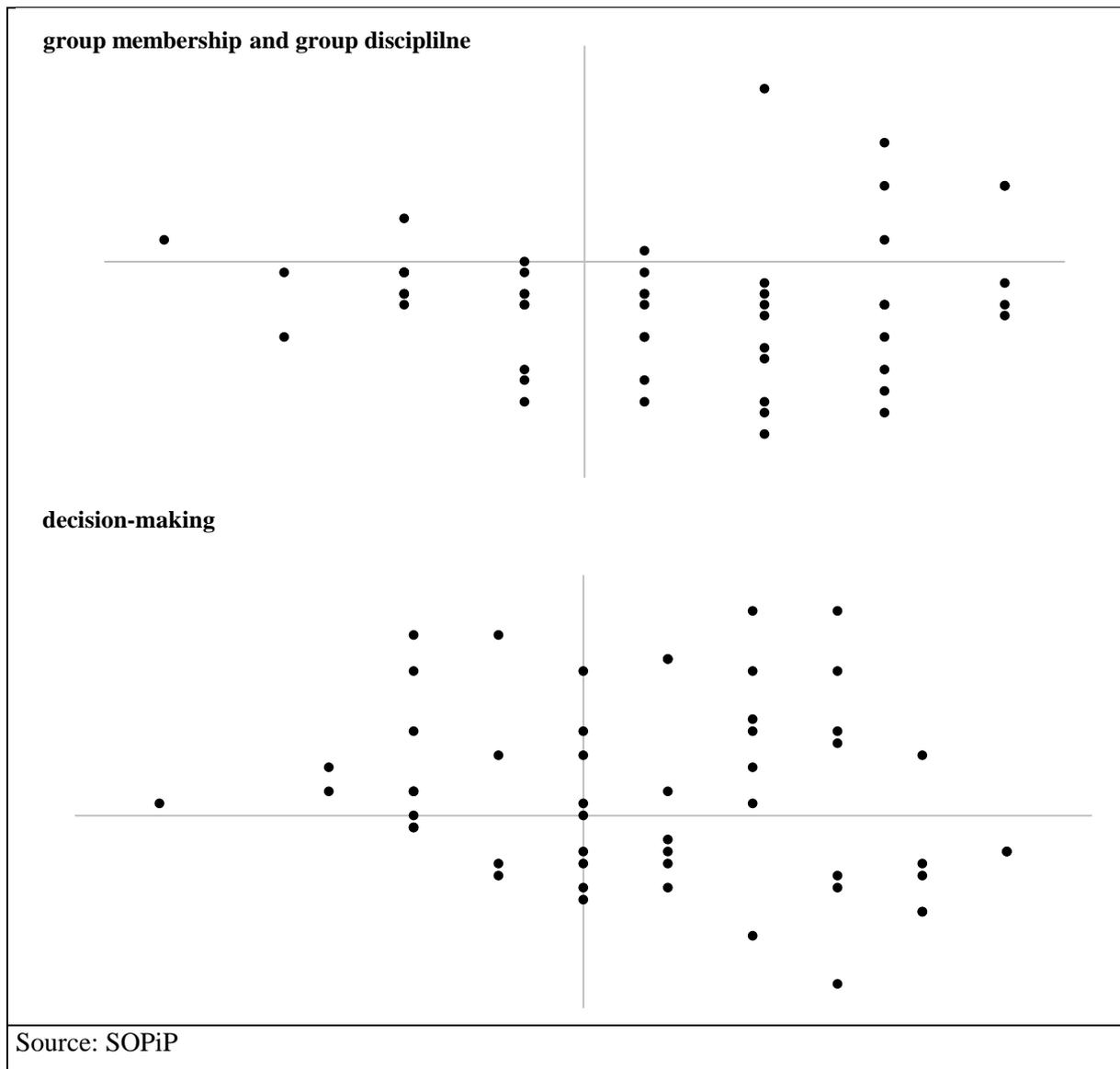
5.1. Do PPGs vary?

The aggregated data in figure 1 reveal two findings. First, we see a high variance for the formalization score (x axis). The Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) in Germany provides the most regulated standing orders whereas the Mexican Partido del Trabajo (PT) and the Latvian Nacionālā apvienība (NA) are positioned on the opposite site. Second, PPGs also differ as to the question to what extent formal rules favour the group's elite (y axis). The French LReM and the Italien Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) and Forza Italia (FI) mark the extreme values among the upper data points. In contrast, the Austrian Greens most strongly tend toward the participation pole followed by Germany's Die Linke. Consequently, we see a rather dispersed picture with all four quadrants occupied. For instance, the Italian Forza Italia (FI) and the German FDP have an equally high formalization score, but both groups greatly differ as the former (upper right quadrant) exhibits far more leadership-friendly rules than the latter (lower right quadrant). Similarly, the Mexican Movimiento Ciudadano (MC; upper left quadrant) and the Finnish Svenska riksdagsgruppen (SvR; lower left quadrant) are characterized by an equally low level of regulation but are far away from each other on the y axis.



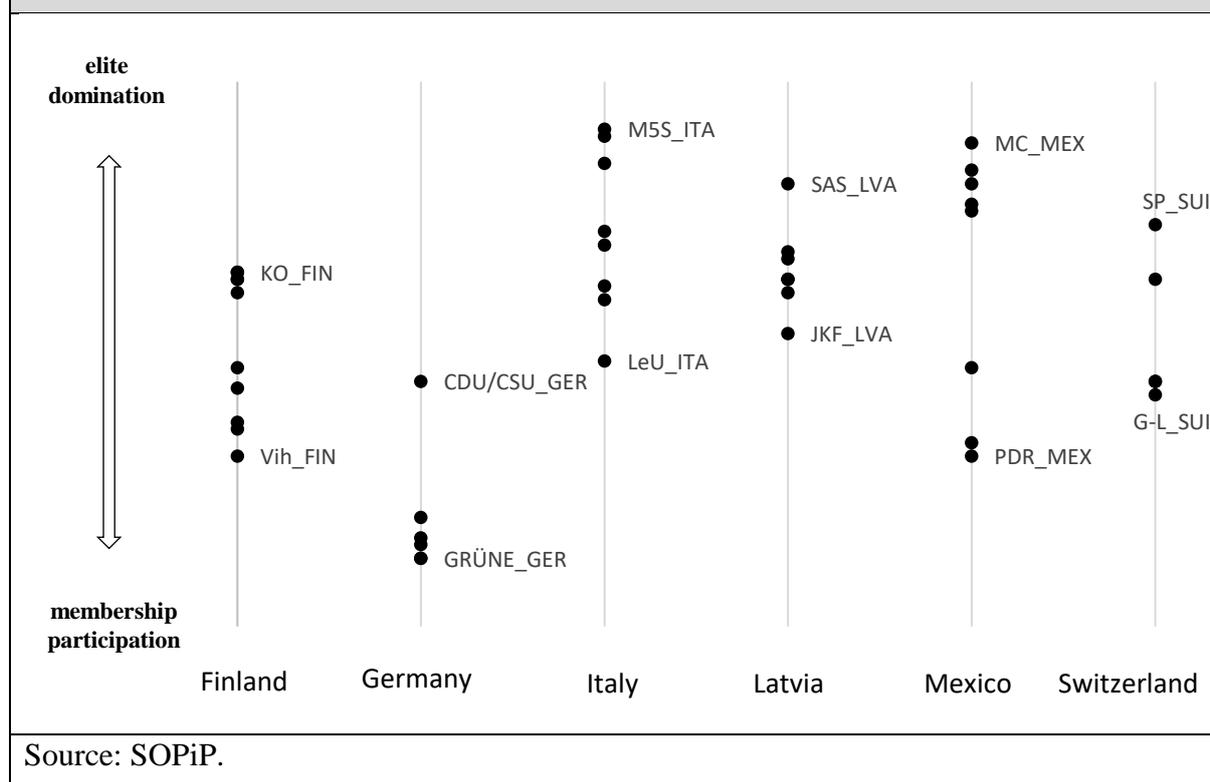
Variance for both dimensions also occurs when we look at the groups of items one by one (see figure 2). However, they provide somewhat different pictures. Regarding leadership (de-)selection, there is a clear relationship between both dimensions. The upper right quadrant (indicating regulated groups that favour elites) is even empty. This does not come as a surprise given that selection and deselection refer to participation rights for the whole group. The more interesting finding is that we find huge differences as to formalization. Slightly more variation can be found for our 2nd category of items, i.e. group membership and group discipline. Unlike leadership (de-)selection, all quadrants are now occupied. Yet, PPGs are again strongly concentrated in the lower part of the figure, indicating participation-friendly rules. The third figure in which we collapsed both decision-making items to one group, includes the most balanced distribution. More importantly, the majority of PPGs now occupies the upper part within our two-dimensional space. This indicates that elites indeed play a pivotal role for decision-making according to the PPG rulebooks. Yet, again, we should not neglect the huge differences.





To look for country patterns, figure 3 presents the data for our six full sample polities. The visual inspection discloses some differences between the countries. For instance, Italy and Germany, that both have a parliamentary type of government, tend towards different directions. However, we also see a moderate to high level of intra-country variation. Given the visible spread inside the countries, polity-related specifics are certainly not the only relevant factor for the question whether PPGs favour elite domination or broad participation by design.

Figure 3: PPG rulebooks separated by countries (full sample only)



Source: SOPiP.

5.2. Is the level of elite domination related to other PPG features?

To check whether our main variable is related to other PPG attributes, our bivariate analyses include the degree of item formalization, the (weighted) length of documents, group size, the parties' ideological orientation, and the PPGs status as part of the government or opposition during the time of standing order adoption.¹⁹ As shown in table 2, there is a highly significant association between the first variable and our leadership-participation index. Indeed, the coefficient amounts to -0,47 indicating a strong negative relationship.²⁰ Hence, the more regulated PPGs are, the less elite domination is implied by their rulebooks. This finding also holds if we rescale our leadership-participation index to consider potential country specifics. If we use a PPG's distance to the country mean as variable, we still see a noticeable and significant relationship with the formalization score ($r=-0.431$, $p\text{-value}=0.001$). This corroborates our main result that formal rules strengthen the PPG rank-and-file.

¹⁹ Summary statistics and data sources can be found in the appendix, table 5.

²⁰ For a visual inspection, see the figure 4 in the appendix.

Table 2: Relationship of leadership-participation index and further PPG attributes		
	Effect size	Significance
Formalization score	$r = -0.47$	0.0002***
Weighted length of documents	$\rho = -0.097^1$	0.478
Government / Opposition	$U = 377.5$ (Mann-Whitney U)	0.9801
Number of MPs	$\rho = -0.009^1$	0.95
Ideological orientation	$r = 0.27$	0.057*
¹ Spearman's rho was used due the outliers for the variables weighted length and group size. Significance at * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. See Table 5 in the appendix for descriptive statistics and data sources.		

Remarkably, it is the formalization of our selected items that matters but not the length of the groups' documents per se (see table 2). The fact that the groups' government or opposition status is not important does not come as a surprise. PPGs might be part of the opposition in one electoral period and switch to support the government subsequently while their constitutional documents do not change. More interestingly, there is no statistical relationship as to group size. Hence, large and small PPGs do not significantly differ in their constitutional design.

Our last variable, i.e. ideology as measured with data from the comparative manifesto project, deserves some more attention. It narrowly falls short of the 5 percent significance level, and can only be considered significant if we use the 10 percent threshold instead. Actually, the correlation in our sample reveals a moderate relationship indicating that right-wing PPGs more strongly tend to the leadership pole whereas groups from the political left might have a more participation-friendly constitution. The visual inspection also reveals some relationship between both variables (see figure 5 in the appendix). Given the small size of our sample, we interpret the findings in any event as justifying additional research in this direction.

As a final step, we use formalization and ideology as joint predictors in a regression model to look for their effect on the leadership-participation index. Bearing in mind the note of caution that we deal with a small sample, the results basically stay the same. Both variables help to explain the PPGs' position as to elite domination and membership participation.

Table 2: determinants of elite domination/membership participation (logistic regression)				
	Estimation	Standard errors	Confidence interval	Significance
Constant	-2.687	0.586	-3.87 – -1.51	0.000***
Formalization score	-0.374	0.101	-0.58 – -0.17	0.001***
Ideological orientation	0.062	0.032	0.00 – 0.12	0.063*
R^2	0.282			
n=50; significance at * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ Source: SOPiP				

6. Conclusion and next steps

Unlike the standing orders of parliaments or the statutes of parties, PPG rulebooks are a relatively unexplored topic in comparative politics. This is puzzling given that those pluralistic groups shape legislative politics in representative democracies (Schüttemeyer 1994; Heidar and Koole 2000) but are also mostly treated as unitary actors whose workings remain rather hidden. Consequently, there is a rich empirical terrain for improving our understanding of the groups' internal decision-making with the help of their constitutions. Against this background, this first step paper provides both a conceptual framework for investigating how participation-friendly or elite-dominated PPG rules are, and an empirical examination of more than 50 standing order documents.

A first key finding is that we encounter a wide variance both in terms of formalization and elite domination. Among the groups which are only slightly or moderately regulated, we find PPGs that favour the elite and PPGs that favour the rank-and-file. Even more variation can be found among the highly regulated groups which may provide the more interesting subset. While some of them (like Forza Italia) strongly empower elites, others (like the Austrian Greens) give the rank-and-file clearly more weight by institutional design. To be fair, however, a lack of elite influence should not be expected even in the latter case since leadership also takes shape in capacities and competencies that are not (fully) formalized or cannot be (fully) formalized. In this respect, we are aware that PPG constitutions certainly are not completely informative when it comes to exposing elite power.

The main finding from our statistical analysis is that the mixtures of leadership empowerment and participation are partly explained by the degree of issue formalization. If PPGs write down rules in key areas of their intra-group business, those provisions tend to benefit the groups' grass roots. In other words: Institutionalizing power counteracts elite politics. Yet, again, we should not neglect the visible differences between equally regulated party groups, as in the case of the Greens in Austria and Forza Italia. Overall, our study makes the case that more research is required to comprehensively explore the rules that govern PPGs. This is also due to our small and selected sample of countries and groups.

There are multiple avenues for further inquiry. One of the next steps is to examine more specific topics like the rules on voting discipline or the relationship between the PPG and the extra-parliamentary party organization in more detailed studies. Besides the cross-national comparison must be accompanied by in-depth investigations of one or more countries. Otherwise, we may risk missing important contextual features that influence why those rules are as they are.

In general, the constitutions' significance and the relationship between formal rules and informal ones have to be explored through interviews with MPs. The few qualitative data we can draw on so far, point to the documents' relevance: Asked about the purpose of PPG standing orders, one high-ranking MP from a left-wing German PPG told us, they are needed "to have a proper balance of power between the leadership and the individual members – checks and balances".²¹ Yet, we do not know yet whether such views hold in other countries (and other groups).

Besides, we are in need of longitudinal comparisons. In an initial study, for instance, we found that the length of the German Social Democrats' and the Liberals' rulebooks heavily increased between 1949 and 2019 (the number of words tripled in the first case and expanded sevenfold in the latter (see Schindler and Kannenberg 2020)). Simultaneously, looking at institutional changes over time sheds light on why and how standing order reforms take place.

We are sure that all those steps will, in combination, provide a nuanced picture both of intra-group decision-making and the constitutional documents' meaning. They add up to a comprehensive research program on the institutional design of one of the most important organizational substructures in modern parliaments.

Appendix

Table 4: Data on PPGs included

Table 4: PPGs included in the study						
Country	Name	Year*	MPs (seat share)*	Gov. /Oppo.*	Length	Weighted length**
Armenia	My Step (MS)	2018	88 (66.7)	Gov.	2550	2723
Armenia	Alliance Armenia (AA)	2021	29 (27.1)	Opp.	2744	2930
Austria	Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative (Grüne)	2020	26 (14.2)	Gov.	3718	3970
Austria	NEOS	2017	10 (5.5)	Opp.	1515	1618
Finland	Vihreät (Vih)	2018	15 (7.5)	Opp.	1198	2737
Finland	Perussuomalaiset / True Finns (PS)	2014	39 (19.5)	Gov.	1345	1843
Finland	Vänsterförbundets riksdagsgrupp (VAS)	2020	16 (8.0)	Gov.	1464	2006
Finland	Svenska riksdagsgruppen (SvR)	2018	10 (5.0)	Opp.	725	993
Finland	Socialdemokratiska riksdagsgruppen (SR)	2013	42 (21.0)	Gov.	1968	2697
Finland	Liike Nyt (LN)	2018	1 (0.5)	Opp.	2124	2910
Finland	Ano Turtiainen (AT)	2020	1 (0.5)	Opp.	1122	1537
Finland	Keskustan Eduskuntaryhmä (KES)	2013	35 (17.5)	Opp.	1440	1051
Finland	Kokoomus (KO)	2020	38 (19.0)	Opp.	2085	2857

²¹ Interview conducted in November 2020.

Finland	Kristillisdemokraattinen eduskuntapuolueyhmä (KD)	2013	6 (3.0)	Gov.	893	1224
France	La République en Marche! (LREM)	2017	308 (53.4)	Gov.	2249	2023
France	Les Républicains (LR)	2020	103 (17.9)	Opp.	1368	1231
France	Parti socialiste (PS)	2017	30 (5.2)	Opp.	5623	5058
Georgia	Evropuli Sakartvelo (ES)	2019	19 (12.7)	Opp.	1653	1765
Georgia	Kartuli Otsneba (KO)	2019	115 (76.7)	Gov.	1924	2055
Germany	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)	1954	151 (31.0)	Opp.	1102	1177
Germany	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)	2019	152 (21.3)	Gov.	3420	3652
Germany	Bündnis90/Die Grünen (Grüne)	1987	42 (8.5)	Opp.	2061	2201
Germany	Bündnis90/Die Grünen (Grüne)	2012	68 (10.9)	Opp.	3511	3749
Germany	Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP)	1949	53 (12.0)	Opp.	432	461
Germany	Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP)	2018	80 (11.3)	Opp.	2915	3113
Germany	Christlich Demokratische Union / Christlich-Soziale Union (CDU/CSU)	1949	140 (31.4)	Gov.	1250	1335
Germany	Christlich Demokratische Union / Christlich-Soziale Union (CDU/CSU)	2018	246 (34.7)	Gov.	2386	2548
Germany	Die Linke	2011	76 (12.2)	Opp.	3408	3639
Germany	Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)	2019	91 (12.8)	Opp.	2877	3072
Italy	Partido Democratico (PD)	2018	111 (17.7)	Opp.	2141	2065
Italy	Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)	2019	216 (34.3)	Gov.	4200	4052
Italy	Fratelli d' Italia (FDI)	2018	32 (5.1)	Opp.	3810	3675
Italy	Italia Viva (Viva)	2019	26 (4.1)	Gov.	2734	2637
Italy	Liberi e Uguali (LeU)	2018	14 (2.2)	Opp.	1624	1567
Italy	Forza Italia (FI)	2018	104 (16.5)	Opp.	3936	3797
Italy	Lega Nord (LN)	2018	125 (19.9)	Gov.	2671	2577
Latvia	Zaļo un Zemieku savienība (ZZS)	2018	11 (11.0)	Opp.	886	1157
Latvia	Jaunā konservatīvā frakcija (JKF)	2018	16 (16.0)	Gov.	1000	1307
Latvia	Attīstībai/Par! (A/P)	2018	13 (13.0)	Gov.	870	1136
Latvia	KPV LV	2018	16 (16.0)	Gov.	758	990
Latvia	Saskana (SAS)	2018	23 (23.0)	Opp.	745	973
Latvia	Nacionālās apvienības "Visu Latvijai! "-Tēvzemei un Brīvībai!/LNNK" (NA)	2018	13 (13.0)	Gov.	855	1116
Latvia	Jaunā Vienotība (JV)	2018	8 (8.0)	Gov.	1086	1418
Mexico	Movimiento Ciudadano (MC)	2018	27 (5.4)	Opp.	2995	2742
Mexico	Morena (MO)	2018	191 (38.2)	Gov.	3910	3580
Mexico	Encuentro Social (ES)	2018	56 (11.2)	Opp.	5175	4738
Mexico	Partido Verde Ecologista (PVE)	2018	16 (3.2)	Opp.	3853	3528
Mexico	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)	2018	45 (9.0)	Opp.	5505	5040

Mexico	Partido Acción Nacional (PAN)	2018	81 (16.2)	Opp.	4577	4191
Mexico	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD)	2018	21 (4.2)	Opp.	8290	7590
Mexico	Partido del Trabajo (PT)	2018	61 (12.2)	Opp.	1821	1667
Switzerland	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei (CVP)	2016	28 (14.0)	Gov.	1308	1397
Switzerland	GRÜNE Schweiz (Greens)	2019	28 (14.0)	Opp.	1121	1197
Switzerland	Grünliberale Partei	2017	7 (3.5)	Opp.	1474	1574
Switzerland	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz (SP)	2018	43 (21.5)	Gov.	1515	1618
Switzerland	FDP. Die Liberalen (FDP)	2020	29 (14.5)	Gov.	2106	2249
* Data refer to year of standing order adoption						
** by using a language correction factor based on the English UN Human Rights Charter						

Table 5: Summary statistics

Table 5: descriptive statistics and data sources of variables used		
Leadership-participation index	Mean: -3.03 Range: -12.75 – 4.25 Std.Dev.: 4.33	Own calculation
Formalization score	Mean: 0.52 Range: -12 – 13 Std.Dev.: 5.22	Own calculation
Weighted length of documents	Mean: 2459.9 Range: 461 – 7590 Std.Dev.: 1345.7	Own calculation by using a language correction factor based on the English UN Human Rights Charter. Since the Armenian and Georgian languages use a different script, we had to rely on the German translation as a reference.
Government / Opposition	Gov. PPG: 23 (41%) Opp. PPG: 33 (59%)	Own compilation based on the national parliaments' and government's websites
Number of MPs	Mean: 60.6 Range: 1 – 308 Std.Dev.: 65.1	PPEG Database "Political Parties, Presidents, Elections, and Governments" (version 2022v1), https://ppeg.wzb.eu/
Ideological orientation	Mean: -7.16 Range: -46.9 – 44.8 Std.Dev.: 17.2	Manifesto Project Dataset (version 2021a), https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/datasets

Figure 4: leadership-participation index and formalization score

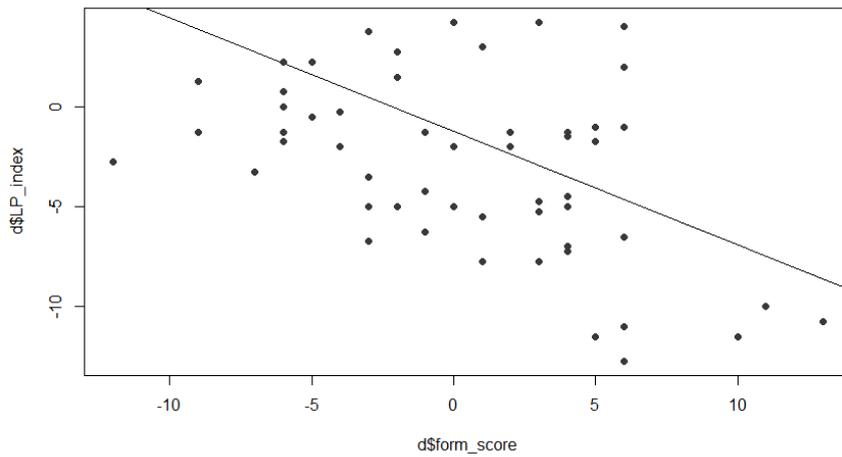
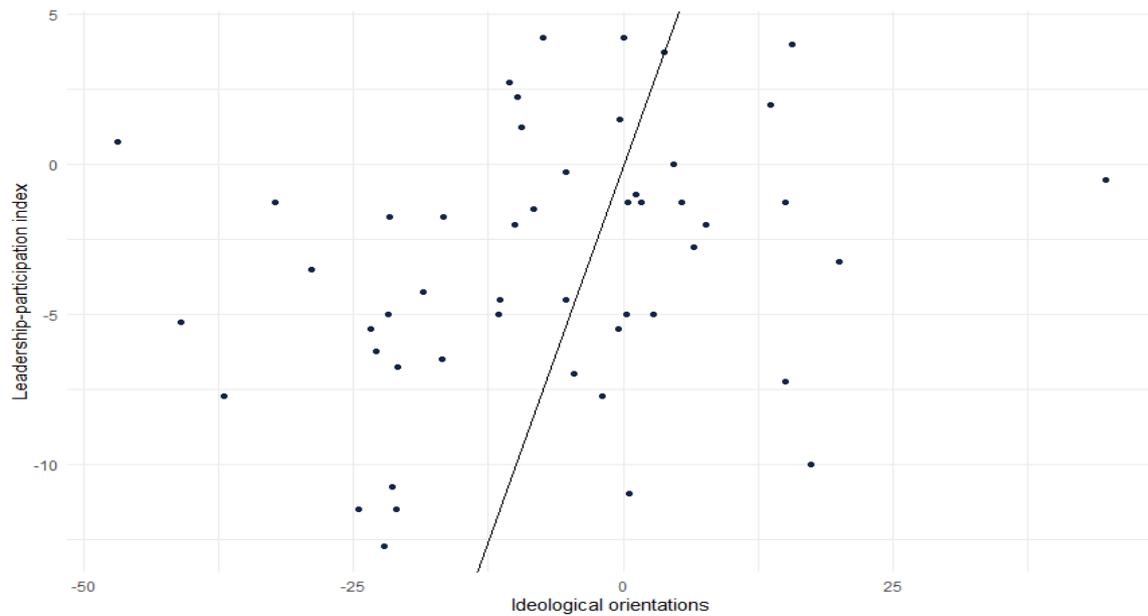


Figure 5: leadership-participation index and ideology of party



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