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THE ACCEPTANCE OF PARTY UNITY IN PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACIES

DAVID M. WILLUMSEN

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Preface

United political parties are, in the European setting, the default understanding of how politics functions—the leader says jump, and the backbenchers ask how high. An enormous amount of work takes this state of affairs for granted, and the translation of citizen preferences into concrete policy change to a large extent relies on it being the case. This top-down perspective is very compelling for a number of reasons, in particular since it seems to explain why self-interested political actors with diverse views, better known as politicians, manage to act in unison so regularly. When I first started studying this topic, I thought this top-down perspective was obviously true, yet the deeper I dwelled into it, the less convinced of it I became. First of all, I began to question whether the views of partisan politicians truly differed as much from each other as we'd come to expect—we tend to notice the disagreements, and ignore the much more frequent agreement. Secondly, it became harder and harder for me to maintain that highly successful politicians (which we often forget is what national legislators are) would so universally accept being dominated by party leaders whose survival was in their hands.

I was first introduced to the systematic study of legislatures as a master's student at the London School of Economics, in an eye-opening course on the legislative politics in the European Parliament. I became fascinated by the extent to which it was possible for the highly diverse legislative parties in the European Parliament to function as (more or less) unitary actors, despite all the many reasons there was for them failing to do so. The course encouraged me to undertake a PhD, which I was extremely fortunate to be able to pursue at the European University Institute in Florence. I was given free rein to develop my own topic for my thesis, which evolved into a project to explore intra-party politics in legislatures.

I'm enormously grateful that my thesis at the EUI was supervised by two extremely accomplished scholars. Peter Mair taught me an enormous amount about party politics, encouraged me to read widely, to pursue my ideas even if they seemed unlikely to work out, and to go beyond the perceived wisdom and the obvious answers. His death was not only a great to loss to his supervisees, but also to the wider political science community. Adrienne Héritier was the most thorough and supportive supervisor I could have asked for.

She made every part of my work stronger and better, challenged all parts of my thinking, and taught me more about clear reasoning than anyone else.

Mark Franklin and Simon Hix made me very happy by agreeing to serve on my thesis jury, and their comments and suggestions made it much better. In addition, both were patient teachers of mine. Mark taught me to love data, and Simon to love parliaments. Their intellectual support and encouragement are gratefully acknowledged.

My friends and fellow PhD students at the EUI ensured my time there was wonderful, even when the thesis and I weren't getting along. The student body at the EUI is small enough that you know, interact, and learn from everyone, and too large to thank everyone in person. A few to whom I am particularly indebted deserve to be mentioned: Julian Topal, Hanna Schebesta, Angelos Chryssogelos, Marat Markert, Conor Little, Elin Hellquist, Josef Hien, and Mattia Guidi all provided support and diversions throughout my time in Florence. Ylenia Carfi patiently listened to me butcher her language, so that my Italian might move beyond ordering coffee.

During my studies, I also got to spend four months as an exchange student at ETH Zürich, where Stefanie Bailer provided me with a great intellectual setting to present and develop my work. On very short notice after Peter Mair's untimely death, she also took me on as a PhD student, challenging and supporting my work, and providing me with an office while I was finishing the thesis. Florian Weiler, Max Würfel, and Clint Claessen all shared that office with me at different times, and all provided support and diversion in the necessary amounts.

My thesis would never have been possible without others giving me access to their parliamentary survey data. Enormous amounts of work go into conducting these, and I was able to draw on much more data than I could ever have collected myself. Ólafur Harðarson, Hanne Marthe Narud, Knut Heidar, and Torben Jensen provided the survey data on the Nordic countries; Peter Esaiasson provided access to the Swedish parliamentary surveys, and Patrik Öhberg helped me whenever I had problems with it. Petr Kopecký sent me the first parliamentary survey data I used (on the Visegrád countries), which helped convince me that the approach was feasible. I am thankful to all of these scholars for so generously sharing their data.

The Danish Ministry of Science funded my PhD studies for four years, and the EUI gave me a finishing grant to get the project over the line—being able to focus on my research without worrying about money was an incredible privilege for which I'm eternally grateful. Both Silja Häusermann and Daniel Bochsler employed me while I was putting the finishing touches on my thesis, making sure it got completed.

Before I had defended my thesis, Klaus Goetz hired me as a post-doc on an exciting project in a great city. Not only that, he pushed me to revise the thesis

into a book and submit it, providing me with the encouragement, deadlines, and work time to successfully do so. For all of that, and much more, I'm forever thankful.

All my colleagues at the University of Munich were unfailingly supportive throughout my time there. Christian Stecker spent hours drinking coffee and discussing legislative politics with me, helping me iron out many issues. Michael Koß' door was always open whenever I wanted to learn more about the development of parliamentary politics, and he taught me a great deal throughout my years in Munich.

At Oxford University Press, Dominic Byatt was extremely supportive of the book, encouraging it throughout the entire process. Olivia Wells, Elakkia Bharathi, Christine Ranft, and Stephen York all made the publication process very smooth, and their reminders whenever I went over a deadline were always polite. Three anonymous reviewers made the manuscript much stronger, which I greatly appreciate.

My parents always encouraged me to read and provided an endless supply of books to that end. They were unfailingly supportive of my studies, never asked me to study something more practical, and encouraged my pursuit of a PhD throughout the process.

Saving the best for last: Tamaki Ohmura. I'm reminded every day how lucky I am to have her in my life, and without her love and support, neither my thesis nor this book would have been finished.

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List of Party Names

Denmark

Centrumdemokraterne	(Centre Democrats)
Enhedslisten	(Unity List—former Communists)
Fremskridtspartiet	(Progress Party)
Konservative Folkeparti	(Conservatives)
Radikale Venstre	(Radicals—Social Liberals)
Socialdemokratiet	(Social Democrats)
Socialistisk Folkeparti	(Socialists)
Venstre	(Liberals)

Iceland

Alþýðubandalagið	(People's Alliance—Socialists)
Alþýðuflokkurinn	(People's Party—Social Democrats)
Framsóknarflokkurinn	(Progressive Party)
Þjóðvaki—Hreyfing Fólksins	(National Movement—Social Democratic)
Samtök um kvennalista	(Women's Alliance— Feminists)
Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn	(Independence Party)

Norway

Arbeiderpartiet	(Social Democrats)
Fremskrittspartiet	(Progress Party)
Høyre	(Conservatives)
Kristelig Folkeparti	(Christian Democrats)
Senterpartiet	(Centre Party—Agrarians)
Sosialistisk Venstreparti	(Socialist Left Party)

Sweden

Centerpartiet	(Centre Party—Agrarians)
Folkpartiet liberalerna	(People's Party—Liberals)
Kristdemokraterna	(Christian Democrats)
Moderaterna	(the Moderates—Conservatives)
Miljöpartiet de gröna	(Greens)
Sverigedemokraterna	(Sweden Democrats)
Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti	(Social Democrats)
Vänsterpartiet	(Left Party—former Communists)

Czech Republic

ČSSD	Czech Social Democratic Party
HSD-(S)MS	Movement for Self-Governing Democracy/ Association for Moravia and Silesia
KDS	Christian Democratic Party
KDU–ČSL	Christian Democratic Union/Czech People's Party
LB	Left Block
LSNS	Free Democrats/Liberal Social National Party
LSU	Liberal Social Union
ODA	Civic Democratic Alliance
ODS	Civic Democratic Party
SPR-RSČ	Association for the Republic/Republican Party of Czechoslovakia

Hungary

EkgP	United Smallholders' Party
Fidesz	League of Young Democrats
FKgP	Independent Smallholders' Party
KDNP	Christian Democratic People's Party
MDF	Hungarian Democratic Forum
MIÉP	Justice and Life Party
MSZP	Hungarian Socialist Party
SZDSZ	Alliance of Free Democrats

Poland

BBWR	Nonpartisan Bloc for Support of Reform
KPN	Confederation of Independent Poland
MN	German Minority
PSL	Polish People's Party
SdRP	Social Democracy of the Polish Republic
SLD	Democratic Left Alliance
UD/UW	Democratic Union
UP	Labour United

Slovakia

EWSS	Coexistence
HZDS	Movement for Democracy of Slovakia
KDH	Christian Democratic Movement
KNP	Group of Independent Representatives
MKDH	Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement
NDS-NA/DU	Democratic Union
SDL	Democratic Left
SNS	Slovakian National Party

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The Puzzle of Backbench Assent

Legislative Parties as Non-unitary Actors

On 8 November 1973, the Social Democratic MP Erhard Jacobsen failed to attend a vote in the Danish Parliament on a key piece of taxation, causing the fall of the government, and in turn the calling of the so-called 'Earthquake' election,[1] which shattered the post-war party political system in Denmark. Jacobsen's claims that he missed the vote only because his car had run out of gas were somewhat undermined by his having founded a new political party, the Centre Democrats, the day before, a party he led until 1989. By the failure of a single MP to attend a vote which the government was expecting him to attend, the government fell; an impressive illustration of the potential power of the individual legislator. While the consequences of this particular breakdown of parliamentary party voting unity are, of course, much more dramatic than most, it still illustrates a very important point: the voting unity of a legislative party cannot be taken for granted by party leaders, and by extension neither by political scientists.

Of course, this is far from the only example of serious consequences of a breakdown of party voting unity. In 1993, the failure of the ruling party to maintain voting unity meant that Latvia was left without a president; in 2002, two members of the governing coalition in Estonia managed to derail the budgetary process by failing to vote along party lines (Tavits 2009, 794). During the election of the Minister-President (Ministerpräsident) of Schleswig-Holstein in 2005, an abstention by a member of the alliance supporting the re-election of the then Minister-President Heide Simonis meant that Simonis was unable to command an absolute majority in the Landtag, and eventually had to step down from the post, despite her being supported

[1] In Danish, this election is known as 'Jordskredsvalget', literally 'the landslide' election. However, it is generally translated as the 'Earthquake election', due to the common usage of the term 'landslide' to connote a substantial victory.