

The Promises of Big Data for Parliamentary Research and Evidence-Based Policy Making

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Open Data and Parliaments

Parliaments around the world experienced a ‘transparency rush’

Opened up large & diversified data via open data portals and APIs

Recent study showed that among 29 parliaments in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, **86.2 % had open data policy**

Unique opportunity for researchers to tackle old and new questions based on big data and data science methods

But major challenges remain

- **Parliamentary website quality**
- **Cross-country data comparison**



Plenarsitzungen

Der Nationalrat diskutiert in Plenarsitzungen unter anderem über Gesetzesinitiativen und kann dazu Beschlüsse fassen.

Der Bundesrat befasst sich in seinen Plenarsitzungen mit den Beschlüssen des Nationalrats, kann aber auch eigene Gesetzesinitiativen einbringen.

[DETAILS >](#)

Ausschüsse

In den Ausschüssen des Nationalrats und des Bundesrats finden die Vorbereitungen zu Verhandlungsgegenständen, Aussprachen mit Regierungsmitgliedern und Hearings mit Expert:innen statt.

Neben den Fachausschüssen gibt es Unterausschüsse, Untersuchungsausschüsse, besondere Ausschüsse und den Ständigen Gemeinsamen Ausschuss des Nationalrats und des Bundesrats.

[DETAILS >](#)



Research Example: Legislative Dataset (*LegDat*)

Global Corruption Observatory (GCO)

Aim: to collect all legislative data available on national parliamentary websites

So far collected:

300,000+ bills

50,000+ laws

Together with 65 legislative variables:

Text of law

initiator of law (+ party affiliation)

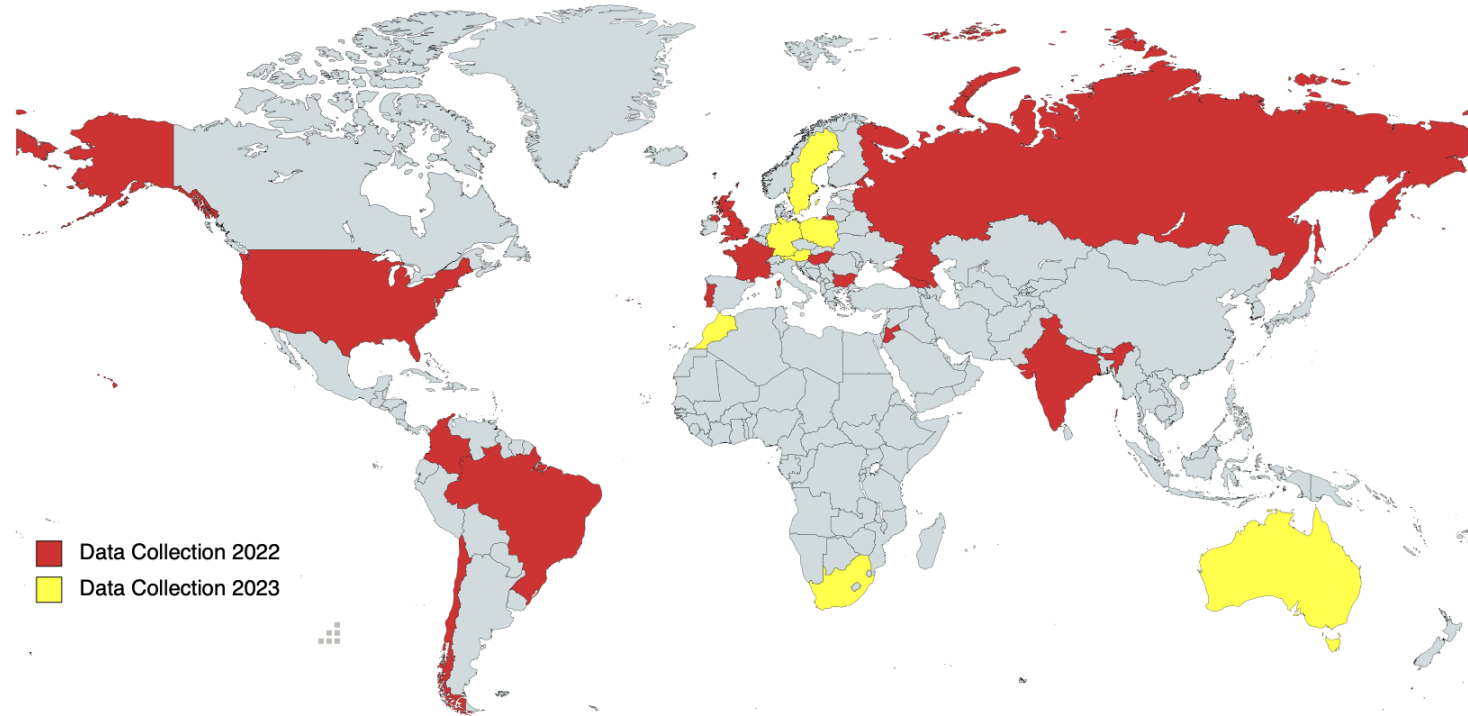
Time spent in parliament

Number/ names of committees involved

Final voting records

Date and number of modifications

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LegDat showcase 1

Number of bills passed by year

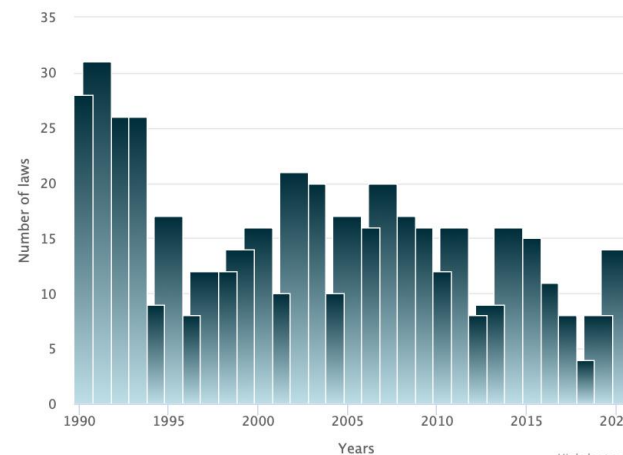
% laws linked to specific economic sector:

- We rely on text of laws
- Unique text-as-data algorithm
- Algorithm matches laws to specific economic sectors

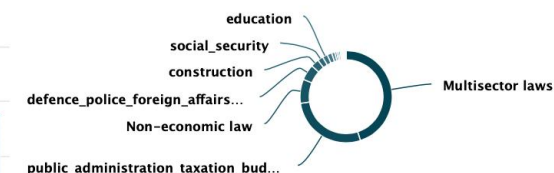
Corruption indicators over time:

- Law size/omnibus legislation
- Extraordinary procedures
- Initiator of legislation
- Modifications of laws

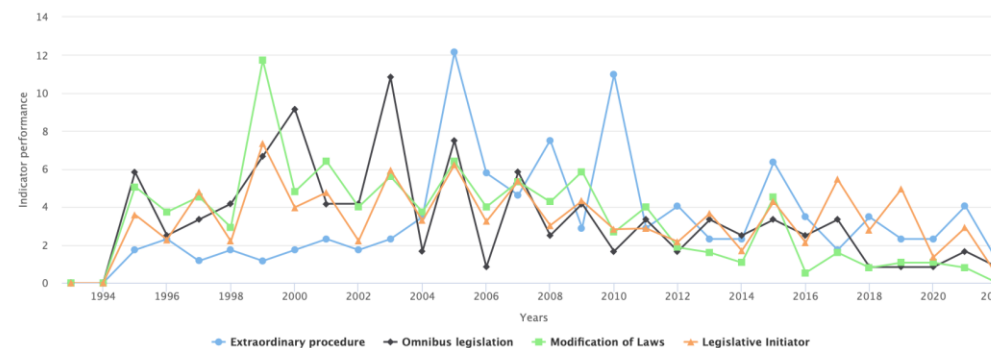
Number of laws over the years



Sector-wise distribution of laws



Time series graph with all indicators over years



LegDat showcase 2

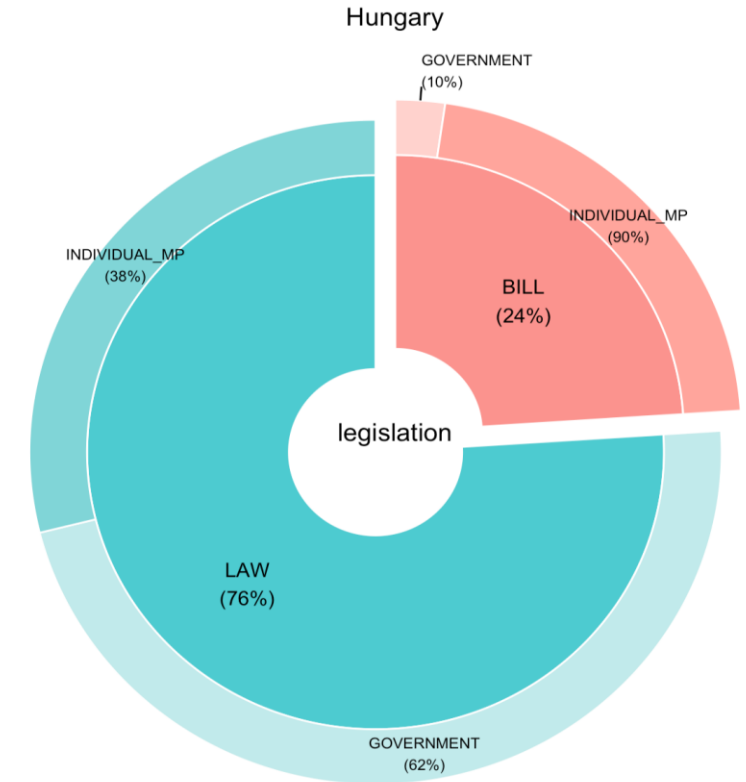
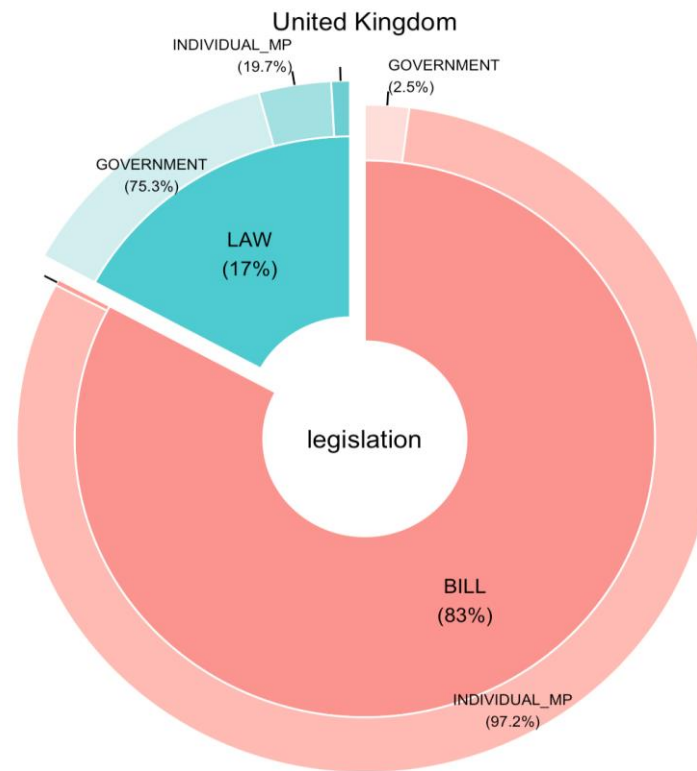
Who initiates legislation?

How many bills are enacted?

Clear difference between the UK and Hungary

While less than 20% of all bills in the UK become law, more than 75% of bills are enacted in Hungary

Does such differences in 'legislative activism' point at differences in legislative quality?



Policy issue: Legislative Unpredictability

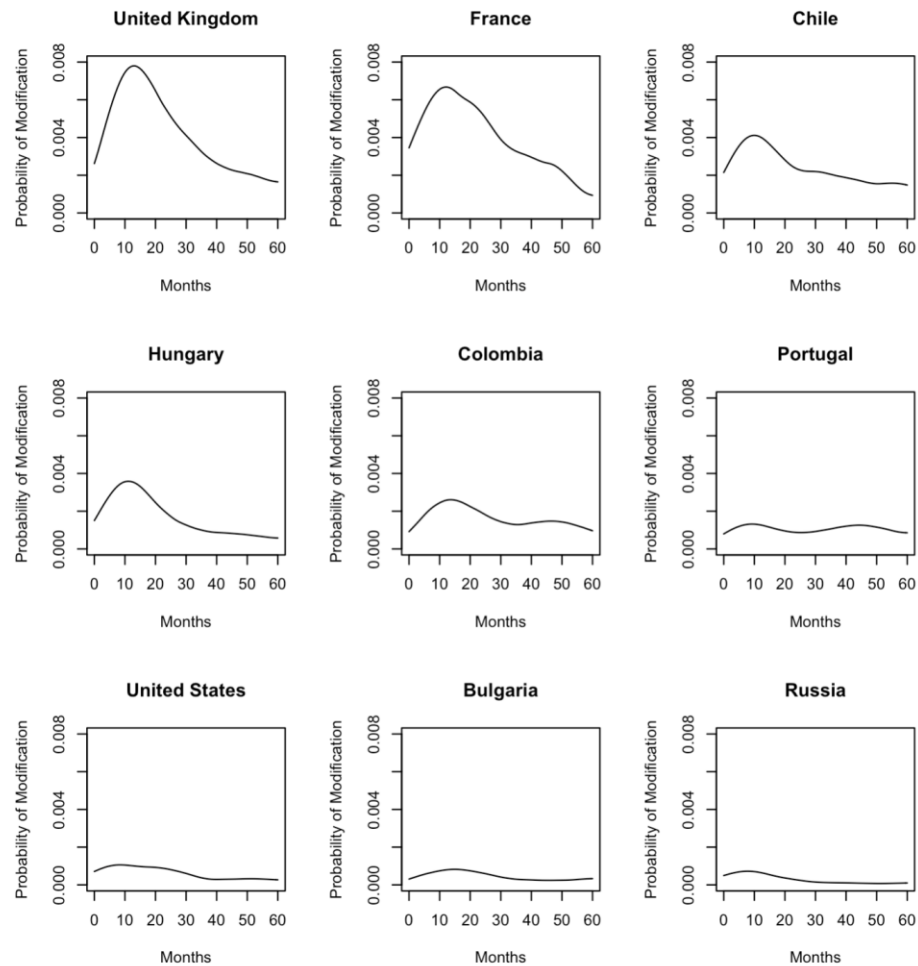
Laws need to change to account for societal changes and policy issues

But frequent changes increases uncertainty for households and businesses

Legislative predictability:

Law making based on minimal modifications over a short period of time

Unpredictability across countries highest in first 20 months (2000-2020)



Impact assessments as a policy solution?

Stable and predictable legislation requires high-quality laws that escapes ‘politicisation’

Politicisation of law-making includes:

- Conflicts between political and administrative levels
- Political favouritism and special interest politics
- Political uncertainty (changes in government)

Impact assessments are a possible tool to limit negative effects of politicisation

If a law went through an impact assessment, can this reduce the risk of modifications and increase legislative predictability?

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Can impact assessments tame legislative drift? Event history analysis of modifications of laws across Europe

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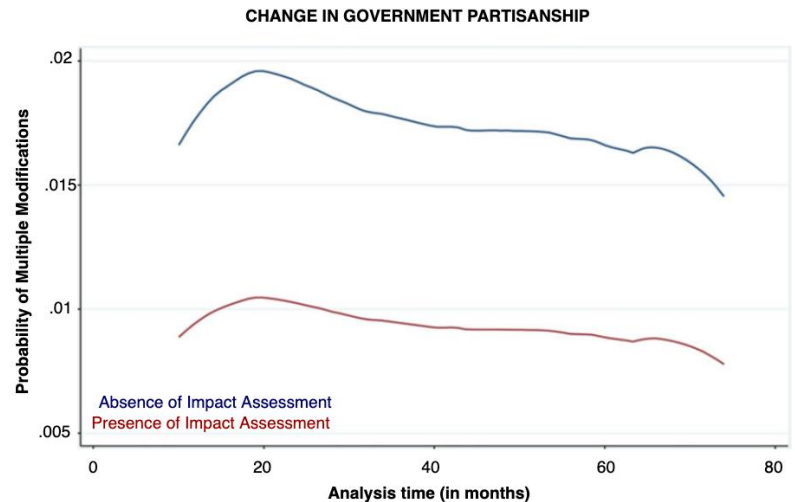
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Abstract

Laws should endure and change only if assumed benefits don't materialize over time. Yet frequent modifications of laws shortly after their enactment distort this compromise between stability and change. While, Impact Assessments (IAs) are designed to improve the quality of legislation, we know little about IAs' impact on legal stability post-enactment. We fill this gap by analysing whether the ex-ante application of IAs influences the incidence and frequency of legal modifications. The analysis is based on a complete dataset of more than 2500 laws in France, Hungary, Italy, and the UK between 2006 and 2012. We apply a comparative event history analysis to account for both first and subsequent modifications. We find across-the-board that IAs are associated with legal stability. IAs are predicted to have the largest effect when political power changes both in terms of seat shares and party ideology, suggesting that IAs can, to some degree, tame legislative drift.

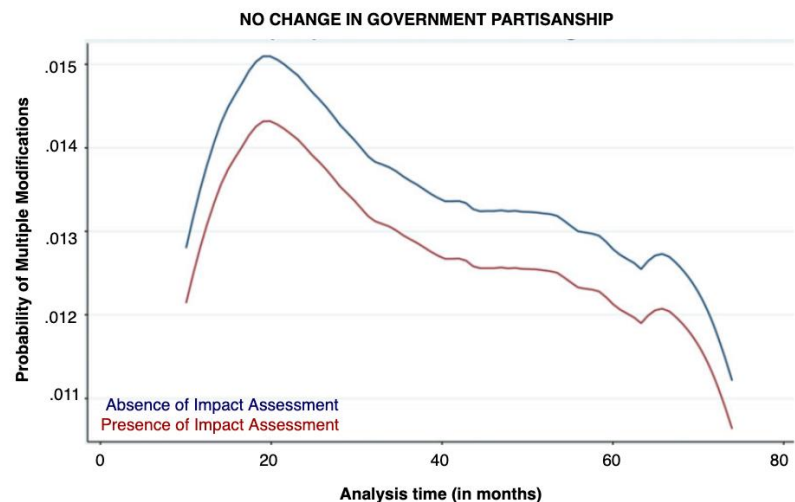
Effect of IA on Legislative Predictability



We found a statistically significant, positive effect of IAs on legislative predictability:

- IAs reduce risk of first modification by **32-42%**
- IAs reduce risk of multiple modifications by **38-49%**

Positive effect of IAs particularly strong when partisanship in government changes (upper graphs)



Change in government usually a source of high legislative instability.

IAs can reduce this instability and increase legislative predictability across time

Conclusion

1. Parliaments should be at the forefront of legislative open data initiatives

Open data quality still varies significantly across the world

Austria's ***Digitales Parlament*** a role model for open data access

Researchers dependent on high quality, open data initiatives

2. LegDat Dataset and the Global Corruption Observatory

Currently at an early stage of the project (so far **300.000+ bills** collected)

Long term research endeavour with many more data updates to come

Dedicated website (w/ open data) to be launched in Fall/Winter 2023

3. Significant potential for research-policy collaboration in Austria and beyond

Together we can **understand global legislative trends & draw lessons for national context**

Vielen Dank!

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