

Primaries and legislative behavior

Indriði H. Indriðason, University of California, Riverside

Gunnar Helgi Kristinsson, University of Iceland

Abstract: While elections in closed list proportional representation systems generally provide individual MPs with little incentive to build a personal vote, the use of primaries for the establishment of party lists increases the need of MPs to distinguish themselves from their co-partisans. It has been argued that the importance of the personal vote undermines or weakens political parties but, when it comes to parliamentary systems, it is not clear whether the incentives created by primary elections are significant enough to affect the parties' ability to pursue their legislative agenda. We contrast two perspectives on MPs' motives with regard to legislative behavior. An electoral perspective, in which MPs are assumed to be guided by the prospective of winning reelection (which may involve contesting a primary), and a party perspective, in which parties are recognized as gatekeepers of positions of power within the legislature and the executive. We examine legislative behavior in the Icelandic Alþingi in order to evaluate the implications of primaries according to each of the perspectives. Iceland is a useful venue for exploring the effects of primaries as they are common but are not universally employed.

Interest in more inclusive methods of nominations seems to be spreading in parliamentary systems, which traditionally have relied primarily on relatively exclusive nomination methods. Parliamentary government, as Sartori (1994, 193) put it, “implies party supported government; a support that in turn requires voting discipline along party lines”. The temptation to open up the candidate nomination process appears to be spurred by voters growing increasingly skeptical and distrustful of political parties and party elite. Greater openness and broader participation is seen as an aid in re-gaining voters' confidence. But as parties in most parliamentary systems have rather little experience of such nomination methods there is limited knowledge or understanding of how they actually work. A central concern here is the question whether inclusive nomination methods are compatible with the idea of responsible party government, i.e., do inclusive primaries create havoc within political parties and undermine responsible government or can they be made to work in an orderly fashion within the framework of disciplined party government?

The key question here is which of the many incentives parliamentarians face are most relevant. A strong tradition in party research is concerned primarily with the electoral motives of politicians (Downs 1957, Rae 1971), who are considered to be interested in maximizing votes in order to secure election. This implies that electoral arrangements are a key ingredient in the structure of incentives affecting legislative behavior. And if electoral arrangements influence behavior, we should expect party primaries to be no exception. In the U.S. there is a long standing interest in how the 'electoral connection' affects legislative behavior (Mayhew 1974). Outside the U.S. there is also a growing interest in how electoral incentives affect such behavior. According to established models of how electoral systems shape the behavioral incentives of politicians, systems with less party control provide incentives to cultivate a personal reputation whereas greater party control may solve the collective action problem of parliamentary groups in favor of more cohesive parties (Sartori 1976; Carey and Shugart 1995). Influential accounts of the likely effects of primaries in parliamentary systems draw a rather gloomy picture of the effects of primary election on the ability of parties to act in a cohesive and responsive manner (Rahat and Hazan 2010). While these accounts are correct in noting that theoretically there is tension between the legislators' incentives and effective party control, not a lot of data exists to evaluate such claims.

Legislators may face non-electoral incentives that are equally important to them as those related to securing re-election. The empirical evidence connecting personalized electoral arrangements with loss of party cohesion is mixed, which suggests that there are more factors at work (Carroll and Nalepa 2013; Depauw and Martin 2009; Sieberer 2006). If members of parliament are not only interested in re-election but also want to influence policy and hold positions of power in the legislature or the executive, their behavior may differ significantly from what theories of electoral motives dictate. Incentives to cultivate a personal vote may, thus, be off-set by concerns about how career opportunities are shaped by the opinions and expectations of co-partisans, fellow legislators, and party leaders. Building a personal vote may also be a challenge when voters pay little attention to what their representatives are up to – even highly interested voters are likely to get basic information wrong (Dancey and Sheagley 2013). Party leaders, on the other hand, are likely to observe and to care about their legislators' behavior and to be willing to use the tools at their disposal to encourage behavior that suits party purposes.

The question, then, becomes what party leaders or parliamentary groups want from their members (Kam 2009). In parliamentary systems, the cabinet as a rule controls the legislative agenda to a great extent (Döring 1995). The responsibility for policy making rests primarily with the government and parties, therefore, place considerable emphasis on its MPs toeing the party line. While

most parliaments grant individual MPs some right to initiate legislation, private member bills are rarely adopted. Proposing legislation is the most direct manner of influencing policy but it is, of course, only one manner in which MPs may do so. MPs may, e.g., shape the agenda through work in parliamentary committees, by offering legislative amendments, and by shaping the agenda in various ways, e.g., through debates, committee work, and by effective use of question time.¹ MPs' motivations in engaging in each of these actions may, of course, have more to do with signaling their preferences or legislative effort to their party's selectorate, whether it consists of primary voters or a more narrow segment of party insiders. Thus, the manner in which MPs obtain a place on the party list may affect their legislative behavior but the precise manner in which it does so is likely to depend on how central a role the MPs consider the party to play in terms of achieving their career goals. Below we consider the incentives that MPs face when it comes to their legislative behavior but to set the stage for that discussion, first we briefly discuss the use of primaries in Iceland and how they are conducted.

Primaries in Iceland

To evaluate the effects of primaries on legislative behavior variation in both the independent and dependent variables is required. That is, parties must use different forms of nomination methods – that include primary elections – and the rules of parliamentary procedure must be sufficiently lax in order to provide parliamentarians with meaningful opportunities to respond strategically to the incentives that they face. Iceland satisfies both conditions. All the major parties in Iceland have experimented with primaries at one point or another since the early 1970s while none of them has consistently implemented primaries across all the constituencies. Thus, variation in the use of primaries exists both across and within parties. At the same time Alþingi's parliamentary procedure are unusually permissive, e.g., when it comes to offering private member bills and individual parliamentarians have a relatively generous access to the parliamentary agenda.

The primaries originally developed in response to public criticism of power being concentrated in the hands of party elites. The parties that initiated the use of primaries, in particular the Independence Party (IP) and Social Democrats (SD), presented them as a democratic alternative to centralized party control and an opportunity for under-represented groups, such as women and young people, to obtain greater political representation. The 1959 electoral reform had also

¹ MPs' ability to do so varies, of course, across parliaments. There is, e.g., considerable variance in the degree to which committees have oversight functions and in MPs' ability to question ministers. (sources)

created problems for the parties with large multi-member constituencies replacing a hybrid system of single-, double-, and multi-member constituencies. The system was seen as insulating incumbent MPs from effective competition, combining a high degree of electoral stability with practically no scope for preferential voting. Moreover, competition between different localities within the enlarged constituencies presented problems that threatened party unity within the constituency organizations.

Primary elections are a relatively simple affair where general elections are conducted via majoritarian methods, i.e., in those instances primaries essentially involves selecting a single candidate and there are a number of well established electoral systems that can be used for that purpose, e.g., plurality rule, alternative vote, or majority run-off elections. Primary elections are, however, uncommon in proportional representation systems where the aim is not just to select a single candidate but a ranked list of candidates. It is, of course, possible to employ simple systems such as plurality rule for the purpose of establishing a party list but doing so has fairly obvious shortcomings. While more sophisticated systems, such as the single-transferable vote (STV), appear well suited for the purpose of establishing a party list, the Icelandic parties nevertheless converged on a unique electoral system that we have termed *rank ordered plurality* voting (Indridason & Kristinsson 2015).

Ranked ordered plurality voting requires voters, much like STV, to rank the candidates but instead of each voter having a single vote, the ranked ordered plurality voting essentially gives each voter as many votes as there are seats to fill. The first seat on the party list is allocated to the candidate that is ranked first by most voters (and, unlike STV, there is not quota that needs to be filled). The second seat is allocated to the candidate that was ranked first or second by a plurality voters – thus, even if your first ranked candidate won the first seat, your vote still counts for your second ranked candidate. This procedure continues until all the seats on the party list have been filled. In the example in table 1, Kristján Júlíusson wins the first seat as he was ranked first by a plurality of the primary voters while Valgerður Gunnarsdóttir gets the second seat with the highest number of votes (1291) for the first (29) and the second seat (1262). The system is quite majoritarian – if a faction constituting a bare majority coordinates its ranking of the candidates then the faction is guaranteed to have total control over the composition of the party list.² For our purposes, however, the most important aspect of the primary is simply that fact that voters cast a vote for individual candidates. Thus, the success of individual candidates rests

² In contrast, STV tends to produce relatively proportional outcomes. Of course, the meaning of ‘proportionality’ is a little ambiguous in primaries as proportionality is typically defined in terms of the representation of parties while (most) primaries only involve the candidates of a single party. However, one can instead consider whether the outcome is proportional in terms of party factions or politically relevant subgroups of party members.

on their personal vote, whether through inducing voters to place them higher in the ranking or in terms of mobilizing potential primary participants.

Table 1: Seat Allocation under Rank Ordered Plurality Voting*
-2013 Independence Party Primary in Northeast District-

Candidate	Votes										
	1	2	1+2	3	1+2+3	4	1+...+4	5	1+...+5	6	1+...+6
Kristján Júlíusson	2223	151	2374	46	2420	28	2448	23	2471	37	2508
Valgerður Gunnarsdóttir	29	1262	1291	324	1615	223	1838	258	2096	206	2302
Ásta Sigurjónsdóttir	11	236	247	911	1158	446	1604	307	1911	304	2215
Jens Helgason	16	105	121	261	382	896	1278	337	1615	338	1953
Erla S. Ragnarsdóttir	18	357	375	430	805	354	1159	370	1529	396	1925
Bergur Benjamínsson	8	82	90	186	276	256	532	778	1310	442	1752

* Another three candidates that contested the primary are not shown in the figure

The constituency party organizations typically decide whether to hold a primary or to employ a more restrictive form of candidate nomination – although in some instances the central party organization has presented the constituency organizations with a menu of options to choose from. In addition to choosing whether to hold a primary, the constituency organizations choose whether to hold an open or a closed primary. Thus, there is potentially a lot of variance in terms of the nomination methods employed by each party while in practice it tends to be that the constituency organization that decide hold a primary adopt similar rules for conducting the primaries.

Primaries & Parliamentary Systems

The study of primary elections, until very recently, has to a large extent been focused on the United States. It is, however, not clear that theories of primary elections in the United States travel easily to other context. For one thing, the United States is a presidential system that is characterized by relatively weak and decentralized parties. Parliamentary executives – unlike presidential executives – rely on the confidence of parliament to stay in office. While the ‘fused power’ arrangement that characterizes parliamentary systems may suggest that the legislative branch dominates the executive branch, in reality the opposite appears to be true. That is, strong parties are conducive to maintain control of the government and, in effect, the vote of confidence encourages parliamentary cohesion (Diermeier and Feddersen 1998). It is, therefore, not clear that personal vote seeking incentives take the same precedent in parliamentary systems as they do in presidential systems – even in circumstances when winning a seat in parliament depends on the MPs having a personal base of support as it does, e.g., in plurality systems, open-list proportional representation systems, or where primary elections are held. While

being elected to parliament is clearly important for MPs, the value of a seat in parliament also depends on garnering favor with party leaders who act as gatekeepers to positions of power within the legislature and in the executive. Importantly, the strategies for achieving each of those objectives are not necessarily the same and MPs, thus, face a difficult trade-off. Enhancing ones personal vote, in general, requires the MP to distinguish herself from her party and her co-partisans – doing so is, however, unlikely to endear the MP to party leaders.

To some degree MPs, thus, face a choice between pleasing voters and pleasing party leaders. Below we consider how those choices lead to different expectations about the legislative behavior of MPs. We develop expectations about MPs' legislative behavior under the assumption that electoral incentives dominate and then contrast those with the situation in which MPs are primarily concerned with the fact that the parties hold the keys to positions of power within the legislature and the executive. We then turn to data on legislative activity to examine whether MPs are influenced more by the electoral incentives created by the nomination method or party control.

The incentive to build a personal vote have been shown to depend on factors such as whether the electoral system is a open- or closed-list system, district magnitude, the centralization and inclusiveness of nomination procedures, electoral vulnerability, and the activity of co-partisans (who increase the competition for personal attention). The electoral process in Iceland involves two stages where the first stage involves the nominations (including primaries) of candidates and the second stage is the parliamentary election. Each of these stages can potentially provide incentives for MPs to build a personal vote. However, as the second stage offers little incentives for personalization, with the general election system being a closed-list proportional representation system, our main focus is on the nomination stage.³

Ballot structure

Following Carey and Shugart's (1995) argument concerning the effects of the ballot structure,⁴ the importance of personal reputations ought to be greater where parties hold primary elections. By holding a primary, party leaders hand control over ballot access to the primary voters. There is no vote pooling in the Icelandic primaries since the choice of candidates is conducted ahead of the parliamentary election. The chances of an individual primary candidate to win a

³ The Icelandic electoral system is technically a semi-open proportional representation system as voters can change the order of MPs on the party list. Voters, however, make limited use of this option and it is extremely rare for it to affect the outcome of the election.

⁴ In discussion ballot structure, Carey and Shugart (1995) focus on the role of ballot access, vote pooling, and the type vote cast.

seat in parliament are, never improved by another candidate receiving more votes.⁵ The rank ordered plurality system provides voters with the opportunity to reveal their preferences among different candidates in a relatively detailed manner and places the candidates in a direct competition with one another. Thus, if electoral incentives dominate, we should expect the use of party primaries to increase the incentives to cultivate a personal reputation compared with other methods of candidate selection.

In the party centered view, however, the incentives to build a personal vote may be offset by the expectations and demands of party leaders. Importantly, those expectations depend on whether the party is in government or in opposition. A government backbencher is unlikely to be encouraged to be active in parliament. Instead, she will be tasked with advancing her party's agenda in the committees and in forum. Parliaments under strong party control, in fact, are likely to restrict the rights of backbenchers to speechmaking or to initiate bills. If government backbenchers want to influence policy or advance their careers they are likely to work through their parties or ministers. Opposition parties, by contrast, have no qualms about undermining government control of the agenda and have little incentive to restrict the legislative activity of their members. They may even encourage their MPs to air popular demands that might pose problems for the government. Moreover, leading members of the opposition can be expected to take a leading role in criticizing the government and actively initiate private member bills, ask questions, and make speeches. In sum, irrespective of the type of nominations method, therefore, more legislative activity is expected from members of the opposition and, in particular, opposition leaders, than government MPs.

District magnitude and urban-rural differences

Larger district magnitude is generally expected to increase the sensitivity of parliamentarians to special interests (Cox 1990; Fujimura 2015). The logic seems to be that with large district magnitude individual candidates may do well by appealing to special interests of various kinds while with smaller magnitude they are more likely to represent a broad cross section of the community. The opposite conclusion was reached by Lancaster (1986), who maintained that the tendency to boost a personal reputation, e.g. through pork barrel politics, is greater in small districts than in large ones. Several authors, however, envisage a more complicated relationship, in that the impact of district magnitude may be related to features of the ballot structure. Thus, Carey and Shugart (1995) suggest that district magnitude has an impact only where there is no intra-party

⁵ At least not directly. The composition of the party list may, of course, affect the party's performance in the parliamentary election, which could be considered a form of vote pooling. Similarly, the fact that the primary voters rank all the candidates, provides candidates with an incentive to form electoral alliances, which can be considered a form of vote pooling.

competition (in closed list systems the significance of personal reputations grows smaller as the number of candidates on the list grows). Under other allocation formulas on the other hand (i.e., where co-partisans compete for seats), the importance of personal reputation increases with greater district magnitude. This is, at least partly, consistent with Solvak and Pajala's (2015) findings that parliamentary activity under closed list rules declined as district magnitude became greater.

Primaries are likely to have a similar effect on parliamentary behavior as open-list systems and hence we should expect the importance of a personal reputation to be greater the larger the constituency. On the other hand, the importance of pork barrel may be greater in smaller constituencies. In Iceland, constituency service in various forms is in great demand in the smaller rural constituencies than the larger urban ones. If MPs are sensitive to electoral incentives, we should expect the rural ones to be more active than their urban counterparts.

According to the party centered approach we should not expect district magnitude to make a great deal of difference. The most effective method of winning approval from the party leadership when in government – irrespective of district magnitude – should be the ability to do valuable committee work in committees which are unrelated to constituency pork barrel.

Vulnerability

Members of parliament who are insecure with regard to re-election are more likely to cultivate a personal following (Bowler 2010; Herron 2002; Louwerse & Otjes 2016; Bauman 2016; Williams & Indridason 2017). While much of the literature demonstrating an emphasis on constituency service and other ways of building a personal vote has focused on vote margins in single-member districts, similar logic applies to MPs elected of party lists (Crisp et al. 2013). Members in marginal seats, i.e., those who were among the last ones in off the party list, have an interest in securing a seat higher on the party list in order to insure themselves against fluctuations in their party's electoral performance. MPs who owe their list position to primary voters may, thus, have an incentive to raise their profile with their constituents and one possible way of doing so is by being active in the legislature. While the average primary voter may not pay a great deal of attention to what goes on in the legislature, making speeches, asking questions, and offering private members bills are all ways of documenting the MPs effort that the MP can highlight during her primary campaign. Thus, if electoral incentives are the driver behind the MPs' actions, we ought to see greater legislative activity among electorally vulnerable MPs.

However, if members value advancement and influence over re-election, then the electoral connection should be less influential. If MPs see their career

advancement as largely being under control of the party, government backbenchers should show low levels of legislative activity and should leave control of the floor to more senior members of their parties. Similarly, leading members of the opposition parties are expected to be in the front line with regard to both legislative initiatives and speech making while more junior backbenchers should be less active so as not to overshadow the leadership although they are expected to be more active than government MPs.

Primary Elections and Legislative Behavior in Iceland

Overall, the two perspectives, emphasizing electoral incentives on the one hand and party control on the other, have quite different implications for the legislative behavior of MPs. The electoral incentives perspective implies that MPs ought to be willing to break away from the party line if they perceive it to be important for their chances of re-election. In the Icelandic context that means securing a favorable spot on the party list, which requires MPs to build a personal support base where primaries are conducted. Thus, primaries have often been associated with greater independence of legislators from their parties that ought to be reflected in legislative behaviors but also in greater willingness of MPs to vote against the party line in parliament and, more generally, with the weakening of parties.

Whether the primaries constituted a threat to party cohesion at the time they were introduced in the early 1970s is difficult to establish. Roll-call analysis of final votes on bills in Alþingi shows a steady decline in party cohesion during the 1960s, prior to the introduction of the primaries (Kristinsson 2011). The decline continued until the 1980s in the parties which greeted new methods of nominations most warmly, i.e., the IP and the SDP. Indeed, the primaries may have played a role in splits which occurred in both parties during the 1980s, leaving the party leadership with a weak hand in dealing with discontent. During the 1980s, however, two innovations of party management appear to have strengthened cohesion within the parliamentary groups. On the one hand the parties changed the electoral formula in the primaries from *limited voting* (voters vote for a limited number of candidates without ranking them) to one of *rank-ordered plurality* (voters rank a fixed number of candidates). While limited voting could produce unpredictable results, the new formula introduced a majoritarian element into the system which may have reduced the likely payoffs from cultivating a personal following. At around the same time (although further research is needed on this) the party leaders appear to have begun using positions at their disposal such as ministerial posts and committee chairs in a more strategic manner. As a result, party cohesion increased. Party cohesion for the Independence Party are shown in figure 1. On the whole, party cohesion in

Iceland, despite decentralized and inclusive nomination methods, is comparable to that of the other Nordic countries (Depauw and Martin 2009).

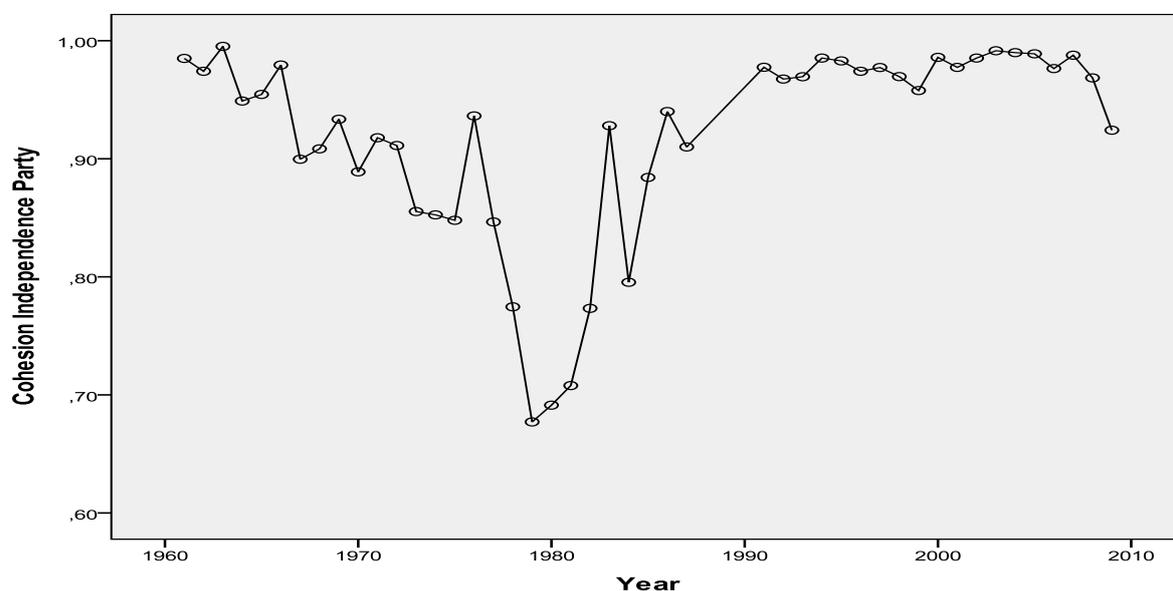


Figure 1. Party cohesion in the Independence party 1961-2010⁶

There are, thus, some suggestions that the adoption of primaries coincided with – or at least did not impede – a decline in party cohesion in Alþingi but that, if present, those effects were temporary as the parties adapted to the changes in the incentives facing MPs.⁷ However, the data on party cohesion is at best suggestive as it does not take account of the fact that not all of the parties have used primaries to the same extent and they vary in the degree to which the primaries are open. Thus, in some cases the primaries are open to party members only, in others they are open to members and voters willing to declare support for the party, and in still others they are open to all voters in the constituency. Decentralization of the nomination process within the parties means that there is variation in the method used by the same party across constituencies. Tables 2 and 3 provide a summary of the nomination processes employed in each electoral district by the main parties ahead of the 1991-2013 elections. The nomination processes have been coded into five categories. “Nomination

⁶ Adopted from Kristinsson (2011). The figures for 1981-1987 are based on roll-call votes while the period 1991-2010 is based on final votes on bills where disagreement occurred. Data for 1988-90 is not available. The measure of cohesion is an adapted version of the Rice index taking abstentions into account and projected onto a scale 0 – 1.

⁷ Another possible explanation is learning on behalf of MPs, i.e., that initially primaries appeared to offer MPs greater independence from their parties that they embraced but then the MPs eventually learn that there are costs associated with deviating from the party line.

Committee” means that the local party organization decides or establishes a committee to draw up a list. An “extended committee” refers to processes where it is the local district council with the addition of a select number of additional members put the party list together. Closed primaries are restricted to party members while anyone can vote in an open primary. Semi-open primaries describe primaries where party membership is not required but there is some other requirement for voting in the primary – typically this simply means declaring support for the party. In the period we consider, about half of the party lists were established using a form of a primary election. While the use of nomination methods has varied over time there are no clearly discernible trends in their use.

Table 2: Nomination Process by Party

	SDP	PP	IP	PA	SDA	LG	Total
Nomination Committee	11	12	19	8	4	18	72
Extended Committee	0	22	0	0	0	0	22
Closed Primary	0	3	2	8	9	14	36
Semi-Open Primary	0	11	24	0	14	0	49
Open Primary	5	0	3	0	5	0	13
Total	16	48	48	16	32	32	192

Table 3: Nomination Process by Year

	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007	2009	2013	Total
Nomination Committee	14	13	17	12	5	1	10	72
Extended Committee	4	5	3	4	1	2	3	22
Closed Primary	5	4	1	1	4	13	8	36
Semi-Open Primary	5	8	6	7	13	7	3	49
Open Primary	4	2	5	0	1	1	0	13
Total	32	32	32	24	24	24	24	192

In order to test the effects of primaries on parliamentary behavior parliamentary procedure must be sufficiently lax to permit individual parliamentarians to follow their preferences. This is not always the case. Many parliamentary systems have considerable restrictions on the rights of parliamentarians to initiate bills and parliamentary resolutions, question ministers, or make speeches (Döring 1995). In the Icelandic case, with 63 members in the Alþingi, there are very little restrictions of this kind. The right of individual members to initiate bills and resolutions is guaranteed by the constitution (article 38) and the law on parliamentary procedure gives them almost unlimited and equal rights to pose questions to ministers. Speaking time is generously allocated with ministers, committee chairs and initiators of bills and resolutions receiving rather more time than others but every backbencher has the right, for example, to speak for a

total of twenty minutes on a bill's first debate, a total of thirty minutes in their first speech on the second debate and five minutes each time after that, and a total of twenty minutes on the third debate (Article 95, Lög um þingsköp Alþingis nr. 55/1991). Different rules apply, however, concerning the opening debate of each session and meetings that are broadcasted where speaking time is divided between parties and the parties select their representatives.

Table 4: Number of Bills & Parliamentary Motions
-by ministers, government & opposition MPs-

Term	Bills			Motions		
	Ministers	Government MPs	Opposition MPs	Ministers	Government MPs	Opposition MPs
1991	498	64	110	65	98	128
1995	513	81	88	57	134	66
1999	534	54	199	102	120	210
2003	462	87	185	81	82	248
2007	213	44	76	26	57	74
2009	513	77	180	121	110	234
2013	301	69	72	79	91	125

Table 5: Average Number of Questions, Speeches and Speech Time
-by ministers, government & opposition MPs-

Term	No. Questions		No. Speeches			Speaking Minutes		
	Gov't MPs	Opposition MPs	Ministers	Gov't MPs	Opposition MPs	Ministers	Gov't MPs	Opposition MPs
1991	1.6	4.7	150.2	67.1	150.5	575	183	818
1995	1.7	7.8	127.1	67.9	179.8	395	176	894
1999	2.2	10.0	116.6	90.6	170.6	314	191	656
2003	1.7	11.7	130.8	108.2	157.7	326	235	652
2007	1.1	12.3	130.9	103.6	226.6	364	259	818
2009	1.7	10.3	181.2	146.9	293.1	437	275	820
2013	2.6	13.2	181.1	120.5	406.4	407	231	1034

Data & Methods

We examine data on the parliamentary activity of legislators between 1991 and 2016. We focus on the four main parties during this time period, which all have made use of primaries to establish their party lists although their use has varied over time and across districts for each of the parties. The parties are the Progressive Party and the Independence Party, which successfully contested elections throughout the time period, along with the Social Democratic Party

and the People's Alliance until an attempt at a consolidation of the left led to the formation of the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left Green Movement in 1999.⁸ Our sample consists of all members of parliament elected of the party lists in each election from 1991 to 2013. We restrict our analysis to MPs who sat for a full session as our unit of observation is the legislative activity during each session. Thus, we exclude MPs that only sat for a part of session as well as temporary and permanent replacement MPs. The electoral term is four years and typically consists of four full sessions in addition to a short (typically, summer) session following parliamentary elections. We exclude the summer sessions from our analysis as they are usually very short and are usually not focused on 'regular' parliamentary business. During the time period under consideration, changes in government coincided with regular elections with the exception of a new government forming during the 136th session of parliament (2008-2009).⁹ As ministerships and government membership are among our independent variables, we exclude the 136th session from the analysis. Finally, we exclude from our analysis MPs who changed party affiliation during the a session.

Our dependent variables aim to capture various form of legislative activity. First, we consider the number of legislative bills and, second, the number of parliamentary motions sponsored by the MP during the legislative session. Most legislation and motions are co-sponsored but we only count legislations and motion where the MP was the 'primary' proposer.¹⁰ Third, we count the number of speeches given by the MP during a session and as well as the total duration of the speeches given by the MP during the session. Fifth, we count the number of questions the MP asked ministers.

Our key independent variable is whether the MP earned his or her seat on party via a primary. The variable *Primary* is coded 1 if the MP's party list was put together using a primary and 0 else. We argued that the MP's place on the party list was likely to affect her legislative activity. The variable *Seat* is simply the MP's seat on the party list. As the MP's incentives to be active in the legislature may be influenced both by his electoral safety and the need to contest a primary, we also include and interaction between *Primary* and *Seat*. MPs are liable to behave differently with an election on the horizon and the variable *Last Session*

⁸ While most the parties on the left joined in the formation of the SDA, the left wing of the People's Alliance opted to form the Left-Green Movement.

⁹ Changes in government are often defined in terms of i) elections, ii) changes in party composition, or iii) change of PM. According to this definition there was also a change in government during the 2003-2007 electoral term when the premiership of the IP-PP was transferred from the IP to the PP in 2004. This change was, however, a part of the parties' coalition agreement and as the composition of the government coalition remained otherwise the same including these sessions has no implications for our analysis.

¹⁰ The primary sponsor, or 'frumflytjandi', tends to be the MP who initiated the writing of the legislation or the motion and introduces the legislation in parliament. Moreover, the parliament's website only lists the primary sponsor's name on its website – although the full list of co-sponsors appears on the legislation itself – thus, serving to make the primary sponsor's role far more prominent than that of the co-sponsors.

is an indicator variable taking the value one in the fourth session of the electoral term and zero else. Rural district is an indicator variable coded one for rural district and zero else. The Reykjavík districts, the Southwest district, and the Reykjanes district prior to the last change to district boundaries, are considered urban district with the rest being considered rural. To account for variation in the length of the sessions we control for *Meeting Days*, i.e., the number of days in which business took place on the floor of parliament during the session. Finally, as ministers and government ministers are likely to face different incentives, the variables *Gov't MP* and *Minister* are indicator variables coded one for when the MP matches the variable's label.

While controlling for government MPs and ministers may capture some of the differences across MPs of different stripes and stature, it is also possible that the relationship between our dependent variables and our key independent variables depends on whether the MP is a member of the opposition or the government – or is a minister. Thus, for each of our dependent variables we also estimate our models on subsamples of i) opposition MPs and ii) government MPs.

As four of our dependent variables are counts of the particular types of legislative activity, i.e., the number of legislative bills, parliamentary motions, speeches and questions, we use count models. To account for the possibility of over- or under-dispersion in the dependent variable, we estimate negative binomial models. When estimating models for the total length of speeches given in the legislature, we use ordinary least squares regression models. In each case we allow the standard errors to be clustered within each party in each district in each election year in order to account for the possibility that the legislative effort of an MP may be correlated with the effort exerted by other MPs. That is, districts may differ in terms of the competitiveness of the selection process (whether a primary or not) leading, e.g., MPs in highly competitive districts to exert greater effort than in a district exhibiting average levels of competitiveness.

The results are shown in tables 6-10. Considering first the number of bills presented by each MP, we find that the method of nomination has a limited effect – at least when considering all MPs together. Primaries do, however, appear to affect the incentives of some opposition MPs. The behavior of opposition MPs elected in first of their party list in their district are not affected by the method by which they were nominated but opposition MPs that occupied seats lower on their party list were more likely to present private member bills. The effect is fairly moderate; opposition MPs that didn't head the party list in the district are estimated to propose 2.28 to 3.32 more bills over the four year legislative term. It is important to emphasize that the variable SEAT is the MP's position on the party list and not a direct measure of electoral vulnerability.

That is, while a party list position is related to electoral vulnerability, there is a big difference being the first seated MP in district where the MP is her party's only MP and a district where she is one of the party's five MPs. In some sense, then, SEAT captures the MP's position within her party rather than vulnerability. In order to examine the effect of electoral vulnerability, we also estimated the models where SEAT was replaced with a measure of electoral vulnerability. While the results are substantively similar, they are not statistically significant. Thus, it appears that the incentive to propose legislation is more closely linked to the MP's standing within the party than her electoral vulnerability

Overall, government MPs are less likely to propose legislation, which is in line with the perspective emphasizing the party as a gatekeeper to positions of power and influence. While the coefficient of the interaction between PRIMARY and SEAT is positive and marginally significant, the marginal effect of PRIMARY never reaches conventional levels of statistical significance. MPs in rural districts are similarly less likely to propose legislation despite the fact that MPs in rural districts are generally expected to place greater emphasis on constituency service and pork barrel politics. This suggests that rural MPs focus their energy elsewhere, which is perhaps not surprising given the low probability of members' bills being adopted. The delivery of particularistic policies relies on influencing legislation and, in order to do so, MPs are likely to direct their efforts at lobbying their party leadership or to seek influence through the legislative committees. Another indicator of whether electoral motives drive parliamentary behavior is the timing of bill introduction. There is little evidence of an increase in bill introduction among opposition MPs during the last session of the legislative term – instead there is a statistically significant decline in the number of bills introduced that suggests, perhaps, that opposition members shift their attention to other activities that they consider more important in electoral terms. The opposite is, however, true of government MPs who are more likely to introduce bills in the last session.¹¹ One possible explanation of this is that opposition MPs are generally not constrained by their parties throughout the legislative term while government MPs, on the other hand, are but that those constraints may loosen or become less effective when an election is on the horizon, i.e., maintaining party discipline may become more difficult there is uncertainty about how long the government will remain in office and, importantly, MPs face uncertainty about their future.¹²

¹¹ The results for the subsample of government MPs are not shown here but are available upon request. However, comparing coefficient for Last Session in columns 4 and 6 in table x suggests that this is likely to be the case.

¹² Indeed, when considering changes across all the session, we find that government MPs propose more bills in the second half of the electoral term, suggesting that the promise of party patronage declines as the end of the legislative term draws nearer.

Table 6: Number of Bills
 –Standard Errors Clustered by District Party–

	ALL		OPPOSITION MPs		GOVERNMENT MPs	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PRIMARY	0.074 (0.345)	-0.013 (0.918)	0.13 (0.457)	-0.35 (0.217)	-0.027 (0.901)	-0.40 (0.140)
SEAT	0.0047 (0.944)	-0.027 (0.711)	-0.24** (0.026)	-0.56*** (0.000)	0.042 (0.359)	-0.045 (0.498)
PRIMARY*SEAT		0.048 (0.358)		0.37** (0.032)		0.13* (0.072)
LAST SESSION	-0.054 (0.300)	-0.057 (0.299)	-0.44*** (0.000)	-0.44*** (0.000)	0.31*** (0.001)	0.28** (0.039)
RURAL DISTR.	-0.15*** (0.001)	-0.14*** (0.001)	-0.19 (0.136)	-0.17 (0.188)	-0.42*** (0.009)	-0.43*** (0.004)
MEETING DAYS	0.00050 (0.758)	0.00049 (0.772)	-0.010** (0.019)	-0.0095** (0.023)	0.0088** (0.025)	0.0082* (0.061)
GOVT. MP	-0.89*** ($<.001$)	-0.89*** ($<.001$)				
MINISTER	2.72*** ($<.001$)	2.72*** ($<.001$)				
CONSTANT	0.62** (0.019)	0.67*** (0.007)	2.15*** ($<.001$)	2.50*** ($<.001$)	-1.14** (0.036)	-0.84 (0.134)
ln(α)	-0.42*** ($<.001$)	-0.42*** ($<.001$)	-0.26** (0.025)	-0.28** (0.018)	0.28*** (0.010)	0.26** (0.027)
OBSERVATIONS	1231	1231	442	442	548	548
LOG LIKELIHOOD	-2323.0	-2322.6	-814.1	-812.4	-660.5	-659.1

p-values in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The results with regard to parliamentary motions are fairly similar in substantive terms to the ones for legislative proposals. That is, being nominated through primary does appear to encourage opposition MPs that didn't occupy the top position to propose more parliamentary motions although the results here fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Government MPs are less likely to propose parliamentary motions as before but none of the other variables are statistically significant although the direction of the estimated effects is generally consistent with the previous results.

Table 7: Number of Motions
–Standard Errors Clustered by District Party –

	ALL		OPPOSITION MPs		GOVERNMENT MPs	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PRIMARY	-0.15 (0.3)	-0.25 (0.3)	-0.065 (0.8)	-0.51* (0.06)	-0.092 (0.3)	-0.14 (0.5)
SEAT	-0.098 (0.2)	-0.13 (0.3)	-0.32*** ($<.001$)	-0.61*** (0)	-0.0039 (1.0)	-0.014 (0.8)
PRIMARY*SEAT		0.050 (0.6)		0.33*** ($<.001$)		0.017 (0.8)
LAST SESSION	0.071 (0.6)	0.073 (0.5)	-0.0083 (0.9)	0.0027 (1.0)	0.0032 (1.0)	0.001 (1.0)
RURAL DISTR.	-0.11 (0.4)	-0.11 (0.4)	-0.023 (0.9)	-0.016 (1.0)	-0.096 (0.7)	-0.095 (0.7)
MEETING DAYS	0.0034 (0.5)	0.0035 (0.5)	-0.0012 (0.8)	-0.0007 (0.9)	0.0018 (0.7)	0.0018 (0.7)
GOVT. MP	-0.59*** ($<.001$)	-0.59*** ($<.001$)				
MINISTER	0.44** (0.04)	0.43** (0.04)				
CONSTANT	0.77 (0.2)	0.83 (0.2)	1.53** (0.01)	1.83*** (0.002)	0.055 (0.9)	0.090 (0.9)
ln(α)	0.35** (0.04)	0.35** (0.04)	-0.27 (0.5)	-0.28 (0.4)	0.18 (0.2)	0.18 (0.2)
OBSERVATIONS	1231	1231	442	442	548	548
LOG LIKELIHOOD	-2159.3	-2158.9	-880.7	-879.1	-810.9	-810.8

p-values in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Turning to the speeches made by MPs (tables 8 and 9), there is limited evidence for the nomination method mattering in terms of how often MPs make speeches on the floor or for how long they speak. There is a slight suggestion that opposition MPs nominated through primaries make more speeches and that this effect is stronger for MPs lower on the party list but the effect falls short of being statistically significant. With regard to the length of the speeches, MPs that lead their party list spent about six hours less time giving speeches if they

were nominated through a primary – for other MPs the effect was not statistically significant (and positive if they were below the second place on the party list).

The lower the MP was on the party list, the fewer speeches she gave and the less time she spent speaking. Again, this suggests that the motives driving MPs to engage in these sort of activities are not related to electoral concerns but rather the MP's position within the party. Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, the MPs are not trying to impress voters with their speeches, or other parliamentary activity, but, instead, their audience is their own party. The importance of the party is further supported by the fact that government MPs devote less effort to speechmaking as do the MPs in the final session of the electoral term. Rural MPs, who are generally believed to rely more on the personal vote, are also less prone to spend much effort on speechmaking.

Table 8: Number of Speeches
–Standard Errors Clustered by District Party –

	ALL		OPPOSITION MPs		GOVERNMENT MPs	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PRIMARY	0.0047 (0.932)	0.063 (0.656)	0.047 (0.753)	-0.022 (0.879)	-0.063 (0.554)	-0.079 (0.742)
SEAT	-0.096 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-0.080 [*] (0.079)	-0.21 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-0.25 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-0.098 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-0.10 ^{**} (0.020)
PRIMARY*SEAT		-0.028 (0.665)		0.049 (0.106)		0.0060 (0.945)
LAST SESSION	-0.11 ^{**} (0.011)	-0.11 ^{***} (0.003)	-0.043 (0.697)	-0.040 (0.712)	-0.20 ^{**} (0.025)	-0.20 ^{***} (0.009)
RURAL DISTR.	-0.18 ^{***} (0.000)	-0.18 ^{***} (0.000)	-0.14 (0.130)	-0.13 (0.128)	-0.34 ^{***} (0.002)	-0.34 ^{***} (0.002)
MEETING DAYS	0.0086 ^{***} ($<.001$)	0.0086 ^{***} ($<.001$)	0.013 ^{***} ($<.001$)	0.013 ^{***} ($<.001$)	0.0047 ^{**} (0.019)	0.0047 ^{***} (0.007)
GOVT. MP	-0.68 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-0.68 ^{***} ($<.001$)				
MINISTER	0.25 ^{***} ($<.001$)	0.25 ^{***} ($<.001$)				
CONSTANT	4.74 ^{***} ($<.001$)	4.71 ^{***} ($<.001$)	4.37 ^{***} ($<.001$)	4.42 ^{***} ($<.001$)	4.60 ^{***} ($<.001$)	4.61 ^{***} ($<.001$)
ln(α)	-0.97 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-0.97 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-1.04 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-1.04 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-0.75 ^{***} ($<.001$)	-0.75 ^{***} ($<.001$)
OBSERVATIONS	1224	1224	439	439	544	544
LOG LIKELIHOOD	-7010.2	-7009.5	-2684.4	-2684.3	-2958.4	-2958.4

p -values in parentheses. * $p<0.10$, ** $p<0.05$, *** $p<0.01$.

Table 9: Speeches in Minutes
–Standard Errors Clustered by District Party –

	ALL		OPPOSITION MPs		GOVERNMENT MPs	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Primary	-54.8 (0.34)	-57.0 (0.58)	-161.6 (0.23)	-444.4** (0.045)	-7.23 (0.61)	5.30 (0.86)
Seat	-34.7* (0.088)	-35.4 (0.23)	-147.0** (0.039)	-318.6* (0.056)	-9.28 (0.11)	-6.58 (0.38)
Primary*Seat		1.09 (0.97)		199.8 (0.13)		-4.61 (0.65)
Last Session	-25.3** (0.017)	-25.3** (0.018)	-35.9 (0.60)	-30.0 (0.65)	-34.6 (0.17)	-33.9 (0.17)
Rural Distr.	-42.8*** (0.0071)	-42.7*** (0.0080)	-58.4 (0.35)	-43.6 (0.49)	-52.5* (0.063)	-53.1* (0.065)
Meeting Days	3.54*** (<.001)	3.54*** (<.001)	6.93*** (0.003)	7.28*** (0.0019)	0.92 (0.17)	0.94 (0.16)
Govt. MP	-521.2*** (0.00058)	-521.2*** (0.00058)				
Minister	121.3*** (0.0024)	121.3*** (0.0025)				
Constant	525.3*** (<.001)	526.6*** (<.001)	448.0* (0.090)	634.3* (0.057)	181.9** (0.021)	173.1** (0.034)
Observations	1224	1224	439	439	544	544
R ²	0.43	0.43	0.20	0.22	0.085	0.086

p-values in parentheses. * *p*<0.10, ** *p*<0.05, *** *p*<0.01.

Finally, we consider the number of questions MPs ask ministers.¹³ Here we do find that MPs nominated through party primaries are more likely to ask questions – although the effect is only statistically significant for the MPs occupying the top two spots on the party list (when considering the model with the interaction term). Interestingly, government MPs nominated through primaries are less likely to ask ministers questions – this finding does not fit easily with either with the party perspective or the electoral perspective. Government MPs are, of course, much less likely to ask ministers questions than opposition MPs are but it is nevertheless a puzzling finding. The content of the questions may, of course, be relevant; MPs that rely on the party for their list position might, e.g., use the question period to ‘throw the minister a softball’ to allow a minister to speak on an issue that she actually wants to talk about or, potentially, to allow the minister to avoid more hostile questions from opposition ministers if time is limited. Or, perhaps, asking questions provides

¹³ Ministers are excluded from this analysis for the obvious reasons.

future primary opponents with the ammunition to paint the MPs as disloyal party member.

There are also interesting differences here with regard to the effects of list position on the propensity to ask questions. Among opposition MPs, MPs lower on the party list, and, thus, generally, less secure, ask fewer questions while the opposite is true for government MPs. While the behavior of government MPs fits the electoral perspective, it is not clear that this is the case when the results are taken together. From the electoral perspective it is not clear why the behavior of government and opposition MPs should differ in this manner. The behavior of government MPs can possibly be explained by the party perspective. Government MPs that were low on the party list are more likely to have been looked over in the allocation of positions of influence, may have little to lose with the end of the term drawing close, and, therefore, be more likely to ask questions. At last, oppositions MPs ask fewer questions if they come from a rural district and if they are in the last session of the electoral term.

Table 10: Number of Questions
–Standard Errors Clustered by District Party –

	ALL		OPPOSITION MPs		GOVERNMENT MPs	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PRIMARY	-0.079 (0.46)	0.27* (0.067)	0.26*** (0.005)	0.29 (0.22)	-0.25** (0.021)	-0.035 (0.87)
SEAT	0.054 (0.20)	0.15*** ($<.01$)	-0.20*** ($<.01$)	-0.18 (0.26)	0.12*** (0.003)	0.16*** ($<.01$)
PRIMARY*SEAT		-0.15** (0.014)		-0.022 (0.89)		-0.079 (0.24)
LAST SESSION	-0.16* (0.081)	-0.15** (0.036)	-0.49*** ($<.01$)	-0.49*** ($<.01$)	0.084 (0.61)	0.095 (0.50)
RURAL DISTR.	-0.076 (0.51)	-0.093 (0.43)	-0.17* (0.070)	-0.17* (0.065)	0.049 (0.79)	0.033 (0.86)
MEETING DAYS	0.0033* (0.099)	0.0028** (0.042)	-0.0033 (0.23)	-0.0033 (0.21)	0.0055 (0.17)	0.0056 (0.12)
GOVT. MP	-1.40*** ($<.01$)	-1.39*** ($<.01$)				
CONSTANT	1.99*** ($<.01$)	1.83*** ($<.01$)	2.95*** ($<.01$)	2.93*** ($<.01$)	0.16 (0.74)	0.037 (0.94)
ln(α)	0.32*** ($<.01$)	0.30*** ($<.01$)	0.039 (0.56)	0.039 (0.57)	0.57*** ($<.01$)	0.57*** ($<.01$)
OBSERVATIONS	983	983	439	439	544	544
LOG LIKELIHOOD	-2611.3	-2606.6	-1452.5	-1452.5	-1134.4	-1133.7

p -values in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Taken together the results are more supportive of the party perspective than the electoral perspective, i.e., we find limited evidence for an electoral connection even for MPs who are nominated through party primaries. The legislative behavior of government MPs, with the exception of the number of questions asked, is generally neither affected by nomination method nor the position they occupied on the party list in their district. Overall, government MPs are also substantially less active, which suggests that partisanship is the primary factor shaping their behavior. When it comes to opposition MPs, who are less likely to be constrained by their partisanship, we find some indications that electoral concerns shape legislative behavior. In particular we find that opposition MPs nominated through primaries present more legislation and parliamentary motions provided that they did not head the list in their district. There is no clear evidence that nomination method affects their decisions to speak on the floor but they are more likely to make use of their ability to ask ministers questions.

There are additional suggestions that electoral motives are not the prime determinant of legislative behavior. If anything, legislative activity declines towards the end of the legislative term when MPs would be expected to step up their efforts if the motivation to engage in legislative activity was to improve the chances of reelection. Finally, MPs in rural district in Iceland have generally been seen as being more engaged in constituency service with a substantial emphasis on the provision of particularistic goods, which suggests that building a personal vote is of substantial importance to them. Yet, we find that across all the forms of legislative behavior we consider, rural MPs are either no different or less engaged than other MPs.

Conclusions

The literature on primaries has tended to focus on the consequences of transferring the power of nomination from party elites to broader sections of party supporters. Seen from the vantage points of the theory of responsible party government, these consequences are often seen as being undesirable, i.e., reducing the ability of the parties to keep their candidates in line, to present a cohesive front, and to reduce accountability. There are good reasons to think this may be the case, i.e., primaries place candidates in direct contest with their co-partisans. Thus, the candidates must distinguish themselves in some manner

and seek to build a personal vote, which may involve staking out positions that diverge from the party's policy.¹⁴

As we noted above, the literature on primary elections has been heavily focused on the United States until very recently and there are reasons to believe that the lessons from there don't travel easily to other political systems. In particular, the incentives to build a personal vote may manifest themselves in different ways in parliamentary systems. Parliamentary systems tend to be characterized by a tight control of the legislative agenda by the government and the ability of MPs to independently influence policy – or to deliver particularistic goods – is highly limited. Thus, whether the MP seeks to influence policy or seeks reelection through the provision of pork barrel, achieving those goals generally requires working within her party.

Thus, the question we have sought to address here is whether the incentives to build a personal vote dominate the variety of incentives MPs have to side with their party when it comes to legislative behavior. In the electoral perspective, MPs are assumed to adopt legislative behavior that is conducive to them winning reelection. The key implication of the electoral perspective is that MPs nominated through primary elections, and especially those that are electorally vulnerable, ought to be more active in the legislature in order to build a personal reputation and a record of service for her constituency. In contrast, the party perspective suggests that nomination method ought to have little impact on the MPs legislative behavior, i.e., if the road to a successful political career runs through the party, having success in building a personal vote and in the primaries is only a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for political influence. It is important to note that the legislative behavior of government MPs is more informative when it comes to evaluating which of these perspectives is a better reflection of the MPs' motivations. The reason is that opposition parties and their MPs have similar interests, i.e., to make life more difficult for the government parties. Moreover, as parties tend to be unable to advance their legislative agenda when they are in opposition, the legislative behavior of opposition MPs is not much of threat to the opposition parties.

Overall, our findings suggest that the party perspective is a better description when it comes to explaining the legislative behavior of Icelandic MPs. Apart from reducing the frequency with which government MPs ask ministers

¹⁴ Scholars have noted that other electoral systems generate similar incentives as primary elections. Open-list proportional representation systems, e.g., are in effect systems in which a primary election and the general election are rolled into one. Primary systems differ from open-list proportional representation systems in that the primary takes place before the general election, which may allow the party to appear cohesive at election time even after a fractious primary. This may also be important because the distance in time between the primary and general election may serve to raise the intensity of the competition while candidates may moderate their behavior in open-list PR elections for a fear of hurting their party's electoral success.

questions, being nominated to the party list in a primary election does not appear to affect the legislative behavior of government MPs. We do, however, find that electorally vulnerable opposition MPs that were nominated through primary are more likely to propose legislation and parliamentary motions. Thus, in a situation where not toeing the party line is less consequential, it appears that the electoral perspective on parliamentarian's behavior gains some relevance. These findings are in line with other findings in the literature on legislative behavior of parliamentarians. Rombi and Seddone (2016) find that the parliamentary behavior of Italian MPs is not affected by the candidate selection methods and Yael (2009) comes to a similar conclusion in a study of the members of the Israel Knesset.

A large part of Icelandic MPs' work is concerned with the standing committees. This is less transparent than what occurs in plenum and even less visible to the voters. This, by many, is considered the "real" working environment in parliament. Committee meetings, however, with some exceptions, take place behind closed door. Thus, while the committees may be the main instrument for ordinary MPs for influencing the work of parliament, they do not guarantee them visibility. And in any case, cordial relations to ministers and committee chairs are a far more likely method of obtaining influence than cultivating a personal reputation.

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