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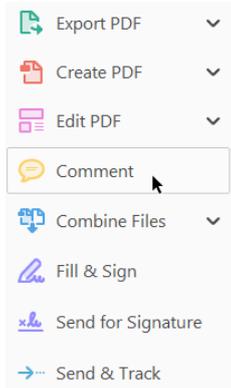AQ11:   Please provide volume number for the reference.

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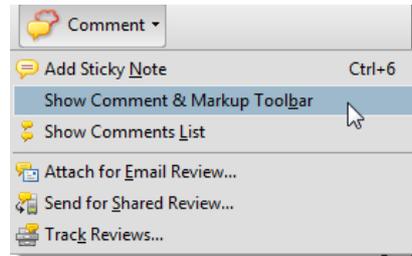
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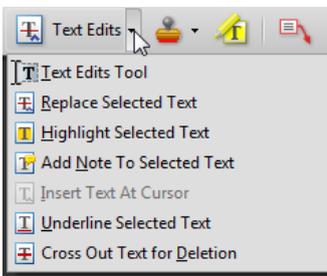The toolbar shown below will then be displayed along the top.

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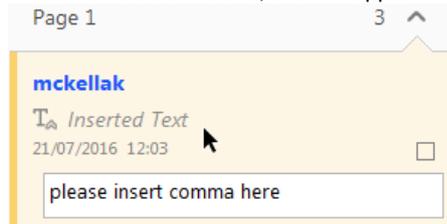
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Introduction: Towards a Better Understanding of Parliamentary Unity

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The study of parliamentary party unity has followed several lines of enquiry: describing the variation across political actors, contexts and time; comparing the multidimensional and dynamic aspects of parliamentary party unity; explaining it from a rational-institutional perspective with emphasis on macro-level arrangements and individual rational motivations. However, we know relatively little about how party organizations shape parliamentary party unity and this special section seeks to address this gap in the literature. This introductory article explains how the special section makes theoretical contributions to the concept of unity, provides alternative measurements and investigates several alternative determinants of unity.

Keywords: Political Parties, Party Unity, Parliaments, Solidarity, Legislative Behaviour, Western Europe

1. Introduction

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Parliamentary party unity is a central feature in contemporary parliamentary democracies. It has important effects on government's survival and stability, coalition behaviour, bargaining power of the party in public office and electoral success (Giannetti and Benoit, 2009; Kam, 2009; Pedersen, 2010; Saalfeld, 2009; Boucek, 2012; Tavits, 2012). Consequently, a better understanding of its determinants and functioning mechanisms is also crucial. An extensive body of literature has examined the variation in parliamentary party unity across time and/or space, within or across specific national contexts (Bowler *et al.*, 1999; Hazan, 2006;

Sieberer, 2006; Carey, 2007; Stecker, 2013). While this research has extended our understanding of parliamentary unity and of its determinants, it has nevertheless been plagued by several limitations. First, these studies often relied on a unidimensional definition of party unity, conceived as the act of MPs from the same party *voting* in a unitary manner (Janda, 1993; Olson, 2003). Yet, more recent perspectives have highlighted the multidimensional and dynamic aspects of parliamentary party unity, which results from a sequential process of agreement, loyalty and discipline (Hazan, 2003; Andeweg and Thomassen, 2011; van Vonno *et al.*, 2014).

Second, measures of parliamentary party voting unity extensively relied on available recorded (roll-call) voting data, although they only provide partial information on legislators' genuine relationship to their party (Carrubba *et al.*, 2006; Hug, 2010) and on what occurs *behind closed doors*. Third, explanations of parliamentary party unity were predominantly entrenched in rational-institutional approaches, while sociological explanations have often been neglected. Besides, while these studies have highlighted the impact of macro-level institutional settings and individual rational motivations (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Bowler *et al.*, 1999; Sieberer, 2006; Carey, 2007; Depauw and Martin, 2009; Kam, 2009; Gherghina and Chiru, 2014), we know relatively little about how party-level organisational factors shape the various dimensions of parliamentary party unity (Tavits, 2012; Little and Farrell, 2017).

This special section seeks to address these gaps in the literature. This special section gathers contributions that were presented during the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops (Nottingham 2017), in a workshop dedicated to 'Rethinking intra-party cohesion in time of party transformation' (workshop directors: Caroline Close and Sergiu Gherghina) and makes a three-fold contribution. As presented below, the articles (i) develop a multidimensional and dynamic conception of unity; (ii) rely on diverse methodological tools to measure the various dimensions of unity, and provide original data; (iii) investigate the determinants of unity at several levels of the polity.

2. Defining parliamentary party unity: a multidimensional and dynamic perspective

The articles included in this special section examine unity in parliamentary parties as a dynamic and multidimensional concept occurring through 'sequences', and take into account both attitudinal and behavioural dimensions of legislative unity. This understanding of parliamentary party unity relies first on the distinction between unity, cohesion and discipline (Hazan, 2003). Unity describes the degree to which legislators from the same party act in unison (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2011), and results from both cohesion and discipline. Cohesion

constitutes the sociological dimension or *voluntary pathway* towards unity, while discipline is associated with rationality and compulsion. Second, it relies on the distinction between at least two dimensions of cohesion: on the one hand, party agreement or shared preferences, defined as 'the extent to which co-partisans agree with one another when voting on legislation' (van Vonno *et al.*, 2014, p. 112); on the other hand, party loyalty, which derives from the legislators' internalisation of the norms of party unity and solidarity. Third, the contributions connect the various dimensions of parliamentary party unity with Hirschman's (1970) framework of 'Exit, Voice & Loyalty', and empirically investigate the relationship between these categories: voice/disagreement, loyalty and exit/party switching—the ultimate lack of unity.

Zittel and Nyhuis examine the voting behaviour of legislators in the German Bundestag, and relate this behaviour to unity in policy preferences. Similarly, Bhattacharya and Papageorgiou investigate legislators' dissenting preferences in the German Bundestag during the Greek crisis and their related voting behaviour. Close, Gherghina and Sierens focus on legislators' pre-floor attitudes across several European national assemblies, and try to capture their degree of (dis)agreement and (dis)loyalty towards their party. Mickler, as well as Roos, demonstrate the processual nature of party unity, which can be built despite potential policy disagreement, either in parliamentary committee in the Dutch Tweede Kamer and German Bundestag (Mickler) or within European parliamentary party groups through both socialisation effects and advantages provided by party groups (Roos). Pedersen and Kaldahl Nielsen, as well as Volpi, concentrate on party switching, that is, cases where unity was breached and where 'exit' constituted a more valuable option for legislators. They relate these switching behaviours with disagreement/voice patterns at both the individual and party levels.

3. Measuring parliamentary party unity: methodological diversity and innovation

The contributions provide a good balance in terms of methodology, and a relevant overview of the tools that can be used to grasp the various dimensions of parliamentary party unity. While recorded voting data (roll-call votes) have proven useful to grasp legislators' voting behaviour, and still constitute a benchmark in the study of legislative unity, they nevertheless involve several limitations. First, as only a relatively small proportion of votes are recorded in many assemblies, and as leaders may strategically 'call the roll' to discipline their fellows, roll-call voting data tend to overestimate the level of pre-floor unity within parliamentary parties. Unity or so-called cohesion indexes (Rice, 1925; Attiná, 1990) built on recorded votes indeed score pretty high across parliamentary democracies, with only small variations (Depauw and Martin, 2009; Little and Farrell, 2017).

Second, legislators' voting behaviour, even when not recorded, often results from intra-party processes of consensus-building, and is greatly affected by the pressure of the party (leader) and fellow co-partisans to stick to the party line and to appear united when voting on pieces of legislation. Voting data thus poorly accounts for pre-floor levels of unity within a parliamentary party, and do not allow grasping what occurs within the 'black box' of parliamentary parties.

Hence, the contributions presented in this special issue combine various tools and data, in order to grasp both visible and less visible sequences of unity, at different levels. Zittel and Nyhuis, as well as Bhattacharya and Papageorgiou, use recorded voting data to measure *visible* defection from the party line. Zittel and Nyhuis further rely on a quantitative-text based analysis of 'explanations of votes' (EoV) in order to grasp legislators' ideological positioning independently from their voting behaviour, while Bhattacharya and Papageorgiou analyse both speeches and EoV in the same purpose. Both analyses demonstrate how speeches and vote explanations can be used by individual legislators to highlight or *voice* their individual stances on floor votes and criticism on their parties' position, while still sticking to the party line in the final vote. Close, Gherghina and Sierens use quantitative surveys of legislators to measure attitudes of agreement and loyalty, and show that these attitudes show greater variation than usual voting scores. Mickler and Roos provide new and comprehensive material on unity-building by using qualitative interviews with (former) legislators. Their contributions permit to get deeper into the process of unity building at both the individual and party levels. The articles examining party switching also rely on original data sets, which were built either using purely quantitative data (Volpi) or mixed-methods (Pedersen and Kaldahl Nielsen). These latter contributions demonstrate that while party unity has become the norm in parliamentary democracies, exit behaviours are not that uncommon across time, parties and legislatures.

4. Explaining parliamentary party (dis)unity: a multilevel approach

Existing research already set forth the influence of multiple factors on the degree of parliamentary party unity, or lack thereof, at different levels of the polity. At the macro level, scholars highlighted the role of state structure, legislative rules and functioning and electoral systems (Patzelt, 2003; Sieberer, 2006; Carey, 2007; Depauw and Martin, 2009; Kam, 2009; Andeweg and Thomassen, 2011). At the micro level, scholars examined the impact of individual resources, socio-demographic factors and strategic motivations (Kam, 2009; Tavits, 2009; Gherghina and Chiru, 2014). Party-level factors were also considered, such as candidate selection rules, size of the party, government and opposition position and size of the governing majority (Hix, 2004; Hazan and Rahat, 2006; Sieberer, 2006;

Depauw and Martin, 2009; Rombi and Seddone, 2017). However, this research has rarely questioned the effect of extra-parliamentary party organisational features, such as intra-party power, intra-party democracy and party ideology (Hazan and Rahat, 2015; Close, 2016). Yet, organisational aspects, as well as the ideological identity of parties, have been and are still changing considerably and require to be brought back into the study of parliamentary party unity.

The articles presented in this special section examine the determinants of legislative (dis)unity at several levels, and provide evidence of party-level variations. Besides, while the existing research is dominated by a rational-institutional approach that mostly conceives legislators as strategic actors, who seek to fulfil specific objectives (i.e. vote-seeking, policy-seeking and office-seeking) (Strøm, 1997) that are 'institutionally conditioned' (Hazan and Rahat, 2006, p. 366), the contributions in this special section interestingly combine rational-institutional approaches and more sociological explanations of legislators' attitudes and behaviour.

Zittel and Nyhuis put forth legislators' strategic motivations (office and vote), and their findings highlight specifically the role of electoral incentives. Bhattacharya and Papageorgiou underline the effect of legislators' electoral connection, experience and career prospects, as well as gender. These two contributions also uncover party-level variations related notably to government and opposition dynamics. Mickler and Roos provide empirical evidence of the role of informal processes and socialisation throughout various parliamentary institutions and working procedures. Finally, three contributions focus on the effect of extra-parliamentary party characteristics: Close, Gherghina and Sierens explore the role of intra-party democracy; Pedersen and Kaldahl Nielsen investigate the impact of intra-party power distribution and Volpi considers the role of party ideology.

Conclusion

The contributions presented in this special section share a similar understanding of parliamentary party unity as a multidimensional concept, which can refer to both behavioural and attitudinal phenomena, and can be grasped at both party and individual level. In behavioural terms, at the party level, parliamentary party unity refers to a party *acting* in unison; at the individual level, it describes a legislator acting according to her/his party guidelines or in line with a majority of her/his co-partisans. In attitudinal terms, at the party level, unity can either refer to an ideologically homogeneous party, or a party in which the norms of party solidarity or loyalty are well-entrenched and effective; at the individual level, it describes a legislator having preferences close to that of her/his party or co-partisans (or a legislator who mostly agree with her/his party's policies or

positioning), or a legislator that has a great sense of loyalty towards her/his party. Parliamentary party disunity in behavioural terms can result from a lack of ideological consensus and/or loyalty; but can be counterbalanced by party discipline—the parliamentary party leader using carrots and sticks to enforce a united behaviour among her/his fellows. The ultimate lack of unity occurs when even discipline becomes ineffective, and translates into one or several legislators leaving the party, thereby threatening the integrity and stability of the group.

Because of this comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of parliamentary party unity, as well as for all the reasons exposed above, we believe that this special section brings an important contribution to the study of parliamentary party unity.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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