Political Prowess or "Lady Luck"? Evaluating Chief Executives' Legislative Success Rates

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How successful should we expect chief executives to be in their relationships with the legislature? Answering this question is key to making judgments about the political prowess and lawmaking abilities of particular rulers. I introduce a standard to compare the actual performances of chief executives around the world based on the notion that variations in chief executives' legislative success rates stem from the unpredictability of legislators' behavior. The results underscore the role of uncertainty in statutory policymaking: on average, chief executives' performances are not much different from what should be expected if legislators flip coins to decide how to respond to their proposals. I also analyze the individual performance of chief executives statistically. The findings suggest that the standard by which we should judge the performance of chief executives cannot be conceived in isolation of the conditions under which they operate. So, for example, to be deemed as successful, a typical Westminster-style prime minister should be able to obtain passage of almost all of her pieces of legislation. In contrast, if a chief executive operating in a separation-of-powers system, with a highly fragmented legislature, secures passage for more than two-thirds of her proposals, she can be considered a very successful *lawmaker.*

More than three decades ago Samuel P. Huntington argued that Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union belonged to the same category of political systems. His landmark expression was that in "... all three systems the government *governs* ..." What he meant was that in these countries, the Cabinet, the President or the Politburo could successfully enact policy changes (1968, 1).

This concern with *governance* or *governability* has received considerable attention during the past three decades. Recent contributions have focused on how different political institutions affect the policymaking process. In particular, arrangements determining the distribution of power among the branches of government (separation of powers) are regarded as structural factors that shape the policy makers' incentives, and in turn, affect policy outcomes. However, not all policy changes are created equal; rather there are multiple sources of law. Of special interest is the capacity of chief executives to enact policy by winning legislative majorities for statutes. A very promising line of research on presidential "lawmaking," and executive decree authority that centers on the conditions under which presidents resort to extraordinary (nonstatutory) rather than ordinary (statutory) means of legislative initiative has developed (Amorim Neto, Cox and McCubbins 2003; Negretto 2004; Pereira, Power, and Rennó 2005). However, it is striking how much remains unknown about the differential abilities of chief executive's to create statute law. In other words, we still know very little about the extent to which chief executives can produce policy changes through acts of government that carry the force of law.

Two major limitations have affected the comparative study of statutory implementation of policies by chief executives. First, truly cross-national research on this topic has been sparse. Most comparative research on this topic is drawn from either case studies of particular acts of government, or from country studies. For example, Calvo (2007) and Alemán and Calvo (2006) have recently analyzed how institutional and contextual factors explain the approval of presidential initiatives in Argentina. Jones (1995) and Kellam (2006) provide some cross-national evidence from Latin American countries. However, in the former, the focus is more on executive-legislative conflict rather than on the ability of chief executives to pass their policy agendas through the legislature, while the

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latter concentrates in the stability of multiparty presidential coalitions in the legislature.

The second limitation has been the lack of an adequate standard to evaluate the relative performance of chief executives. Statements such as "chancellor *x* is an effective ruler" or "president *y* is ineffective" are pervasive in both the scholarly and nonscholarly literatures. However, in order to make an appropriate judgment about "how well" or "how bad" a chief executive is performing as a lawmaker, one should have some reasonable *expectation* about how that particular chief executive should be doing. Moreover, such an expectation should be grounded not only on the individual abilities of a given chief executive, but also on the particular environment under which she operates.

I fill this gap in the literature with the introduction of a standard to compare the actual performances of chief executives around the world. This standard is based on the notion that legislative defeats are associated with the unpredictability of legislators' voting behavior. The results underscore the role of uncertainty in statutory policymaking: on average, chief executives' performances are not much different from what should be expected if legislators flip coins to decide how to respond to their proposals. I then analyze the individual performance of chief executives vis-á-vis the uncertainty-based benchmark using a fixed-effects estimator and multivariate regression. The results allow us to properly evaluate the individual performance of particular chief executives. The main finding confirms the idea that the standards by which we should judge the performance of chief executives cannot be conceived in isolation of the conditions under which they operate. For example, my results suggest that to be deemed as *successful*, a typical Westminster-style prime minister should be able to obtain passage of almost all of her proposals. In contrast, if a chief executive operating in a separation-of-powers system with a highly fragmented legislature secures passage for more than two-thirds of her proposals, she can be considered a very *successful* lawmaker.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the second section, I discuss the role of uncertainty in statutory policymaking and introduce my uncertainty-based benchmark. In the third section, I present my main empirical results. Conclusions follow.

Statutory Policymaking

In most contemporary democracies chief executives play a dominant role in the law-making process. They usually introduce a significant proportion of bills, and in some countries, chief executives even have the monopoly of legislative initiative. Given their proposal powers, chief executives should be in control of the policy process.

However, in practice, chief executives experience numerous legislative defeats. Figure 1 shows the distribution of *box scores* in a sample comprising 39 countries in Western/Eastern Europe, North and Latin America, South/East Asia, and the Middle East for the period 1946-2000.[1] The box score is measured as the number of chief executive's proposals approved in the lower house of the national legislature, divided by the total number of proposals introduced by the chief executive.[2] The measure is analogous to a batting average—number of hits as a proportion of times at bat.[3]

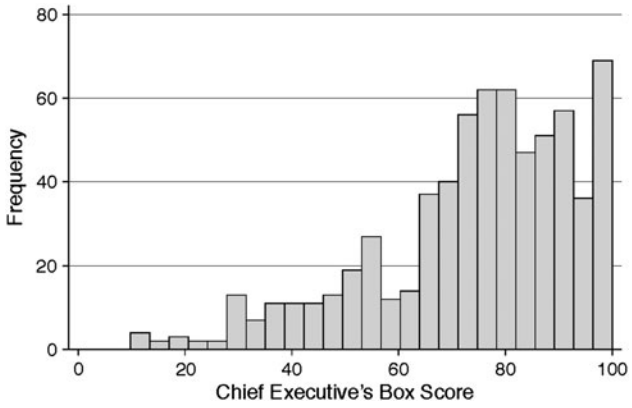
The vertical axis shows frequencies rather than proportions. On average, chief executives get 74.2% of their proposals approved by the lower house of their respective national legislatures. Based on this sample, we can be 99% confident that the population mean lies somewhere in the interval from 72.3% to 76.1%. The lowest box scores correspond to Brazil in 1954/55 (9.8%), followed by those for Ecuador in 1986 (10.7%) and for Costa Rica in 1989 (11.6%).

[1]The data set consists of 623 country-year observations. Information about the composition of the sample is summarized in Appendix A. The sources from which the data were obtained are listed in Appendix B. In several instances, the data were reported in legislative terms, so to create annual observations, I apportioned longer periods to years taking as the criterion the state of affairs as of December 31 of each year.

[2]Another measure of legislative achievements commonly used in the literature is the party roll rate. This indicator is calculated as the number or proportion of times the government is unable to prevent the passage of a bill its members oppose, reflecting the government's control of the agenda (Cox and McCubbins 2005). If the government controls the agenda, then it should be able to "veto" bills it dislikes and should thus never (or rarely) suffer rolls (passage of bills that a majority of its members oppose). This measure contrasts with the box score in that it does not count the failure to pass a bill that the government likes as a roll. As Cox and McCubbins note, such defeats do not suggest that the government cannot control the agenda; they rather reflect its inability to muster sufficient votes on the floor.

[3]The reliability and validity of box scores have been put into question in the United States. The reason is the ambiguity in identifying actual legislative proposals by the president (i.e., the "denominator" problem). This criticism, though, is germane to the United States' separation of powers system. Unlike in the United States—where the president's legislative program has no constitutional or statutory basis—in most countries chief executives formally introduce a significant proportion of bills. Given the controversy surrounding the "correct" box score for the United States' president, I decided to leave this country out of the sample. None of the patterns that I find in the data are sensitive to the exclusion of this case.

FIGURE 1 **Distribution of chief executives' box scores (in country-years)**



At the other end of the distribution, there are 11 observations where the chief executive obtained approval for a 100% of its bills: Canada (1955), Bangladesh (1991–99) and Ireland (1991).[4]

The Unpredictability of Cross-Pressured Legislators

As the data presented in Figure 1 show, the approval rates of executive-initiated bills varies considerably across countries and through time within these countries. This finding begs the following questions: What accounts for the variation in the passage rate of chief executives' legislative proposals? Why are these box scores very high in some instances while they are modest in others?

The existing literature suggests that chief executives' lawmaking abilities originate in their partisan support and their agenda-setting powers. While I agree that both constitutional structures and partisan configurations affect statutory policymaking, I differ from these traditional views in one important way. Specifically, I argue that uncertainty about legislators' voting behavior is the key factor that shapes the capacity of chief executives to successfully enact policy changes through acts of government that carry the force of law by winning legislative majorities.

The importance of this distinction can be emphasized by recalling that the agenda-setter model—the cornerstone of most studies of executive-legislative relations—predicts that proposers should never be defeated. In the case of parliamentary regimes, the conventional wisdom often assumes that once a government is formed, the chief executive will always be able to implement its preferred policies. In the case of presidentialism, most models are extensions of the theory of voting in legislatures and focus mostly on ways in which presidents can successfully pass their policy proposals. For example, in Alesina and Rosenthal (1995), government proposals may be amended by the legislature under open rule, so the final bill may be the ideal point of the median legislator, or just a weighted average of the ideal points of the executive and the legislature. Still, as Heller (2001) puts it, governments who "propose carefully should never be rolled" (2001, 790) and bills should not be amended in such a way that the government is made worse off compared to not sending any bill at all. Similarly, in Groseclose and Snyder's (1996) model, there are no equilibria in which the status-quo policy prevails.[5]

The main problem with these traditional accounts is the "Hicks paradox," which holds that bargaining failures like strikes, wars, vetoes, or legislative defeats are irrational in a setting of complete and perfect information (Cameron 2000). Namely, if a chief executive has complete information, then she can strategically adjust for changes in proposal power or legislative control. And, per the *law of anticipated reactions*, legislative passage rates

[4]Another criticism directed at the box score is that the equal weighting of all executive-initiated bills may not distinguish the important from the trivial. This shortcoming is common to most of the measures used in existing studies. In all likelihood, the primary reason scholars have ignored the problem is the difficulty of measuring the content of legislation quantitatively. The best we can do is to obtain, for some countries, a subset of bills that are classified by country experts as "relevant" in contrast to "irrelevant" legislation. However, one problem with this approach is that the criteria for selection of "significant" or "substantive" initiatives have an important ingredient of subjectivity that can undermine the results of any analysis for a reader who does not share the same criteria. In consequence, there is not much cross-country evidence on this respect. Still, some case studies do exist. Barrett (2005), for example, examines 233 significant bills to measure presidential success in the United States (1977–96) and finds that presidents receive most of what they want approximately 69% of the time. Adler and Wilkerson (2005) focus on the 102nd session of the U.S. House of Representatives and find that different types of legislation (defined by the proposal's urgency and importance) are treated differently in the legislative process.

[5]An alternative argument is that chief executives may choose a strategy of "triangulation," positioning themselves between their own party and the opposition forces in the legislature to build popularity (Groseclose and McCarty 2001; Ingberman and Yao 1991; Matthews 1989). This strategy, however, may only be palatable for a chief executive as long as there are opposition forces in the legislature that need to be exposed in front of the general public: if the legislature is seen as a natural extension of executive power, it may not be a good idea for her to force defeats too frequently.

should always be 100%. However, as Figure 1 shows, it seems utterly unrealistic to expect chief executives to succeed all the time.

These expectations would change radically if we believe that variations in legislative passage rates are the consequences of the unpredictability of legislators' voting patterns. Different views, stressing the role of incomplete information, are proposed in the literature. Cameron (2000) relies on incomplete information to explain the existence of bargaining failures across the branches of government in the United States. Diermeier and Vlaicu (2007) model the legislative process as a multiperiod bargaining game under uncertainty to rationalize the fact that legislative success rates of chief executives are lower in presidential democracies than in parliamentary ones. They argue that bills proposed to the legislature are more likely to be accepted when legislators expect that failing to do so would lead to the collapse of the government.

My emphasis on the unpredictability of legislators' voting patterns deflects the inadequacy of traditional models of executive-legislative relations in a different way. I draw on Saiegh (2009), where I develop a general theory of statutory policymaking. I assert that incomplete information originates in the existence of *cross-pressured* legislators. In particular, I assume that in deciding how to vote, legislators take into account a variety of influences, including their personal values, announced positions, the views of their constituents, and the preferences of their party leadership. If these pressures are not aligned, then legislators will be cross-pressured, and thus, will not always be party loyalists.

Representing uncertainty in this manner has a significant implication for the study of statutory policymaking. It highlights that whenever legislators face conflicting influences, chief executives would be unable to use partisan identities to make reliable assessments of how these legislators would cast their votes. More importantly, this view elucidates the empirical puzzle posed by chief executives' legislative defeats. Even if chief executives can observe the partisan distribution of the legislature, they may still have difficulty in identifying legislators' policy preferences. Given their prior beliefs about the latter distribution, chief executives may send a proposal to the legislature. Yet, they may lose such legislative gambit by miscalculating their support.[6]

This conception of the legislative process offers several empirical implications. If a legislator's partisan identity is a strong predictor of her ideal policies, then a chief executive may be able to calculate more accurately how she will cast her votes. In contrast, if partisanship is weakly correlated with legislators' voting behavior, then, chief executives will make more mistakes. Therefore, a systematic relationship between a set of factors that generate more unpredictability and the passage rates of executive-initiated legislation should exist.

Statutory Policymaking under Uncertainty

The arguments presented above support the idea that differences in legislative passage rates stem from the unpredictability of legislators' behavior. Otherwise, once again, a chief executive would always be able to tailor the content of legislation to accommodate the policy preferences of a majority of legislators and avoid being defeated (i.e., calculate *ex-ante* an optimal policy proposal).

Therefore an empirical evaluation of chief executives' statutory performance must necessarily take the unpredictability of legislators' behavior into account. Namely, any judgment of how well a chief executive is doing as a lawmaker, depends on how well one *expects* her to do in a world fraught with uncertainty. However, it is not clear how this expectation should be formed. Following Hammond and Fraser (1983, 1984a, 1984b), I examine this issue statistically and represent an extremely uncertain world as one in which legislative outcomes are decided by chance.[7]

Suppose that each member of the legislature decides her vote by flipping an unbiased coin (i.e., the probability of a "yes" vote by any legislator is 0.5). In this fully uncertain world, roughly half the time a majority of legislators will vote with the chief executive and half the time a majority will vote against her; giving her an expected passage rate of 50% (Hammond and Fraser 1984b).

While this representation of uncertainty yields passage rates below 100%, it is still too unrealistic to square with the empirical patterns presented in Figure 1. A somewhat less uncertain situation is one in which legislators' preferences can be approximated by their partisan affiliations. One way to incorporate uncertainty in such a world is to assume that a majority of the chief executive's copartisans always have preferences identical to hers, and that this party majority will vote yes or no according to her wishes.

[6]For a formal presentation of this argument, see Saiegh (2009).

[7]Unlike the work of Hammond and Fraser, though, which focuses exclusively on the case of the United States, I explore the consequences of the unpredictability of legislators' behavior for legislative passage rates in a cross-national setting.

Notice, though, that just because a chief executive can count on the support of a majority of her party on a vote does not mean that she will actually win the vote. The outcome will depend on the number and size of legislative parties; the larger the chief executive's party, the greater the probability that a majority of her party will be on the winning side. Once again, following Hammond and Fraser (1983), I identify this representation of the legislative process as the *party augmented* model of uncertainty.

The probability that a majority of the chief executive's party, and therefore the chief executive, will be on the winning side of a roll call is again calculated using the assumption that legislators vote by flipping unbiased coins. To get an intuitive idea of how it works, consider the following thought experiment (Hammond and Fraser 1983). Suppose that the chief executive faces a three-member legislature (composed of legislators A, B, and C) operating under majority rule. Say that the chief executive belongs to the same party as legislator A. Each legislator flips an unbiased coin to decide her vote, so the probability that she will vote yes is $\frac{1}{2}$. There are eight possible voting combinations. In six of them, the position of A prevails.[8] Therefore, the probability that the chief executive will be on the "winning side" of a vote is $6 \times \frac{1}{8} = \frac{3}{4}$, or 75%. Similarly, if we restrict our attention to those situations in which the chief executive likes the proposal, she will be on the "winning side" of a vote three times out of four, or 75% of the time.[9]

[8]When A likes the proposal, there are three events in which the chief executive is on the winning side $\{AB, AC, ABC\}$ (i.e., the proposal is passed); and when A dislikes the proposal there are three events in which she votes against it along with at least somebody else $\{0, B, C\}$ (and the proposal is killed).

[9]More realistic models designed to accommodate different configurations of legislators' preferences and seat distributions (and departures from equiprobability) can yield predictions that are very similar to the ones obtained from this model. Following Barry (1980), consider a legislature composed of three parties, with weights of three, two, and two votes, and where a majority of five out of seven votes is needed for the passage of a measure. Call the player with three votes player A and the other two players B and C. Assume also that the chief executive belongs to the party A. Therefore, her legislative contingent controls 42.8% of the seats in the legislature. Suppose that there is a random association between A's preferences and those of B and C, but that B and C always disagree (i.e., the chief executive faces a divided opposition). If this is the case, then the chief executive will always win. Suppose now that the preferences of B and C are associated at random with each other (and also with A's preferences). The outcome in this case will be a box score of $\frac{7}{8}$ for the chief executive. Finally, suppose that B and C always agree (i.e., the chief executive faces a united opposition). In this case, the chief executive will secure a victory $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time.

The logic behind the *party augmented* model does not change if more structure is added to the representation of the legislative process (cf. Hammond and Fraser 1984). Assume that executive-initiated bills must be considered two separate times, once in committee and once on the floor. At each stage, each legislator makes a decision by flipping a coin. While a chief executive's proposal can be referred to committees that are likely to vary in their size and partisan composition, the norm that most legislatures use to assign members to committees states that the composition of each committee shall proportionally reflect the partisan composition of the body as a whole. Therefore, even though party ratios may vary somewhat from committee to committee, the effects of these differing ratios on expected passage rates would counterbalance each other almost exactly. In consequence, the average expected passage rate in a legislature's committee would be almost exactly equal to the expected success rate on the floor. If the decisions made at each stage are statistically independent of each other, then the overall passage rate is just the product of the probabilities of passage at each point (Hammond and Fraser 1984). Decisions at each stage in the legislative process, though, may not be independent of each other (Cox and McCubbins 2005). For example, if some executive-initiated proposals never make it out of committee, but every bill that reaches the floor is subsequently enacted, then the calculation of a chief executive's legislative passage rate is the same as before (i.e., the *party augmented* model with a single decision instance).

Finally, we can move back to the world of complete certainty. In this case, we should assume that members of the chief executive's party will always vote in favor of her proposals, while members of the opposition will always vote against them. As noted above, per the *law of anticipated reactions*, if a chief executive has complete information, then she can strategically adjust for changes in legislative control. Therefore, in such a simple world, passage rates would be unrelated to the number of seats held by the chief executive's copartisans in the legislature.[10]

[10]Another way to think about the issue is to consider a situation with multiple progovernment parties, multiple opposition parties, and both committed and uncommitted legislators in the legislature. Hence, a chief executive will always be able to count with the votes of a group of "core" supporters and will never be able to muster support from "core" antagonists, yet she may also be able to collect votes from "uncommitted" progrovernment and opposition legislators. In this case, the probability that a chief executive will be on the winning side of a roll call could be calculated using the assumption that only the uncommitted legislators vote by flipping unbiased coins.

Empirical Results

I am now ready to compare the actual performance of chief executives around the world with their expected performance in situations where legislators' preferences cannot be fully predicted in advance. In particular, I will compare the data presented in the previous section with the predictions coming out of the *party augmented* model.

To explore the relationship between party size and a chief executive's expected win rate, I will use the technology of the binomial distribution and Monte Carlo simulations. The implementation is quite straightforward. In any given roll call, each individual legislator can either vote "yes" or "no." Following the convention, I call one of the two possible results a *success* (S) and the other a *failure* (F). Given this particular experiment has only two outcomes, let p denote the probability of success in such experiment and let $q = 1 - p$ denote the probability of failure (in this case, $p = .5$). Suppose now that the experiment is repeated and the trials are independent. In this case, I am interested in how many "yes" votes should be expected from the members of a party of size n. The probability of exactly k successes is given by: $\binom{n}{k} p^k q^{n-k}$. Notice that the number of "yes" votes from a party in a series of coin flip roll calls will be binomially distributed. Therefore, I can simulate the results of a roll call by generating a series of binomially distributed random numbers.

Given a party size, these random numbers will produce a distribution of yes votes which approximates the binomial distribution. For each simulated roll call a series of random numbers is produced, one for each party, and each of these random numbers represent the number of yes votes from each of these parties. Using these simulated roll calls, I can then examine whether a majority of the chief executive's party is on the winning side or not. If a majority of the chief executive's party is on the winning side, I count the roll call as a "win" for her; if a majority of her party is on the losing side, it is counted as a loss (Hammond and Fraser 1983).[11]

I simulated 5,000 roll calls for a 100-member legislature, using different sizes for the chief executive's party as inputs. So, for example, in a legislature where the party of the chief executive had 45 seats and the opposition controlled the remaining 55 seats, the chief executive "won" 3,705 of the roll calls, yielding an expected success rate of 74.1%. The second column in Table 1 shows the simulated passage rates for the different sizes of the chief executive's party. As expected, a chief executive's passage rate should be somewhere between 50 and 100%. Note that his expected rate does not drop below 50%. This is a logical consequence of equating a chief executive's position with that of a majority of his party in the legislature (Hammond and Fraser 1983).[12]

Armed with these numbers I can now evaluate the actual performance of chief executives around the world. To carry out the comparison, I classify the observations according to the share of seats held by the party of the chief executive (prime minister or president). The variable ranges from no seats at all (these are cases of caretaker governments, such as the one in place in Italy in 1995) to 78% (in Canada between 1958 and 1961). I then calculate the average share of seats controlled by a chief executive's copartisans and the corresponding average passage rate. So, for example, the actual average passage rate for a chief executive whose party controls, on average, 45% of the seats in the legislature amounts to 75%.

As the third column in Table 1 indicates, the actual passage rates are remarkably close to what is expected in a world where legislators' preferences cannot be fully predicted despite their partisan identities. These results, thus, are *prima facie* evidence that any sensible model of executive-legislative relations should incorporate incomplete information as part of the analysis. More importantly, the findings presented in Table 1 indicate that the *party augmented* model of uncertainty constitutes a useful benchmark to evaluate the actual statutory performance of chief executives.[13]

[11]If the chief executive's party is evenly split on a simulated roll call, I count it as a loss.

[12]As noted above, if legislation must be considered by committees that have a partisan composition similar to the parent chamber, and the decisions made at each stage are statistically independent of each other, then the overall passage rate is just the product of the probabilities of passage at each point. To calculate these probabilities one needs only to compute the square of the simulated passage rates in column two. So, if the party of the chief executive has 45 seats and the opposition controls the remaining 55, then the expected success rate would be 54.9 %.

[13]The chance models rest on the idea that legislative decisions are made "as if" they were like experiments in coin tossing, each legislator tossing a coin to decide whether to vote for or against an executive-initiated proposal. This is obviously an inadequate description of legislative behavior. However, the unrealism of these coin-tossing models do not make the results based on them inadequate, because all models use more or less unrealistic simplifying assumptions (Poole and Rosenthal 1987).

TABLE 1 **Simulated and Actual Passage Rates**

Seats	Simulated Values[a] Mean	Actual Values Mean	Std. Dev.	Obs.[b]
5	57.56	50.67	19.6	20
10	61.06	58.92	18.9	52
15	63.44	64.56	18.0	49
20	66.48	66.91	18.1	22
25	66.9	68.63	17.1	47
30	69.12	65.57	20.2	93
35	70.2	66.75	19.3	80
40	71.26	70.83	16.8	76
45	74.1	75.07	16.2	204
50	75.62	78.19	16.7	284
55	76.26	82.42	16.8	174
60	79.74	84.91	14.2	64
65	80.54	82.94	18.8	33
70	81.8	89.66	14.8	32
75	82.42	87.75	17.7	15
80	85.8	n/d	n/d	n/d
85	87.6	n/d	n/d	n/d
90	90.22	n/d	n/d	n/d
95	92.28	n/d	n/d	n/d
100	100	n/d	n/d	n/d

[a]These values were generated by simulating five thousand roll calls for a 100-member legislature, using different sizes for the chief executive's party as inputs.
[b]I used the full sample to calculate the average share of seats controlled by a chief executive's copartisans in multiples of 5 and 10 seats, respectively. Therefore, the number of observations reported in this Table doubles the sample size.

Statutory Performance of Individual Chief Executives

The findings presented in Table 1 suggest the probability that the chief executive's party will be on the winning side depends on the number and size of legislative parties. They also indicate that, on average, chief executives' performances are not much different from what should be expected if legislators flip coins to decide how to respond to their proposals. However, these similarities are based on a comparison of averages, which masks the variation between the actual and the expected passage rates of individual chief executives.

For example, the share of seats held by the president's copartisans in Ecuador (1990–91) and Brazil (1956–57) is similar to the share of seats held by the prime minister's party in Belgium (1995–96) and West Germany (1949–52). However, these chief executives exhibit radically different box scores. While Ecuador's Rodrigo Borja and Brazil's Juscelino Kubitschek obtained passage of less than 30% of their initiatives, Belgium's Jean-Luc Dehaene and Germany's Konrad Adenauer received more than two-thirds of their proposals approved by their respective legislatures.

To evaluate the individual performance of chief executives vis-á-vis the uncertainty-based benchmark, I estimate a statistical model with individual chief executives' box scores as my dependent variable and the partisan distribution of seats in the legislature as the basic explanatory variable of interest.[14] My dependent variable, BOX_{ijt}, is the proportion of bills initiated by chief executive j and approved by the legislature of her respective country i in period t. Since this variable takes values between zero and one, a standard OLS regression is not appropriate because its prediction equation will not be constrained between such values. To address this issue, I perform a logit transformation of the dependent variable, such that: $LNBOX = ln(\frac{BOX_{ijt}}{1-BOX_{ijt}})$, and then run an OLS regression using data on seat shares.[15] Specifically, to account for the effect of the share of seats held by a particular chief executive's copartisans, I use the variable $DIFSIZE_{ijt}$. It is constructed in the following way: $DIFSIZE_{ijt} = AVSIZE_i - SIZE_{ijt}$, where $AVSIZE_i$ measures the average number of seats held by the party of the chief executive in country i for all the chief executives in all the periods in the sample, and $SIZE_{ijt}$ is the actual share of seats controlled by the party of chief executive j in country i at time t.[16] The model specification is thus:

$$LNBOX_{ijt} = \sum_{i=1}^{I} \alpha_i COUNTRY_i + \beta' DIFSIZE_{ijt}$$

where I is an index identifying each country and the $\alpha_i s$ are the country specific constants.

The use of a fixed-effects estimator has a number of advantages. Recent contributions suggest that country-specific factors such as sociopolitical heterogeneity,

[14]Due to data limitations regarding the distribution of seats of the chief executive's party for some of the observations, the composition of the sample that I use to estimate the model is slightly different than the one in Appendix A.

[15]This specification corresponds to the chance models discussed above, as my dependent variable, the box score, can also be interpreted as a simple sampling problem from a Bernoulli distribution.

[16]For those observations in which there was more than one chief executive in charge—due to elections, or a change in government—I calculated the support differential as a weighted average between the seats held by the parties of the different office holders.

culture, and history may also have an impact on executive-legislative relations. Therefore, any inferences on the coefficient of my main explanatory variable (seat share) will be biased if it is correlated with time-invariant unobserved country heterogeneity. It is not just cultural/historical factors that can be controlled for in this way, however. Any (approximately) time-invariant factor will automatically be part of the country-specific effect and will therefore be controlled for (for example, see Neumayer 2003).

Another important advantage is that fixed-effects estimation allows us to pool passage rate data obtained from very different national sources. Differences in definition and source of data imply that passage rates for different countries may not be comparable. However, if the error of measurement in the data is systematically related to the country, but does not change much over time, then this measurement error is also taken into account.

Technical considerations aside, good substantive reasons exist to estimate the model using country fixed effects. First, if the country effects are statistically significant, I can also exploit the cross-country differences to make inferences about how different environments affect chief executives' legislative capacity regardless of their individual characteristics. Second, once I take into account the conditions in a particular country, I can identify those individual chief executives who do better or worse than the country fixed effects and the distribution of seats in the legislature would suggest (i.e., the ''overachievers'' and ''underachievers''). Using a sports analogy, a good judgment about how good a player is will depend not only on her individual characteristics, but also on those of both her team, and the league in which the team competes. These estimates will thus give us a good grip of the elusive concept of legislative *success*, as we can distinguish the ''quality'' of a given league (i.e., the country), a certain team (i.e., the size of the chief executive's party) and a particular player (i.e., a chief executive). In other words, a very good player (i.e., a successful chief executive) is one who excels above the standards of her league and her team.

The results of my fixed-effects estimation are presented in Table 2. The first thing to notice is that passage rates are indeed correlated with the number of seats held by the chief executive's co-partisans in the legislature. The coefficient is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that passage rates should be higher for chief executives whose legislative contingent are above their country's average. As mentioned above, in a world of complete certainty, passage rates would be unrelated to the number of seats held by the chief executive's copartisans in the legislature. Hence, this finding contradicts the notion that chief executives can perfectly anticipate legislators' reactions.

TABLE 2 Fixed-Effects Estimates

Variable	Coefficient	(Std. Err.)
Seat Differential	0.019***	(0.003)
Canada	2.678***	(0.153)
Costa Rica	0.400**	(0.159)
Argentina	0.568***	(0.197)
Brazil	0.200	(0.137)
Chile	0.698***	(0.256)
Colombia	0.045	(0.256)
Ecuador	−0.397**	(0.191)
Uruguay	0.367*	(0.209)
Venezuela	0.881***	(0.148)
Bangladesh	4.794***	(0.256)
Israel	2.084***	(0.331)
Turkey	0.394**	(0.197)
Japan	1.388***	(0.122)
South Korea	1.227***	(0.191)
Austria	2.540***	(0.573)
Belgium	1.048***	(0.159)
Denmark	1.444***	(0.153)
Finland	1.934***	(0.363)
France	1.551***	(0.137)
Germany	1.205***	(0.121)
Greece	1.197***	(0.363)
Hungary	1.470***	(0.405)
Iceland	1.649***	(0.405)
Ireland	2.106***	(0.331)
Italy	1.454***	(0.124)
Malta	2.152***	(0.331)
Netherlands	1.704***	(0.363)
Poland	0.428	(0.363)
Portugal	1.163***	(0.173)
Spain	1.703***	(0.177)
United Kingdom	3.551***	(0.141)
New Zealand	3.337***	(0.331)
N	585	
R^2	0.822	
$F_{(33,552)}$	77.001	

Significance levels : * : 10% **: 5% *** : 1%

To further interpret the effect of partisan support, we can look at the elasticity of the response variable with respect to a one standard deviation increase in the seat differential. For the whole sample, a one standard deviation increase in the proportion of legislators who belong to the chief executive's party, a difference of 10.9 seats, increases her predicted box score by roughly 3%. This effect is even more pronounced in some of the countries in the

sample. These country-specific effect can be calculated using the α_is. For example, in Ecuador, the predicted box score of a president whose seat differential is one standard deviation above the mean is 46%. This is equivalent to a 16% increase in the predicted box score of the typical Ecuadorean president. In the case of Turkey, a one standard deviation in seat differential translates into a change of the predicted box score of roughly 12%.

However, partisan control over the legislature is not sufficient for legislative success. The results in Table 2 suggest that there is a systematic relationship between a country's characteristics and the variation in chief executives' box scores. Recall that under the null hypothesis (i.e., country characteristics do not have an effect on chief executives' box scores), the regression intercept α_i is nondistinguishable from zero. Rejecting this null hypothesis would indicate that the performance of the chief executives depends on their country's characteristics. As Table 2 shows, the null hypothesis only holds in three countries (Brazil, Colombia, and Poland).

Moreover, I can also calculate the magnitude of this coefficient as an indicator of how important these country effects are. Specifically, values of α_i above unity indicate that the predicted box scores of the chief executives in these countries are higher than in the sample average. In contrast, values below unity (including negative values) are associated with below average performances. An interesting finding is that those countries for which $\alpha_i > 1$ are mostly parliamentary regimes (with the exception of Finland, France after 1958, Iceland, Portugal, and South Korea in 1960), while most of the countries for which $\alpha_i < 1$ are presidential (except for Poland and Turkey). These results square very well with existing knowledge in comparative politics. Since parliamentary governments risk confidence of the legislature when they are defeated, such governments should be particularly careful in proposing legislation. Alternatively, as Huber (1996) notes, in some parliamentary regimes, governments can attach a vote of confidence to particular pieces of legislation, making it more risky for legislators to cast a negative vote.

Table 3 presents two alternative specifications in which cross-country differences in institutional design are measured directly. I also control for some additional institutional features, such as government type, electoral rules, and the structure of the legislature.[17] The main findings remain unchanged. There is a strong relationship between a chief executive's passage rate and her country's constitutional structure.[18] In particular, the results indicate that, relative to Westminster-style parliamentary systems, passage rates are lower in non-Westminster parliamentary countries, in semiparliamentary regimes, and specially under presidentialism.[19] The effect of the share of seats held by a particular chief executive's copartisans on passage rates also remains robust and statistically significant under these alternative specifications.[20]

Two additional findings are worth noting here. First, passage rates appear to be lower when there is a multiparty coalition rather than a single-party government in power.[21] As Cheibub et al. (2004) note, government coalitions tend to form when the policy distance between a minority party in government and the rest of the parties in the legislature is large. Therefore coalition governments are typically quite heterogeneous and have more players who could potentially veto a change.[22] Second, both specifications in Table 3 reveal that, ceteris paribus, passage rates are higher under electoral systems in which

[17]The first column reports the results of a model in which standard errors are robustly estimated and the disturbance terms for each country are allowed to be correlated, while the second column presents the results of a model with regional dummies.

[18]Unfortunately, due to data restrictions, including these variables reduces the sample size considerably. To ensure that the effects of these institutional features are not attributed to changes in the sample size, I reestimated the model presented in Table 2 using this reduced sample. The results are virtually unchanged, indicating their robustness to changes in the sample size.

[19]Constitutional structures were classified according to the criteria developed by Cheibub (2006). He distinguishes presidential from parliamentary and mixed democracies based on the absence of the vote of confidence, which allows the legislature to remove the government during the legislative term (Cheibub 2006). What distinguishes parliamentary from mixed systems is that the government's existence in the latter depends both on the legislature (through the vote of no confidence) and on a directly elected president, who can remove the government unilaterally or by dissolving the legislature (Cheibub 2006). The following countries in the sample were coded as Westminster-style systems: Canada, Bangladesh, Ireland, Malta, United Kingdom, and New Zealand.

[20]Results are identical when the chief executive's seat differential is measured as differences from the overall mean. Results are also unchanged when I use the actual share of seats held by each chief executive.

[21]The variable *Coalition Government* is a binary indicator that takes the value of 1 if the government is a multiparty coalition, and 0 otherwise. A government is considered to be a multiparty coalition if two or more political parties represented in the national legislature hold cabinet positions. Source: Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh (2004).

[22]Government (portfolio) coalitions are different from legislative or policy coalitions. If parties are disciplined, then every government coalition is a legislative coalition. Legislative coalitions, in turn, may vary from one issue to another (Amorim Neto 2002).

TABLE 3 Institutional Features and Passage Rates

	Country Clustered	Regional Effects
Seat Differential	0.018** (0.008)	0.023*** (0.006)
Non-Westminster Parliamentary	−1.861*** (0.564)	−1.961*** (0.252)
Semi-Parliamentary	−1.908*** (0.574)	−1.966*** (0.275)
Presidential	−2.663*** (0.577)	−2.154*** (0.389)
Coalition Government	−0.439** (0.186)	−0.283** (0.125)
Electoral Rules	0.880*** (0.299)	0.238 (0.209)
Average District Magnitude	0.005** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)
Seats from National District	1.186* (0.597)	1.288*** (0.450)
Bicameral System	0.275 (0.278)	0.275** (0.139)
Asia		0.683** (0.297)
Latin America		−0.781** (0.372)
Eastern Europe		−0.331 (0.315)
Middle East		−0.601** (0.244)
Intercept	2.926*** (0.556)	3.078*** (0.244)
N	272	272
R^2	0.467	0.52

Note: Column 1 contains the results of a specification with disturbance terms clustered at the country level. The omitted category in column 1 is Westminster-style system (for constitutional structure); in column 2, the baseline categories are Westminster-style system (for constitutional structure) and Western Europe (for region). Standard errors are in parentheses. *indicates significance at a 10% level; **indicates significance at a 5% level; ***indicates significance at a 1% level.

legislators represent a "national" rather than a "local" constituency.[23] The explanation for this finding is also possibly the consequence of the degree of predictability of legislators' behavior. If the legislators' partisan identities are good indicators of their ideal policies, then chief executives may be able to calculate more accurately how they will cast their votes, and consequently make less mistakes.

Overall, these results demonstrate that the comparative ability of individual chief executives to obtain legislative approval of their initiatives depend largely on the conditions under which they operate. And while some of these circumstances might be under their control, such as the government's partisan makeup, some other ones are structural features of the governance framework that cannot be easily changed by them.

"Successful" Chief Executives

The results presented in Table 4 allow us to evaluate the individual performance of particular chief executives. To rank the performance of individual chief executives I use the residuals generated by the model presented in Table 2. In particular, I take the difference between a chief executive's actual box score in a given year and her predicted performance according to the statistical model (i.e., once the average effect of the size of their legislative party and country characteristics are taken into account). Therefore, the most "successful" chief executive in a given country is the one who exhibits the greater "unexpected" performance. Table 4 lists the ranking of chief executives, along with their country, the year, their predicted box score, their actual box score, the average box score for their respective countries, the share of seats held by their copartisans, and their countries' regime type.[24]

The results suggest that the standard by which we should judge a particular chief executive's level

[23]The variable *Electoral Rules* takes the value of 1 if plurality governs the majority/all of the seats in the lower house of the national legislature, 0 if proportional representation is used, and 0.5 if it is a mixed system. Source: Keefer (2005). The variable *Average District Magnitude* is calculated as the total number of seats allocated in the lowest tier divided by the total number of districts in that tier. Source: Golder (2005). The variable *Seats from a National District* indicate the proportion of legislators that are elected via a national tier to the lower house of the national legislature. Source: Wallack et al. (2003). The variable *Bicameral System* takes the value of 1 if the national legislature is bicameral; 0 otherwise. Source: Wallack et al. (2003).

[24]In the case of mixed systems, the chief executive is the prime minister and not the president. Also, I decided to exclude from the table those cases where there were multiple chief executives in a single year, and those countries that—due to scant data—do not exhibit enough variation across individual chief executives. The composition of the ranking would be very similar if these cases are included, but such ordering is less intuitive in terms of identifying the performance of a particular leader. This alternative ranking is available from the author upon request.

TABLE 4 Successful Chief Executives

Country	Year	Chief Executive	Pred. Box Scr.	Act. Box Scr.	Cty. Avge.	Seats	Regime
Canada	1948	W.L. Mackenzie King	92.51	98.70	90.58	51.02	Parliam
Costa Rica	1959–61	Mario Echandi	48.81	76.40	58.48	22.22	Presid.
Argentina	1984	Raúl Alfonsín	64.00	78.20	63.19	50.98	Presid.
Brazil	1995–97	Fernando Henrique Cardoso	43.27	70.70	54.18	12.08	Presid.
Chile	1990	Patricio Aylwin	66.92	86.30	65.90	31.67	Presid.
Colombia	1983	Belisario Betancur	48.08	72.00	50.80	41.21	Presid.
Ecuador	1985	León Febres Cordero	37.06	64.70	41.90	12.86	Presid.
Uruguay	1987	Julio María Sanguinetti	60.78	70.20	58.47	41.41	Presid.
Venezuela	1984–87	Jaime Lusinchi	75.29	89.50	67.85	56.50	Presid.
Bangladesh	1992–95	Khaleda Zia	99.09	100.00	99.50	51.21	Parliam.
Israel	1978–80	Menachem Begin	88.50	90.60	88.23	35.83	Parliam.
Japan	1951	Shigeru Yoshida	81.20	91.10	78.88	56.65	Parliam.
South Korea	1988–89	Roh Tae Woo	68.71	87.20	72.58	33.78	Presid.
Austria	1985	Fred Sinowatz	92.58	96.00	91.50	49.18	Parliam.
Belgium	1984	Wilfried Martens	73.83	88.10	73.02	20.28	Parliam.
Denmark	1986	Poul Schlüter	76.88	87.70	80.23	24.00	Parliam.
Finland	1965	Johannes Virolainen	87.67	93.30	85.94	26.50	Mixed
France	1959	Michel Debré	84.80	98.00	79.02	42.58	Mixed
Germany	1973	Willy Brandt	76.92	82.80	76.62	46.37	Parliam.
Iceland	1951	S. Steinthórsson	83.54	86.80	83.57	32.69	Mixed
Ireland	1991	Charles Haughey	89.52	100.00	81.02	46.39	Parliam.
Italy	1985	Bettino Craxi	73.21	92.00	75.90	11.59	Parliam.
Malta	1975	Dom Mintoff	89.38	90.00	89.58	50.91	Parliam.
Poland	1994	Waldemar Pawlak	57.60	66.18	60.35	10.50	Mixed
Portugal	1988–89	Aníbal Cavaco Silva	80.20	94.90	71.32	59.20	Mixed
Spain	1997–99	José María Aznar	83.13	89.50	83.61	44.57	Parliam.
Turkey	1984–86	Turgut Özal	63.17	80.90	58.45	52.89	Parliam.
United Kingdom	1965	Harold Wilson	96.94	98.50	96.45	50.31	Parliam.
New Zealand	1982	Robert David Muldoon	96.27	97.50	95.35	51.09	Parliam.

Note: To rank the performance of individual chief executives I used the residuals generated by the model presented in Table 2.

of success cannot be conceived in isolation of the conditions under which she is operating. As Table 4 shows, a successful prime minister in the United Kingdom or Ireland should be expected to get her initiatives approved almost all the time. In contrast, it would only take a box score in excess of two-thirds to be considered a successful leader in a politically fragmented country like Ecuador or Poland. Another interesting finding is that some of these chief executives were able to achieve legislative passage rates that surpassed their countries' average box scores, even though their predicted box scores were actually below those average passage rates. This group includes the likes of Spain's Jose Maria Aznar, Italy's Bettino Craxi, and Brazil's Fernando Henrique Cardoso.[25]

[25]The other chief executives in this group are those of Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, Bangladesh, South Korea, Denmark, Iceland, Malta, and Poland.

This ranking of "successful" chief executives has to be taken with a grain of salt, though. In some cases, these politicians were operating under exceptional circumstances (such as regimes transitions, or postwar experiences) and it was the combinations of their particular skills with the *spirit of the times* which gave a big boost to their individual performances. This is the case, for example, of Argentina's Raul Alfonsín in 1984 and of Uruguay's Julio María Sanguinetti in 1987 who came to power as leaders of a democratic transition from authoritarian rule. Similarly, the tandem Charles De Gaulle-Michel Debre at the onset of the French V^{th} Republic ranks at the top of the French chief executives.

In other cases, in particular under parliamentary regimes, it is not quite appropriate to think of a government's performance in terms of individual chief executives, but rather to consider it the result of a concerted party/coalition effort. For example, although

Willi Brandt receives recognition as the most successful German leader of the period, his performance owes a lot to the Social Democratic Party's victory in 1972. The somewhat limited coverage of the data also imposes a constraint on an ''all-time'' comparison within countries, as some of these leaders are absent from the sample altogether. It is an open question whether Harold Wilson in 1965 would remain the most successful prime minister in the United Kingdom if more recent periods had been incorporated into the analysis.[26]

These caveats aside, the comparison presented in Table 4 provides a very good illustration of how the statutory performance of individual chief executives can be evaluated in a cross-national setting. In addition, by looking at the performance of the most successful individual chief executives in each of their respective countries we can draw broader insights about the dynamics of statutory policymaking in different environments.

Take, for example, the case of Poland between 1991 and 1995. In the country's first free parliamentary elections held in October 1991, the Democratic Union (a post-Solidarity party) obtained the plurality of an extremely fragmented vote with about 13% of the vote. In total 29 parties entered the 460-seat Sejm, leading to a period of party and parliamentary impasse, political scandal, and extremely uncertain political environment. On October 1993, a government under Waldemar Pawlak of the Peasant Party was sworn in. On top of the existing fragmentation, the Pawlak government found itself increasingly at odds with President Walesa over many issues. It is therefore not surprising that in such conditions a box score of 60% represents a ''success.''

The Pawlak story and the Polish experience stands in stark contrast with that of Turkey's Turgut Özal, who was elected prime minister as head of his own Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi or ANAP). His uncontested leadership led him to rule with the unquestionable support of his copartisans and to dominate Turkish politics for a decade until his death in 1993 (first as a prime minister between 1983 and 1989 and then as president between 1989 and 1993). This is clearly reflected in Table 4. With an actual box score of nearly 90%, between 1984 and 1986, he outperformed both the average box score for the typical Turkish chief executive and the predicted box score based on the country's characteristics and his legislative support.

[26]Unfortunately, the sample does not cover the administrations of Margaret Thatcher, John Major, or Tony Blair.

Conclusions

Despite the centrality of statutory policymaking in modern democratic countries, the comparative ability of chief executives to obtain legislative approval of their initiatives remains understudied. In this study, I presented new evidence for comparative research into democratic governance, and introduced a standard to evaluate the relative performance of chief executives around the world.

An important implication of the results presented in this paper is that any sensible model of executive-legislative relations should incorporate incomplete information as part of the analysis. With respect to my empirical results, one finding particularly stands out. The results presented in this paper suggest that seeking to address the question of how successful we expect chief executives to be in their relationships with their respective legislatures using a ''one-size-fits-all'' approach is likely to produce erroneous answers.

I found that in some countries, it is not uncommon for chief executives to obtain approval for almost all of their legislative proposals. In contrast, some chief executives tend to have much lower box scores, regardless of how much political prowess they may individually have. More generally, I believe that the data and the standard introduced in this paper can be used to test hypotheses about the conditions under which chief executives may adopt statutory versus nonstatutory policymaking strategies.

Indeed, by sorting out the conditions under which chief executives succeed and under what conditions they fail in the legislative arena—where constituency interests are often represented—the ideas developed in this paper can helps us deepen our understanding of what institutional arrangements and practices work particularly well (or bad) at combining the dual objectives of accountability and governability.

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Appendix A

Country	Period	Region
Canada	1946–73	North America
Costa Rica	1958–69, 1975, 1986–98	Latin America
Honduras	1990–96	Latin America
Mexico	1982–99	Latin America
Argentina	1983–2000	Latin America
Brazil	1946–60, 1963, 1968–81, 1983–98	Latin America
Chile	1990–2000	Latin America
Colombia	1982–83, 1986–87, 1992, 1995–99	Latin America
Ecuador	1979–96	Latin America
Venezuela	1959–98	Latin America
Peru	1996–99	Latin America
Uruguay	1985–2000	Latin America
Paraguay	1990–99	Latin America
Bangladesh	1973, 1991–99	South Asia
Israel	1975, 1978–82	Middle East
Turkey	1983–2000	Middle East
Lebanon	1953–72	Middle East
Japan	1947–80, 1988–97	East Asia
South Korea	1960, 1963–67, 1988–99	East Asia
Austria	1975, 1985	Western Europe
Belgium	1969–96	Western Europe
Denmark	1953–73, 1975, 1978–82, 1986	Western Europe
Finland	1962–65, 1975	Western Europe
France	1946–66, 1968–73, 1975, 1977–83	Western Europe
Germany	1949–93	Western Europe
Greece	1978–82	Western Europe
Iceland	1951, 1961, 1971, 1981	Western Europe
Ireland	1985–87, 1989–91	Western Europe
Italy	1948–58, 1960–61, 1963–73, 1975–96	Western Europe
Malta	1975, 1978–82	Western Europe
Netherlands	1978–82	Western Europe
Portugal	1976–2000	Western Europe
Spain	1979–99	Western Europe
United Kingdom	1946–78	Western Europe
Hungary	1990–93	Eastern Europe
Poland	1991–95	Eastern Europe
Russia	1996–99	Eastern Europe
Australia	1975	South Asia
New Zealand	1975, 1978–82	South Asia

Appendix B: Box Score Sources

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