All Votes are Equal?

Significant Legislation and Party Competition in the Danish *Folketing*

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Abstract
In nearly all studies on legislative party competition, all votes are treated equally. We argue that the cooperation between parties varies substantively depending on the type of legislation analysed. However, establishing a measure of the relative significance of votes has challenged legislative studies for decades. We propose to use a novel measure for legislative significance: length of debate. Using parliamentary votes from 23 legislative periods in the Danish Parliament (1953-2003) and debate length as measurement for bill significance we present analyses focusing on between-party voting patterns on significant and non-significant legislation and discuss the presence, extent, and features of legislative cartels. Our results suggest that when looking only at the significant legislation reveals more clearly the legislative cartels within the legislature. These findings first of all challenge the traditional assumption of treating parliamentary votes equally and secondly, the findings allow for a better understanding of legislative cartels in the Folketing.

When in session, members of legislative assemblies help pass numerous bills. The votes are assumed to be a function of underlying legislator preferences (e.g. Poole and Rosenthal, 1997) and they are subsequently used for gauging party competition and its dimensionality (e.g. Hansen and Debus, 2012; Hix, Noury and Roland, 2007; Hix and Noury, 2013), evaluating representation (e.g. Schonhardt-Bailey, 2003), or finding pivotal actors within a particular decision making body (e.g. Lauderdale and Clark, 2012; forthcoming). Independent of the chosen approach (i.e. ideal points, optimal classification, index of distances), co-voting patterns between parties or legislators are the basis of these analyses. Along models evaluating the complexity of factors underlying, recent studies have demonstrated that a more accurate picture of decision-making behaviour is drawn using information about the bills (Clinton, 2012; Gerrish and Blei, 2012; Aldrich, Montgomery and Sparks, 2014), or more generally the content of the decisions (Lauderdale and Clark, forthcoming). This allows us to explicitly consider the heterogeneity of preferences, depending on well-defined characteristics of the decision. This article fits within this framework and focusing on bill significance we test a theory of legislative interaction between parties in the Danish parliament (*Folketing*).

Most Danish governments since 1953 have been minority governments, indicating the need of forming informal coalitions or legislative cartels in order to safely pass government proposed bills. Through an analysis of fifty years of parliamentary voting in Denmark we show that party co-voting differs depending on the significance of the legislation, enabling us to detect the presence of legislative cartels.

Whether the difference in the significance of bills is due to financial or political reasons, a difference exists, and party leaderships do not consider all bills equally important across all parties (Patty, 2010: 123). This has been acknowledged for a long time and has resulted in various approaches to determine the relative importance of bills in political

systems (e.g. Riker, 1959; Mayhew, 1991; Binder, 1999; Clinton and Lapinski, 2007). All of these examples come from research on the U.S. Congress and it is only in very limited form that work exists asking the same question on different legislative settings (though see Warntjen, 2011; Bräuninger et al., 2013). We measure significance through the length of debate associated with the particular bill, as the institutional setup of the parliamentary rules limits the possibility of endless debate for distortion purposes.

We argue that on significant legislation, one group of legislative actors form a type of legislative cartel wherein most significant bills are passed. Parties outside of the cartel, often parties who in the particular parliament are on the far sides of a left-right spectrum, only sparingly join in supporting significant legislation as they are not offered the possibility to influence the content of the proposed bill. We analyse co-voting patterns showing that there is more overlap in terms of votes between government and opposition parties on non-significant legislation, but particular opposition parties vote more in line with the government on significant legislation. Furthermore, we show that when the government seat share is larger, there is less cartelization, as there is no need to bring opposition parties on board to assure the passage of significant bills. We develop our understanding of the reach and extent of party cooperation in multiparty systems and contribute to the under-researched implications of significant legislation.

Party positions and competition in the Danish Parliament

Previous studies of the Danish parliament have found that it is predominantly uni-dimensional (Hansen, 2008) and 80 per cent of legislation is passed with the support of at least four parties, the four "old" parties, Social Democrats, Social Liberals, Conservatives and

Liberals (Kurrild-Klitgaard et al, 2006).[1] Especially the latter finding is important for this study. It hints towards the existence of a type of legislative cartel. The legislative cartel model (Cox and McCubbins, 1993; 2005) in its pure form tells us that legislative actors form cartels to control the agenda through delegation of agenda-setting powers to the majority party. This cannot be directly applied to parliamentary constellations where agenda-setting is either directly or indirectly solely a matter for the government, and in cases of minority governments this aspect becomes crucial for how and where parties seek support for their legislative proposals. Furthermore, in these cases collective action dilemmas complicate even more the legislative process (see also Cox and McCubbins, 2005) and as party reputation depends on the legislative record incentives for legislative cartelization can be even stronger. This entails the government to actively seek a majority for its policy proposals through negotiation with the opposition parties, if a government is not able to secure a majority its reputation will suffer and ultimately result in a general election.

The application of cartel theory predicts that the government will seek to limit the number of parties available for these policy coalitions to minimize the cost of repeated negotiations or the possible policy content compromises needed. We argue that parties that are not necessarily a part of the negotiation might still vote in favour of the bill to show their willingness to compromise on other issues, i.e. show that they are interested in being a more active member of the cartel. This is akin to the assumptions made by Cox and McCubbins on party reputation and legislative productivity (2005: 21-22). Cartel membership in our approach is not formal and parties can drift in and out, but those who are further away from cartel membership are mostly parties who are either on the extreme left or right, as they are often seen as untrustworthy partners as their demands for agreeing to support a policy are too

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[1] These four parties have always had a majority in the parliament though never served in a peacetime government together.

far from what is acceptable to the government. It can be costly for a government to rely on extreme parties to pass their bills in terms of reputational costs, and conversely for some parties it can be equally costly to support the government. To a large extent this can be translated into an ideological element of voting, where we would expect parties ideologically far away from the government to vote against the proposals of the government.[2]

The specific Danish context also requires us to briefly consider the issue of "core support parties", i.e. parties that are not a part of the government, yet vote for all or nearly all of the proposals put forward by the government and are included in all or nearly all of the negotiations with the government. While it is true that some parties have taken up this position more than others, the tradition in the Danish Parliament for relatively broad majorities (see Kurrild-Klitgaard et al., 2006) suggests that whether a party is a "core support party" or not is of less importance for our particular problem as it is more often than not a matter of oversized policy coalitions which makes it difficult to exactly pinpoint which party is the precise "core support party". On the other hand, we do expect the decision by a party whether or not they are a part of the cartel to have substantial impact on their voting behaviour in the parliament.[3]

Parties that are a part of the legislative cartel will generally vote more in line with the government on all bills, as they need to keep their place in the cartel. Parties wish to stay in the cartel, and voting in line with the government on non-significant legislation is necessary but not sufficient, whereas on significant legislation it is also sufficient, i.e. the party wishes to signal that it is a credible partner and more credibility is gained by taking responsibility on significant legislation, i.e. voting in favour.

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[2] The existence of an ideological element in parliamentary voting is corroborated generally by Hix and Noury (2013) and specifically for Denmark by Hansen (2008).

[3] Unanimously passed legislation was on average 35 per cent per year in the period 1953-2005 (Christiansen, 2008:79).

In contrast parties who are not a part of the cartel will not be given the spoils they require to vote for the significant legislation, they might be included in the non-significant legislation as the reputational costs for parties of joining non-significant legislation is low and the government might even be willing to share some of the spoils of the non-significant legislation to show good faith.[4] Generally, given a one-dimensional quasi-ideological dimension in the Danish Parliament, we would expect that the parties on the far-right and far-left will be those that are more likely to not participate in the cartel on either type of legislation, while parties traditionally seen as more centre based will seek to increase their membership of the cartel by supporting the non-significant legislation.

Thus, the legislative cartel logic in our adaptation can be thought of along the lines of inclusion or exclusion (both by the government), whereas outside the government it is a matter of signalling intention of membership. When reputational costs are lower for the parties (i.e. non-significant legislation) signalling is less costly in terms of possible electoral losses (supporting the government). If we consider differences in terms of policy preferences, using votes on non-significant legislation to signal cartel membership willingness is also expected to be less costly. For a one-dimensional model this should translate into some parties voting more often together with the government on the significant votes (those included in the cartel by the government), while some parties may vote with the government more often on the non-significant votes, but less frequently on significant votes (excluded by the government on the decision-making process for significant votes and signaling intent on the non-significant votes).

In sum, parties not included in the legislative cartel will be excluded from the

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[4] The near perfect occurrence of minority government rarely allow for tough oppositional politics, i.e. voting against the government at every bill as it is in next session could be the reversed situation where the previous opposition now in government would have to work with the previous government, now in opposition.

decision-making process of the significant legislation, which would in most cases lead them to vote against the legislation thus resulting in weaker overlap with the government in terms of voting patterns. There will be a smaller group of parties with whom to share the spoils of the legislation and the reputational costs by legislating with extreme parties can be minimised, however, given the nature of minority government we believe this will vary depending on whether the parties deem the legislation to significant or not.

[Table 1 here]

Parties for whom it is neither beneficial to vote with the government on significant or non-significant legislation (excluded from decision-making and signalling negative intent) we expect to have substantively less co-voting with the government. Given the institutional constraints and power relations granted by electoral support, our approach also contributes to a feasible way of detecting the legislative cartel in a particular legislature. We summarise our expectations for different outcomes describing the nature of legislating and intra-parliament workings in Table 1.

Bill significance

Measures of significant legislation rely on data from the time point of the vote, data from within the legislative setting itself. Thus, in order to understand what data is there and how it is influenced we need to look at what governs the legislature under examination. These institutional properties condition both *what* can be considered as a possible indicator of significance and *which* levels on these indicators suggest that we are looking at significant or non-significant legislation.

Objectively defining the relative salience of a piece of legislation is not an easy task. What might be seen as extremely salient when passed might not be so 30 years later and a piece of legislation yielding little controversy when passed may have much influence decades

later. Riker (1959) was one of the first to point out this issue and further distinguished between significant and important legislation. Significance relates to judgement made at the time when the vote occurs and importance relates to the judgement sometime after the vote (Riker, 1959: 378).

While remotely acknowledging these conceptual differences[5], nearly all of the studies attempting to determine the relative salience of legislation use the aspect of important legislation and analyse the implications for legislative gridlock (e.g. Mayhew, 1991; Binder, 1999). In his pioneering work, Mayhew (1991: 45-59) implemented a two-stage process approach, first using annual end-of-session wrap-up articles from newspapers to survey contemporary judgements about the significance of Congress' work each session, and then retrospective judgments by policy specialists' about the importance of legislation. In a similar vein, Binder (1999) developed a Congress-by-Congress gridlock score coding the legislative content of each editorial mentioning the Congress, House or Senate and then used the issues mentioned to compile a list of agenda items for each Congress, tallying the number of editorials the *New York Times* ran on each issue (Binder, 1999: 524).

In recent years the coding approach has been augmented by approaches relying more on expert surveys than Mayhew or Binder did, either as stand-alone methods or in combination with the coding approaches. Clinton and Lapinski (2006, 2007) presented a new measure of legislative importance by using elite evaluations of a new dataset containing every public statute enacted combined with item response theory, whereas the combined use of expert evaluations and media coverage is the strategy used to study salience of legislation in the European Parliament (Warntjen, 2011).

Although the distinction between important and significant legislation is far more than

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[5] Indeed, in his influential work Mayhew only deals with this problem in one sentence: "In principle, the term important will connote both innovative and consequential" (1991:37).

a nuance, studies dealing with the significance of legislation are few. Riker (1959) proposed a measurement using the turnout on votes and the closeness of the vote to derive an index of significance (further extended by Bax, 1981), but as King (1986) showed, leaving out the closeness of the vote and focusing only on turnout already yields a useful expression of the significance of the vote. However, as argued by Riker (1959) the method he developed was done so specifically for Congress and would require some adjustment to be used in other legislatures. Indeed, this argument holds for the entire literature on significant and important legislation, that bar a few studies, they all focus on Congress.

Conceptually, the question of significance was debated also by Pedersen (1967b) who presented arguments in favour and against including a measure of significance. First and foremost Pedersen (1967b: 421) argued that if the goal was merely descriptive then the issue of variation in the level of significance was moot. However, if the votes were to be used as explanations it was deemed necessary to include some form of distinction in the votes. While Pedersen (1967b) did not operationalize his arguments for distinguishing between votes he followed the arguments presented by Riker (1959:378) on the problematic nature of using voting behaviour without considering the potential differences in the votes.

The overall conceptual differentiation between importance and significance travels well across countries and legislatures, but the measurement of these concepts needs adaptation that reflects institutional constraints and legislative dynamics that are inherently different in other contexts. This is especially the case for determining the significance of the legislation, less so for importance, because the former is based on measures of MP or party behaviour where both the rules guiding competition and the interests of parties can be systematically different across legislatures.

Operationalization of bill significance in the Danish Parliament

All legislatures are governed by standing orders which set out the rights of the individual MPs and the party groups; who can ask for a vote, how many MPs needed for a quorum, how long an MP can speak for, etc. Despite the importance of standing orders, it is only recently that efforts have begun analysing how standing orders are changed and politicised (see Sieberer et al., 2011). However, it is not only through the formal institutions that the behaviour of MPs and parties are regulated. Informal arrangements may also play an important role. In this study we focus on determining the significance of legislation in the Danish Parliament.

While there are votes in the Danish Parliament they have little resemblance with the traditional roll call voting, and thus original methods relying on legislators' voting records need adaptation. First, while there is a provision for roll call votes in the standing orders this has not been used in the last several decades. Second, the level of party cohesion in the voting behaviour of MPs is so high it makes little sense to talk of individual MPs making a decision on proposal; this is done by the party group as a whole (see also Skjæveland, 2001). Thirdly, not all MPs vote on all proposals. As the voting takes place along party lines, an informal agreement between the parties allowing a proportion of their members to be paired absent.[6] This challenges the use of voting records on two levels: first, the number of participants is an artificial number with no meaning, and second, the size of the majority is not necessarily equal to reality as the number of people absent influences it.

What can be used is something governed by the standing order – length of debate. Gary Cox (2006) describes legislative debate as a matter of a 'plenary bottleneck' in which parties are aware that there is limited time available for debate in the plenary and thus parties make choices regarding which debates are to be given more focus than others. Overall, there

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[6] This is not unique to the Danish Parliament. Pairing is the norm in most modern parliaments to keep the balance between participating in votes and the general MP workload.

has recently been an increased focus on legislative speech as a valuable tool for measuring legislative activity or MP positions (e.g. Bäck, Debus and Müller, 2014; Proksch and Slapin, 2012). Generally, it is believed that legislative speech is something used to increase media attention and present individual positions (Maltzman and Sigelman, 1996) or in coalition governments to differentiate coalition partners on policy (Martin and Vanberg, 2008). Proksch and Slapin (2012) find where party reputation is more important than individual MP reputation it is much more controlled who gets to speak from the floor. Bäck, Debus and Müller (2014) finds a gender difference in who speaks on which issue, however, their focus is on the individual level of MPs and not at the party level. However, their study finds differences based on what type of policy is analysed, which supports our argument that there is a difference on bills which we believe is one of significance vs non-significance. While Proksch and Slapin (2012) argue that party groups have established rules for who can speak on which issues it is also important to look at the formal standing orders in the parliaments under examination.

In contrast to other legislatures the time allocation for debate in the Danish Parliament, for both individual legislators and party groups, is severely limited by the standing orders. While the official party spokesperson on a bill has a longer period of time to debate the bill and given the opportunity for a second round of remarks individual members are more limited in how long they can speak.[7] Thus it is not possible to debate a bill off the floor or indeed to circumvent its success through debating. Debates are nevertheless used to express both the views of the parties supporting the bill and those against it; individual members who have a special view or experience in the area and who are not spokespersons

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[7] For an overview of the particular time allocation for debates see the Standing Orders of the Folketing (Folketinget, 2006).

might contribute, although this is a limited feature in Danish Parliamentary debate.[8]

In other words, for a debate to be lengthy it is necessary that more than one party takes part. It is possible for a party to be the only party to feel very strongly about a bill; this will only make the total length debate marginally longer as the other parties have a low salience on the particular bill. The bill that year after year is the lengthiest is the annual Finance bill. It sets out the spending of the government for the coming year and is significant; should the government fail to pass its budget the government falls as well. Thus, all parties participate at the strongest possible level in this debate, a debate where there is also slightly longer time allotments allowed for the debate. The dynamics of debate in the Danish Parliament have not been researched in detail. Given the standing orders and inspection of some typical debates in the parliamentary proceedings two things stand out 1) even in the short debates all parties present their position and argue why they support or do not support the bill and 2) there is no evidence that opposition parties supporting the government keep their debate contributions to a minimum, as attempting to mask their support will either be flushed out by other opposition parties to show the kow-towing to the government or highlighted by the government to show their ability to cooperate.

Debates are verbatim recorded in the Parliamentary Proceedings providing a source for measuring debate length. The idea of using debate length was actually first presented by Riker (1959) who used it as a control of whether his method for significant legislation captured the bills it was expected to. In other words, in Riker's study the debate length measure registered high convergent validity. Keeping in mind that in the case under examination debate is governed by the standing order and the length is also related to changes in the number of parties, i.e. more parties more spokespersons, it is a measure taken at the

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[8] For bills where the party whip is not enforced, i.e. bills on ethical matters, individual MPs speak more, as there is often no position of the party group as a whole. The number of such bills is limited.

time of the bill of how significant the actors participating in the deliberations perceive it to be. The longer the debate the more significant it is. This has recently been demonstrated by Giannetti et al. (2014) in their analysis of time allocation for plenary debates in the Italian Parliament where they found that there are longer debates in parliament on issues that are divisive and salient than on issue that are less divisive. In connection with the findings of Proksch and Slapin (2012) we argue that this is evidence that solving the plenary bottleneck entails parties making strategic choices of which bills to debate, and devote more time to significant legislation. Following the definition of significance by Riker (1959) it is important to note that it is a definition that is not dependent on the action of one single actor. In other words, one single actor cannot prolong – given the standing orders of the Danish Parliament – the debate in such a way that it will become among the most lengthy.

Data

The analyses in this article are based on a dataset comprising the votes of the party groups on all the final votes on all passed legislation in the Danish parliament from 1953-2003. Danish law requires three readings of a bill in parliament with the vote on the third reading determining whether or not it becomes law. Using the votes from the third reading we can ensure that the parties have all information before casting their vote.[9] The usage of the third reading votes are also in line with the normal approach in studies of the Danish Parliament and the parties votes (see also Hansen, 2008; Pedersen, 1967a; 1967b; Pedersen et al., 1971). This is due to two reasons; first far from all MPs participate in all votes as also discussed

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[9] It should be noted that the government holds a near monopoly of getting bills to the stage of a final vote and once they reach the stage of the final vote they pass. While the opposition may, and frequently do, propose bills, they are usually not reported out of committee after the 2nd reading and hence, not given the final vote. In this respect our results could be biased, however, the data to test whether this is the case is not available, i.e. no final votes.

earlier which would result in positions with very large standard errors if we were to estimate individual positions and more importantly, the near perfect levels of party cohesiveness in Denmark (see Skjæveland, 2001) which shows that deviations from the party line are extremely rare. The few extremely limited events where an MP votes against their party yield little information for the issue analysed in this article.

The data has been augmented by a dataset developed for the study of agenda-setting in Denmark (see e.g. Green-Pedersen, 2010; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010).[10] From this data we have taken the total length of debate on all three readings for each bill (see also Green-Pedersen, 2006) and linked to the voting data in our original dataset. In the appendix Table A1 we present the full list of party abbreviations and Table A2 an overview of the number of bills, the average length of debate in terms of number of columns in the parliamentary proceedings and the standard deviation calculated for each period between two elections or where there has been a change of government composition. Here, we display in Figures 1 the overall distribution of significance.[11]

[Figure 1 here]

We consider legislation to be significant if it is in the 80th percentile of the debate length distribution of legislature in which it was proposed. This coding has two major advantages. First, as already noted there are some bills with very long debates (i.e. Finance bill), which as outliers would make sensitive thresholds problematic. Second, it also assures that for each legislature in question we have 20 per cent of the bills in one category, making these categories comparable in *extent* across legislatures. Additionally, referencing the category thresholds to the distributions in each legislature we make sure that the actors controlling legislation were the same and there is no party related variance in the expression

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[10] Available on http://www.agendasetting.dk/start/page.asp?page=4

[11] In the appendix we present the distributions per legislature in Figure A1.

of significance in terms of the length of the debate. Nevertheless, we include robustness checks (see below) using the continuous version of bill significance.

Analyses

The government parties rally support from various other parties – formally non-government or opposition parties[12] in order to pass legislation. Policy influence may be given to parties that are expected to demand least in exchange for passing the proposed bill; nevertheless, other parties might also vote for the bill to signal that they are viable partners for later bills.

We focus on three aspects of the legislative cartel theory using party dyads from each legislature. First we split the bills into those passed unanimously or not. We have larger numbers of unanimous bills than those reported by Christiansen (2008) as we only use the votes on government bills and only those who are actually passed at the third and final reading in parliament. In fifteen out of twenty-three legislatures analysed here, systematically appearing up until the 1975 legislature, we find less unanimous votes on significant bills (see Appendix Table A3). Around that period we also see a substantive decrease in the proportion of unanimous votes. This is undoubtedly due to the increased number of parties represented in the parliament, where the norm before 1973 was five parties, but it never dropped below eight parties in the period afterwards, also covered in this paper. While unanimous votes can help us understand the presence of legislative cartels, they are not suitable to meaningfully speak to finer party differences, so we exclude them from the subsequent analyses and focus on the possible differences in party voting behaviour.

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[12] In the period considered in this article only 1957-60, 1968-71 and partially 1993-94 saw majority governments. These few observations are much too limited for exploring any difference between majority and minority governments.

We look at the party level majority with which non-significant and significant bills are passed. For each bill voted on, we calculate the proportion of parties that voted "Yes" from the total number of parties in the parliament. The presence of a legislative cartel is indicated by a more restricted group of parties assuring the passage of the bill, or, in other words, we smaller proportions of the parties voting for significant bills, while still assuring that the bill passes. Figure 2 displays these differences.

[Figure 2 here]

Somewhat similar to our preliminary look at unanimous votes, we find that, except for two legislatures, smaller groups pass bills on significant legislation. However, for the 1968-1971, 1977-1978, and the legislatures after 1984 the differences are very small. Until the 1971 legislature we find strong indication of legislative cartels, but in the period afterwards the evidence for legislative cartels is weaker. The figure does show that after a period from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s of very large majorities on votes, there is a return to more moderate size of vote majorities. At the same time, in the later parts of the period covered in this paper there are smaller differences between the non-significant and significant votes. Whether this is due to an increased used of legislative accommodations (see Christiansen, 2008; Klemmensen, 2005) or the legislative cartels being stronger on *both* significant and non-significant legislation is difficult to disentangle, not least when it comes to determining which is a necessary condition of the other.

The core mechanisms of how the legislative cartels can operate were two-fold: through inclusion of a limited number of parties by the government, and/or through exclusion of the more extreme parties. One straightforward implication of the inclusion mechanism is that fewer opposition parties will work together with the government on significant legislation. For each bill, we have calculated the proportion of opposition parties that voted in

the same way as the main government party (or simply the government party in single party government).

[Figure 3 here]

We find that in almost all legislatures, fewer opposition parties vote in accordance with the government on significant legislation, though the differences from the 1968 legislature onwards are substantively small (see Figure 3). For our purposes, we identified the ideologically most extreme parties for each legislature, on both ends of the left-right ideological scale.[13] To reiterate, according to the exclusion mechanism, ideologically extreme parties are expected to vote with the government to a smaller extent on the significant bills. The party furthest to the right was set as the Conservatives until 1973, then the Progress Party and since 1998 the Danish People's Party. During the 1970s the position as the most left-wing could be a competition between the Communists and the Left-Socialists. Where the Communists were represented they were chosen as the most left-wing, where the Left Socialists were represented and not the Communists, they were chosen. From 1987-88 Common Course held this particular distinction, and during the 1960s and early 1990s the Socialist People's Party held the positions, before it was taken over by the Unity List.

[Figure 4 here]

Each legislature has two extreme parties (left and right), for each bill, we have recorded the proportion of these extreme parties (0, 0.5, or 1) that voted with the government. As seen in Figure 4 (and Appendix Table A4 an A5), the results conform well to the traditional description of Danish politics post-1953. The 1966-68 legislature has *SF* as the party with the most overlap on the significant votes, and it was during this period that *SF* was a key supporter of the Social Democratic government led by Jens Otto Krag. Their

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[13] Extremity is here a relative term, i.e. furthest to the left and furthest to the right among the parties represented in the particular legislative period.

cooperation has gone into Danish political history as the 'red cabinet' (*røde kabinet*). *SF* take on their supporter role after the Social Democrats were able to wrangle the post of prime minister away from the Social Liberals in 1971, though from 1977-1988 it is the Social Liberals (RV) who are the key actors with most overlap on both non-significant and significant votes. From 1977-82 to the Social Liberals lend support to the various Social Democratic led governments, however after 1982 they switched to support the Conservative led coalition government. Eventually the Social Liberals entered government in 1988, though left again in 1990 and shortly after began re-orientating themselves towards the Social Democrats, which is also why the Christian People's Party are the most overlapping party on the significant votes in the 1990-93 period. When the Social Democrats took over the government in 1993 *SF* returned to their position as most overlapping party until 2001 where the Liberal-Conservative coalition took office with strong and clear support from the Danish People's Party. In the appendix (Figures A2-A3) we include a full set of figures for each legislature displaying opposition party level average co-voting with the government. Here there are similar interesting elements at play. The period after the earthquake election of 1973 until around 1981 is unsettled in terms of which parties overlap more and this is concurrent with previous studies (e.g. Hansen, 2008). Both the Social Liberals and the Progress Party supports the Conservative-led coalition government in 1982, a government which fell as the Social Democratic was not willing to support or abstain on the budget bill in late 1983. However, after the 1984 election the Social Democrats appear to have taken up a more positive approach to the government.

Finally, if the explanation of these differences between how different government and opposition parties behave on significant vs. non-significant legislation is rooted in the possible strategic differences in how governments approach bargaining with other parties to

pass the bills, we should find a relationship between the extent of differences in overlap and the seat share held by the party or parties in government.

[Figure 5 here]

Indeed, Figure 5 shows that higher government seat shares are associated with less opposition party support, but we find no evidence of a systematic relationship between the role of ideologically extreme parties and government seat share.

Robustness checks

In order to assess whether the choice of length threshold (80th percentile) could matter, we carried out additional analyses using debate length as a continuous indicator of significance. For each legislature, we exclude bills with debate length in the top 1% to discard possible outliers, such as the Finance bill, and then normalize the debate length (for each legislature separately), by subtracting the mean and dividing with two standard deviations.

The second source of possible heterogeneity is linked to the topic of bills. For the topic, we use as a proxy the cabinet ministry where bill originated. To avoid a large number of empty cells from the thirty-four distinct sources for a bill we created 7 broader categories to account for important topic differences. The list of sources and the broader categories used subsequently are reported in Appendix Table A6. Furthermore, in 565 cases bill proponent information was not available, resulting in a total of 4534 not unanimous bills used in the analyses below. We find a difference between welfare bills and non-welfare bills and we also see the area of agriculture and fisheries becoming less important over the years, thus fewer significant bills on this topic in recent years. The detailed trends can be found in Figure A4, appendix.

In Appendix Figure A3 we present detailed information on each party (whenever in parliament and in opposition) in terms of average co-voting with the government on non-

significant and significant bills, for each policy area separately. While there are differences between policy areas, we find no systematic patterns. Still, there is an interesting factor that deserves a highlight. It seems that for a large part of the time when there is a Social Democratic government, e.g. during the 1960s and again from 1993-2001 the few significant welfare bills that are put forward are supported more than the non-significant welfare bills and it is also different from when other parties are in government. This suggests that the reforms of the welfare state made under Social Democratic governments are stronger and perhaps why they rarely get reformed in major ways when Liberals or Conservatives lead the government. The additional checks indicate some heterogeneity when it comes to policy areas; however, these are neither systematic nor influential in terms of the substantive findings reported in the main analyses section.

Finally, we have specified a series of multivariate models presented in Table 2. There are three outcome variables, all of them expressed as proportions (with detailed bivariate trends in Appendix Figures A5-A7): (a) the proportion of parties voting for a bill out of the total number of parties (majority with which the bill is passed), (b) the proportion of opposition parties of the total number of opposition parties voting with the main government party, and (c) the proportion of ideological extreme parties voting for the bill (from the total of two extreme parties). These are modelled as a function of significance, when in the election cycle the bill was debated (number of days to the next elections, rescaled to range from 0 [closest] to 1 [furthest away]), and a categorical bill domain indicator. As the outcome variables represent proportions and in each case we always know the totals (or total number of trials), we use a binomial regression. Bills are also nested in legislatures, so we specify a hierarchical model, which further allows us to directly include the size of the government as a legislature level predictor, measured as seat share in the Parliament held by the government

(rescaled to range between 0 [smallest government in the period studied] to 1 [largest government in the period studied]).

[Table 2 around here]

These results indicate that, on average, increasing significance (no matter which measurement is chosen) is associated with smaller bill level majority and also with a lower proportion of opposition parties supporting a particular bill. We find no evidence for significant relationships with the proportion of extreme parties that support a particular bill. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous section, these differences are mostly driven by the early legislatures. In sum, we find evidence for our approach to legislative cartels that mostly work through inclusion of a limited number of opposition support parties, and the heterogeneity throughout time is not necessarily an overall change in how legislation is approached, but it is more likely to posit that the differences are associated with how strong of a government is proposing the actual legislation.

Conclusions

The issue of the relative importance or significance of a bill has despite efforts by Riker (1959) and King (1986) been largely ignored in the studies using legislative voting behaviour in the attempt to understanding competition within a legislative assembly. Even more so remarkable as the issue is more than just a methodological question as also highlighted by Patty (2010). All legislation is not of equal importance or - as is the focus of this paper - significance for the polity in which it is passed. Some is purely routine legislation, i.e. the updating of dates or rates in an existing bill where as other is society changing, e.g. allowing same-sex marriage, radically altering social benefits. There is probably little discussion about this fact. Where the discussion may start is whether it actually makes a difference for legislative scholarship. Our view after presenting the research in this article is that it does

make a difference and thus, we should be careful in just taking for granted that all legislation is equal as it can bias the findings. Moreover, such bill specific information can be used to better understand party competition or cooperation in legislatures.

When dividing the legislation on the basis of debate length, which in the Danish case is heavily regulated by the standing order and hence, not possible for a single maverick MP or party to prolong debate indefinitely, we do find differences. There is a difference between party behaviour on non-significant and significant legislation, or alternatively the legislative cartels formed on significant and non-significant legislation are different. Towards the last few decades studied here the difference between significant and non-significant legislation generally gets smaller, although it is still present. Whether this is something that is here to stay or whether it is a period of outliers remains to be seen. What we can say is that the number of extreme parties, both left and right, has decreased in the same period. In other words, there are fewer parties who are excluded, either by own choice or by the government, from the legislative cartel. Indeed, from 2001- onwards the Liberal-Conservative government relied heavily on the Danish People's Party for passing policy, a party that emanated from the Progress Party and could be seen as an extreme party as their kin.

There are of course caveats relating to the analyses presented here. First, we have shown how it works where minority governments are the norm, whether the same patterns can be found in settings where majorities are the norm remains to be seen. Second, it cannot be entirely ruled out that some issues that are very contentious and would garner substantial debate are not debated in the chamber but instead placed in committees which may not report, i.e. creating less contentious votes; indeed taking the plenary bottleneck (Cox, 2006) into consideration this is quite likely. Thirdly, it is due to the nature of the standing orders that it is possible to use debate length as a proxy for significance. In cases where debate can be lengthened by one MP or one party it becomes less useful as it might not just be about

significance, but also about obstruction, in other words for this approach to be applied in other settings we need to consider specific institutional features. Hence, future research on other parliaments should consider finding both the applicable measure of significant legislation, but also the appropriate hypotheses that can emerge in the institutional constrains and the structure of the party competition, especially with relation to how the legislative cartel model would fare in the particular institutional setting. The recent focus on analysis of legislative speech is encouraging in this respect (e.g. Bäck, Debus and Müller, 2014; Proksch and Slapin, 2012) as an improved understanding of the role speech play in parliaments can only help establish the extent to which debate length is a useful measure for significant legislation.

However, when these aspects are tailored to the cases under investigation, our findings can serve as a starting point for which parties or MPs are expected to exhibit different behaviour depending on the type of legislation under scrutiny.

Furthermore, the theoretical implications of our study can easily be incorporated to recent attempts that use the content or domain of the legislation as input. For example, with a clear notion of which party *owns* a particular issue and legislation categorized based on its issue content, one can argue that differential behaviour can emerge in case of parties or MPs who are bound to care about the issue in question, but can relatively freely choose their votes on issues that are not a crucial part of their electoral portfolio.

For the study of Danish politics the findings presented in this article entails that the existing scholarship on conflict in the Danish parliament (e.g. Pedersen, 1967a; Pedersen et al., 1971; Hansen, 2008) may have to be refined. The idea that Danish politics is primarily consensus ruled still holds, although it becomes less clear-cut when taking the level of significance of the legislation into account. We believe that the Danish case is not unique. Where minority governments operate, we would expect the cartel theory model to function in

a similar manner as discussed in this paper: there is a difference between the attention given to legislation, a difference that in turn can be used as a measure for the legislative significance.

Table 1: Expectations

Measure	On significant vs. non-significant legislation
Share of unanimous votes	Less
Share of parties voting for significant legislation	Less
Share of opposition parties supporting government	Less
Likelihood of ideologically extreme parties supporting government	Less

Table 2: Multivariate results

	Majority		Opposition proportion		Extreme proportion	
	continuous	*dichotomous*	*continuous*	*continuous*	*dichotomous*	*continuous*
Significance	-0.058**	-0.093***	-0.079**	-0.131***	-0.051	-0.063
	(0.025)	(0.033)	(0.036)	(0.044)	(0.042)	(0.054)
Electoral cycle	0.025	0.025	0.038	0.040	-0.080	-0.080
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.078)	(0.078)
Domain (Agriculture baseline)						
Culture and Education	-0.080	-0.080	-0.059	-0.059	0.115	0.116
	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.064)	(0.064)	(0.108)	(0.108)
Economy and trade	-0.230***	-0.230***	-0.251***	-0.253***	-0.085	-0.085
	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.093)	(0.093)
Environment and energy	-0.064	-0.064	-0.055	-0.057	-0.106	-0.106
	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.078)	(0.078)	(0.137)	(0.137)
Law, order, defense, foreign policy, prime ministers office	-0.123**	-0.121**	-0.122**	-0.119**	-0.027	-0.026
	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.105)	(0.105)
Local government	-0.209***	-0.211***	-0.232***	-0.235***	-0.038	-0.037
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.100)	(0.100)
Welfare	-0.278***	-0.281***	-0.316***	-0.320***	-0.002	-0.002
	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.065)	(0.064)	(0.111)	(0.111)
Government size	-0.505	-0.461	-1.779***	-1.694***	0.229	0.210
	(0.327)	(0.321)	(0.320)	(0.314)	(0.350)	(0.340)
Intercept	1.324***	1.315***	1.609***	1.580***	-0.357	-0.331
	(0.227)	(0.223)	(0.222)	(0.218)	(0.255)	(0.251)
Between legislature variance:						
Intercept	0.084	0.083	0.074	0.072	0.087	0.095
Significance	0.002	0.004	0.011	0.016	0.001	0.004
Bills	4,484	4,484	4,484	4,484	4,484	4,484
Legislatures	23	23	23	23	23	23
AIC	14,904.170	14,900.830	14,828.210	14,823.550	7,574.495	7,573.799

Note: Logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. * for $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. For columns labeled *continuous*, debate length is treated as continuous and for columns labeled *dichotomous,* debate length treated as categorical, with length above the 80th percentile (in each legislature) considered as significant. Model data frame includes only complete observations, i.e. where exact date and debate length are not missing.

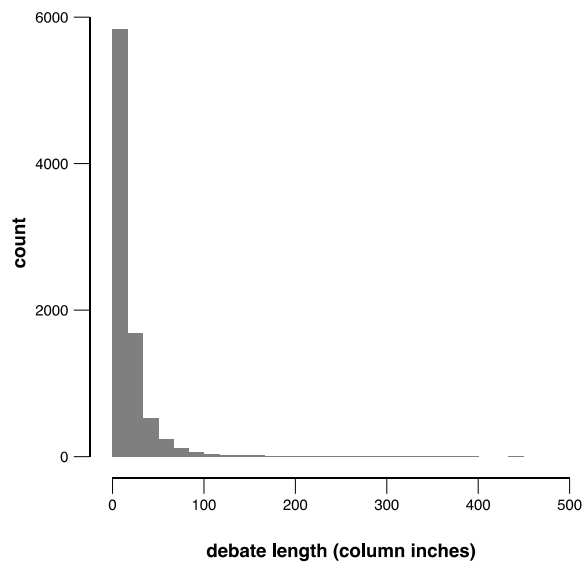**Figure 1:** Distribution of debate length, all legislatures

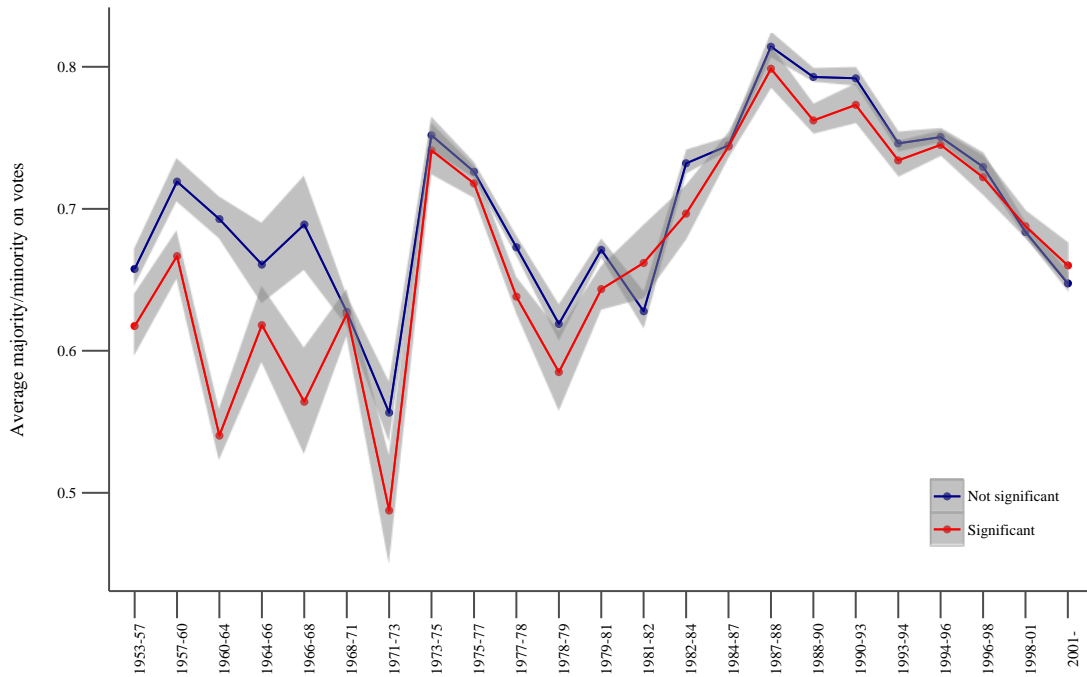**Figure 2:** Average majority with which bills were passed

Figure 3: Average proportion of opposition parties voting with the government
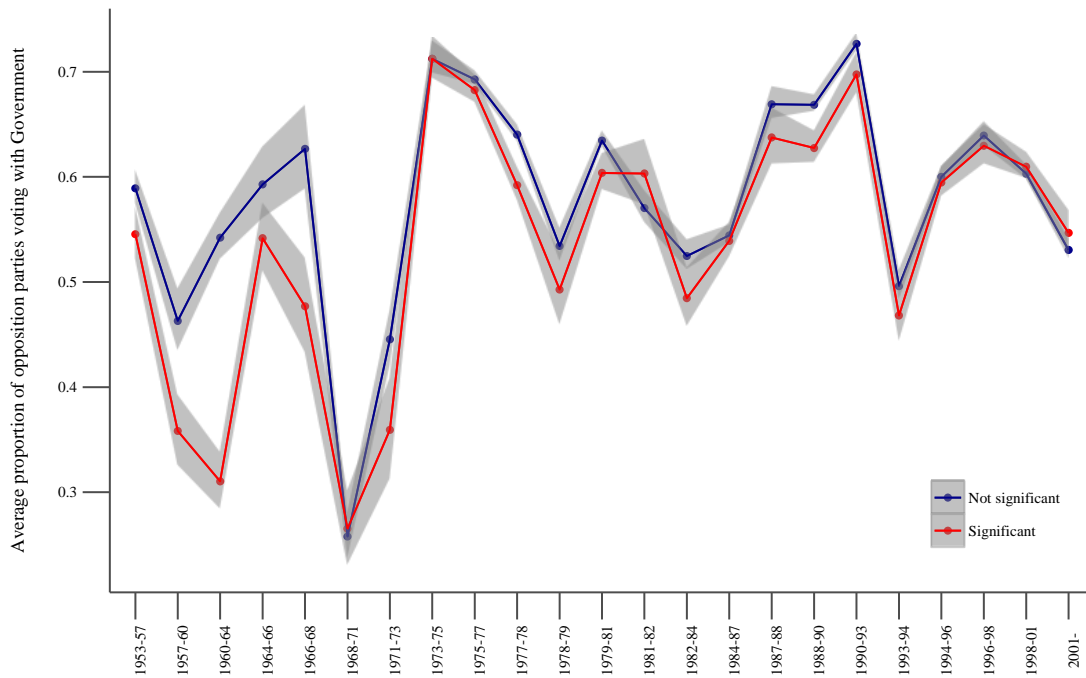
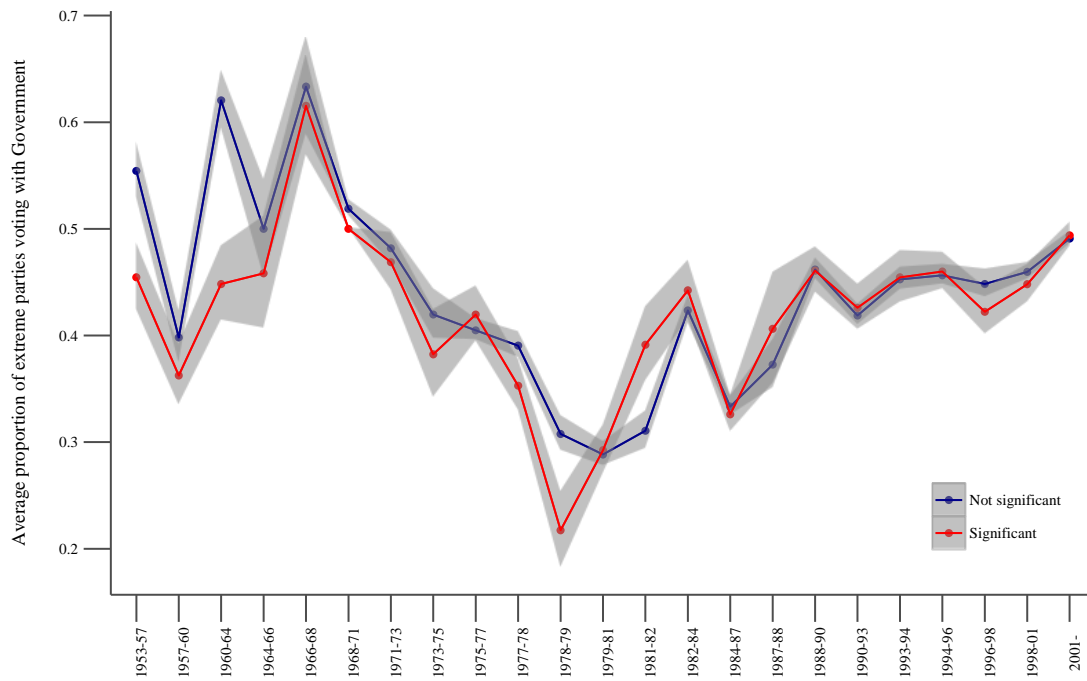**Figure 4:** Average proportion of extreme parties voting with the government
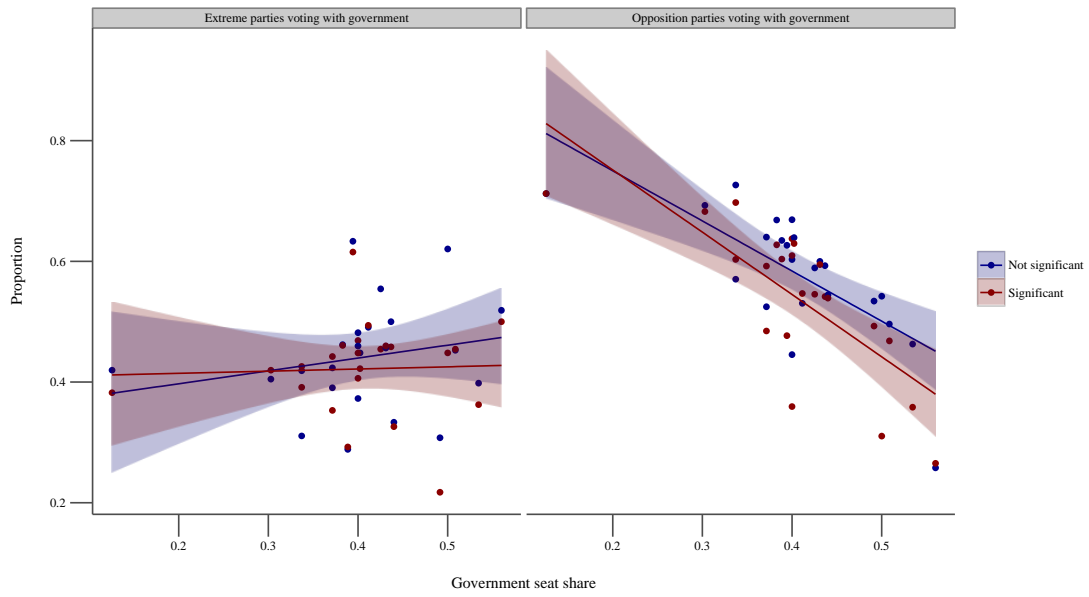
Figure 5: Bivariate relationship between government seat share and legislative cartel indicators

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