

Parliamentary Voting*

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Abstract

Votes in parliament offer one of the few sources of behavioral data to study members of parliaments (MPs). As a consequence, an increasing number of studies rely on such data and by employing sophisticated methods generates new insights on how members of parliament interact with their constituency, their party and their leaders in parliament. This paper reviews the main strands of research in this field and cautions against a too uncritical use of data on parliamentary voting. First of all, in many parliaments information on individual voting behavior is not available for all votes, and second, votes by MPs are influenced by myriad of factors like their constituency, their party etc. In addition, votes can obviously only be observed on objects having been admitted to the agenda. Consequently, to take full advantage of the wealth of information stemming from parliamentary voting, the full context of MPs' choices have to be taken into consideration.

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1 Introduction

Since the early systematic studies by Lowell (1901) and Rice (1925) research on parliamentary voting has made impressive headway, both in terms of new theoretical perspectives and innovative empirical analyses. In addition, while having been dominated by studies on the United States (US) Congress (though see the comparative component in the study by Lowell, 1901) for a considerable time the field has expanded to cover parliaments in various areas of this world and deals with them both at the sub- and international level. Scholars have employed this rich behavioral data in innovative ways shedding new light on research questions that go well beyond the parliamentary (usually) hemicycle.

It is undeniable that some of this scholarly enthusiasm is related to the increasing ease with which information on parliamentary voting can be collected. While early studies, for instance on the US Congress (e.g., Lowell, 1901) or the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA) (e.g., Ball, 1951; Hovet, 1960; Alker, 1964), relied on painstakingly collected information from the printed versions of the official records and minutes, more recent studies can rely on information easily available online.

This increased ease with which information on parliamentary voting can be collected is in part due to the fact that many parliaments (especially in newer democracies) have increased their transparency by adopting voting methods conducive to more openness (see for instance Middlebrook, 2003). At the same time this increased transparency has shed new light on the extent to which parliaments differ regarding the visibility of what their members do (e.g., Saalfeld, 1995; Carrubba, Gabel, Murrah, Clough, Montgomery and Schambach, 2006; Carey, 2009; Crisp and Driscoll, 2012). As Carey (2009) convincingly argues, the extent to which voting by members of parliament (MPs) is visible relates strongly to how well the latter's principals, for instance voters or political parties, may monitor them.

As a consequence, parliamentary voting that is (to whatever extent) visible is likely to give a different view of many characteristics of parliaments and MPs than if non-visible voting were observable as well. Thus, several scholars have started to alert parliamentary researchers that they might face possible biases when relying too naively on information stemming from parliamentary voting (VanDoren, 1990; Londregan, 2000*b*; Carrubba, Gabel, Murrah, Clough, Monte-

gomery and Schambach, 2006; Roberts, 2007; Carrubba, Gabel and Hug, 2008; Thiem, 2009; Hug, 2010). To address many of these possible problems innovative tools have been developed and evaluated empirically (e.g., Londregan, 2000*b*; Clinton and Meirowitz, 2003; Clinton and Meirowitz, 2004; Hug, 2010; Crisp and Driscoll, 2012).

Thus, in what follows I discuss the development of research on parliamentary voting, and how it has progressed and started to address the challenges mentioned above. In the next section I briefly sketch the main themes covered in research on parliamentary voting, and what theoretical considerations have provided useful underpinning. In section three I show how this important field of research has developed and attempted to deal with the problems alluded to above. Section four deals with the most recent contributions that offer ways to address some of the limitations of information on parliamentary voting, while section five concludes.

2 Background and history of the field

If one approaches the field of parliamentary voting one may be surprised that apart MPs political parties appear as primary focus of interest. Already the early work by Lowell (1901) and Rice (1925) focused largely on the role that political parties played in parliaments. Lowell (1901, 323) characterized a series of votes in the US Congress, some state legislatures and the House of Commons by whether the main political parties were unified (i.e., at least nine-tenths of all voting members voted the same way). Similarly, Rice (1925) developed an index (named after him) which measured how cohesively members of the two parties in Congress, more specifically the Senate, voted.¹ This focus on political parties in early studies of parliamentary voting may surprise for two reasons. First, the framers of the US constitution, and thus also the designers of the US Congress, were very wary of political parties and factions and wished to ensure with their institutional design that the latter played a limited role (Hamilton, Jay and Madison, 1787). Second, in the recent literature on Congress, an influential school of thought sees a very limited role for political parties (e.g., Krehbiel, 1993).

¹It has to be noted that the larger part of Rice's (1925) analyses focuses on the New York Assembly. Similarly, to be true to Rice's (1925) work, this author also contributed a second index allowing assessing how much alike two groups behaved in a legislature (see also Rice, 1928).

Scholars of this school suggest that parties do not have the means to control the relevant actors whose support is necessary to advance legislation.

Despite these critical assessments political parties may play all the same an important role in understanding parliamentary voting due to one or several of following three reasons. First, as both Cox and McCubbins (2005) and Carey (2009) nicely argues, a legislature without some sort of internal organization may lead to the theoretically well documented chaos-results (McKelvey, 1975).² By organizing work in parliaments political parties are of central importance in structuring the discussion and adoption of bills to avoid indecision, even in the US Congress (Cox and McCubbins, 1993, 2005). Second, political parties play a key role in elections. Electoral systems that allow voters few if any choices among candidates from the same party make candidate selection by party organizations a crucial phase in the survival of an MP in office (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Hazan and Rahat, 2010). But even in countries with electoral systems giving almost no role to political parties in the selection of candidates (for instance the US), the former are useful devices for voters in providing shortcuts in the information gathering process (Aldrich, 1995; Cox, 1997). Finally, in parliamentary democracies political parties structure the formation of governments and through the confidence procedure, as Diermeier and Feddersen (1998) convincingly argue, exert influence on MPs, especially of governmental parties (see also Huber, 1996; Strøm, 2000; Huber and Lupia, 2001; Strøm, 2003; Strøm, Müller and Smith, 2010).

Thus, it cannot surprise that two reviews of the literature on parliamentary voting put political parties more or less at center stage. Collie (1984) argues that the literature has essentially focused on research questions dealing with the collective (i.e., the parliament as a whole or subsets thereof, for instance political parties) or individuals. In both sets of research questions political parties are, however, central, as they are often the unit of analysis in the former set and an important explanatory variable in the latter. Similarly, and probably a bit too reductively, Uslaner and Zittel (2006) use the role of partisanship in parliamentary voting as thread to discuss in an eclectic fashion the literature.

A useful starting point to capture why political parties play a crucial role is Mayhew's (1974) contribution to understanding MPs' behavior. Whether MPs

²See the study by Andrews (2002) on the Russian Duma for a careful illustration and analysis of cyclical majorities.

care about policy and/or office, the latter is of interest either intrinsically or indirectly to achieve the former goal (see also Müller and Strom, 1999). Consequently, as gaining office is only possible through elections, considering the “electoral connection” seems a necessary element in getting a better understanding of parliamentary voting. As Carey (2009) nicely discusses, this “electoral connection” can be best conceived of as a principal-agent relationship. In what he defines as “individual accountability,” voters elect their MP(s) and at election time hold them to account. This requires, however, that voters can “throw the [individual] bums out.” As many electoral systems do not permit voters to do so, “collective accountability,” i.e., holding political parties to account, may prevail. In these cases, MPs are only accountable indirectly to voters, namely through their parties. The latter hold MPs accountable through the reselection as candidates and the selection for office in parliament or the party.

Envisioning MPs in such a fashion also suggests, however, that accountability requires some sort of information available to the MPs’ principals on the former’s actions in parliament. Several authors have recently highlighted that information on individual votes by MPs is not very frequently available (see for instance VanDoren, 1990; Saalfeld, 1995; Carrubba, Gabel, Murrah, Clough, Montgomery and Schambach, 2006; Roberts, 2007; Carey, 2009; Hug, 2010; Crisp and Driscoll, 2012). Carey (2009) argues, for instance, that only roll call votes potentially make available information on MPs’ votes to actors outside parliament like voters and interest groups. In signal votes (show of hands, for instance) at best actors inside parliament may know who voted in favor or against a proposal. In secret votes (by using, for instance, an electronic voting system) no actor may observe what MPs decide.

Unfortunately, not very many parliaments use roll call votes systematically for all their business (see Saalfeld, 1995; Carrubba, Gabel and Hug, 2008; Crisp and Driscoll, 2012). Despite Poole and Rosenthal’s (1997, 56) claim that for all practical purposes most decisions reached in the US Congress are done so by roll call votes, several scholars have questioned this assessment. VanDoren (1990), studying how legislative proposals are dealt with by committees and which proposals are voted upon in roll call votes, notes that many never leave the committee stage.³ But even among those proposals that make it to the floor, a fair share

³A similar finding and argument appear in Londregan’s (2000*b*) work on the Brazilian leg-

is adopted or rejected by voice votes. Clinton and Lapinski (2008) demonstrate in a more systematic manner and covering a longer time period that not for all laws adopted by Congress roll call votes occurred. In addition, Roberts (2007) notes that for a considerable time roll call votes were not possible when Congress met as a “Committee of the whole.” Consequently, for Congressional decisions reached in the “Committee of the whole” no roll call record is available until the 1970s. Similarly, while studies on the European Parliament acknowledged that only a small minority of all votes taken are roll calls (e.g., Attina, 1990; Brzinski, 1995; Hix, Noury and Roland, 2006),⁴ only recently have scholars started to consider how representative these roll call votes are. Both Carrubba, Gabel, Murrah, Clough, Montgomery and Schambach (2006) and Thiem (2009) show that roll call votes are much more frequent for non-legislative decisions and also often concern specific issue areas.⁵

As the data scholars can use is related both to the visibility and thus to the possibility of monitoring, some caution is advised when using information on parliamentary voting. If, as one might suspect, MPs will be influenced by their principals, this influence will depend on whether the latter may actually observe the behavior of the former. Only in that case can the principals assess whether their voting advices are heeded to. Thus, as in many quasi-experimental studies (Achen, 1986), we need to be wary about possible selection issues.

These issues may affect in different ways the various types of research questions that have characterized the field. Following to some extent Collie (1984), one may identify three main areas of research having dominated the field. First, explaining votes in parliament, either specific ones or a whole set of votes, has been a main thread in the literature. A major preoccupation in this research area is to determine which of the (possibly many) principals influence the MPs’ voting behavior. Second, and finding its origin in the first systematic studies discussed above, research dealing with the cohesion of political parties and sometimes other groups has proved an active research area. Finally, determining what

islature.

⁴Attina (1990, 562) notes that in the first elected EP, “only 15 % of the 936 initiative [sic] and urgent resolutions approved” were subject to a roll call vote, while Hix, Noury and Roland (2006) estimate this share for latter EPs to be approximately a third.

⁵Hug (2010) shows for the Swiss lower house that particular topics are much more frequently subject to roll call votes requested by MPs, while Jenny and Miller (2011) show for the Austrian lower house variations over the legislative term.

conflict lines and cleavages characterize the work in parliament has preoccupied scholars to a considerable extent. Such studies often implicitly or explicitly rely on the estimation of the underlying ideal points of MPs (i.e., their most preferred outcome represented in a policy space).

As each of these research areas rely on roll call vote data, having the latter only available for some votes may lead to biased inferences. When wishing to assess the influence of the various principals on MPs' voting decisions the extent to which these decisions can be monitored is also likely to affect the relative importance of the principals' view. If we follow Carey's (2009) argument, MPs may consider the preferences both of their voters and their principals in parliament in roll call votes. The former's preferences will be of a reduced importance in signal votes (i.e., only observable in the parliament) while the latter will also be limited in secret votes. Consequently, the influence of the various principals on MPs' decision may well be estimated in a biased fashion when considering the overall effect.

If this is the case also studies assessing how cohesive political parties or other groups are in parliament are likely to offer biased views. As in roll call votes both voters and political parties may observe what MPs do, the observed cohesion may be higher if parties gain the upper hand, but might also be lower given that the MPs' constituencies (both voters and interest groups) may be more central and have divergent interests from those of some political parties. Finally, even when we wish to study the cleavages and conflict lines in a parliament based on ideal points we might need to worry as roll call votes might only be carried out on particular topics or be influenced by principals as discussed above.⁶ Consequently, even the recent sophisticated estimations of ideal points may yield biased estimates.

3 Major lines of developments

The framework sketched out above envisioning parliamentary voting in a principal-agent relationship was implicit in much of the work dealing with, for instance, "Congressmen's voting decisions" (Kingdon, 1973). As voters in the US both se-

⁶For the European parliament work by Carrubba, Gabel, Murrah, Clough, Montgomery and Schambach (2006) and Thiem (2009) highlights this point and thus echos similar concerns raised by VanDoren (1990) and Clinton and Lapinski (2008) on the US Congress.

lect the candidates for general elections and then choose among the candidates of the various parties, the importance of the constituencies' interests seemed considerably important. Several studies, among them Kingdon's (1973), demonstrate that in explaining Congressmen's voting behavior the voters' preferences play a considerable role. Others, however, come to the conclusion that once controlling for partisanship the influence of constituencies on Congressmen's voting behavior was reduced to sometimes even vanish (see Weisberg, 1978).

Assessing the effect of various influences on MPs' behavior, from their own preferences to those of their principals like voters, parties, etc. is, however, empirically quite difficult. First, as Fiorina (1975) shows relying on a simple theoretical model in an unfortunately often forgotten contribution, simply controlling for the party membership of MPs when assessing the effect of constituency preferences may lead to biased inferences. Second, Jackson and Kingdon (1992) caution against the frequent practice of using roll call votes to measure the preferences of MPs, which then were to be used to explain together with other information the voting behavior of MPs.⁷

These cautionary remarks urged scholars to pay much more attention to the theoretical underpinning of their empirical analyses and to carry out the latter while being careful when measuring the preferences both of MPs and their principals. Innovative in both regards is Levitt's (1996) study dealing with how various principals affect the voting behavior of Senators. Assuming that a Senator voting against his or her own preferences or against those of a principal induces "utility loss," the author estimates an empirical model with proxies for the preferences of principals leaving as some sort of residuals the Senator's preferences estimated based on so-called fixed effects.⁸ Proceeding in this way generates also weights indicating how important the Senator's preferences and those of the various principals are in explaining his or her voting behavior. According to this methodology a Senator's preference is central in explaining his or her votes, while the voters' beat the national party's preferences to second place. The former, not surprisingly, become more important as elections are looming large.

A different approach relied on the fact that MPs switch either from one cham-

⁷In part Jackson and Kingdon's (1992) critique focuses also on the approach proposed by Kalt and Zupan (1990), which consists of regressing ideal point estimates on constituency characteristics and considering the residuals as the ideological position of MPs.

⁸While this approach appears similar to Kalt and Zupan's (1990), it differs as it puts more structure on the empirical model to be estimated.

ber to another or move from one party to another, changing by the same token some of their principals (i.e., the constituency in the first case and the party in the second). Grofman, Griffin and Berry (1995) argue that members of Congress moving from one chamber to another offer conditions of a “natural experiments,” thus allowing to attribute any change in voting behavior to the different constituency. They find that such changes in constituencies only lead to changes in Congressmen’s behavior if the former are more extreme (i.e., more to the left for Democrats and more to the right for Republicans). The same “natural experiment”-argument is made by Nokken (2000) (see also Nokken and Poole, 2004) to study the partisan effect on Congressmen. The author finds that Congressmen switching adjust their voting record to the one of their new party.⁹ These studies need to make the strong argument that the MPs switching from one chamber to the other, or from one party to another, are identical or at least similar to all other MPs. One might reasonably question this strong assumption, and thus also take the empirical results with a grain of salt.

Several other studies distinguish themselves by paying much closer attention to the way in which preferences are measured. Snyder and Groseclose (2000) propose a way to implicitly address Jackson and Kingdon’s (1992) critique. More specifically, Snyder and Groseclose (2000) rely on the voting behavior in lopsided votes (assuming that there is no party pressure in such votes) to estimate the preferences of Congressmen, before relating these estimates to the voting behavior in close votes. Based on this estimation approach they find that party pressure varies across issue areas and topics, and also across time. McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal (2001), on the other hand, conceptualize party discipline as leading to two distinct dividing lines in a policy space between the yes- and no-votes in each party. Proceeding in this way they find only few party effects, and thus question Snyder and Groseclose’s (2000) approach and conclusion.

Bartels (1991), wishing to assess what influenced voting decisions on defense spending, relies on opinion polls to measure the preferences of Congressmen’s constituencies. The results of his study suggest that the latter have contributed significantly to the defense buildup during the Reagan presidency. While Bar-

⁹Relatedly, Heller and Mershon (2008) study in more detail party switchers in the Italian parliament (see also Heller and Mershon, 2009). They find that Italian MPs leave more frequently political parties with a high discipline, suggesting that they want to escape exactly this discipline.

tels (1991) focuses on a specific policy domain, namely defense spending,¹⁰ Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart (2001) assess more generally how strongly the preferences of Congressmen's constituencies are related with their representatives voting behavior. The constituencies' preferences are again measured on the basis of surveys but offer a much broader and less policy specific measure. The authors find that even when controlling for party membership a considerable effect for the constituencies preferences on the Congressmen's voting record remains.

While such studies have largely originated in the US, a series of scholars has started to proceed in a similar fashion while focusing on other legislatures. Hix's (2002) study, for instance, introduces a distinction between two partisan principals for members of the EP. While the selection of candidates for EP elections is controlled by the national political parties, party groups in the EP have some control over offices allocated in the EP and in the party group leadership. Using preference measures based on an MP survey he finds that national parties appear to be much more influential than the party groups in the EP, which can at best offer offices and perks inside the EP or their own organizational structure. Lindstädt, Slapin and Wielen (2011) build on this idea but argue that national parties are especially influential before and after EP elections, while the party groups increase their influence over members of the EP in the middle of the legislative term.¹¹ For the largest parties they find empirical results supporting this argument.¹²

In Kam's (2008) study deviations from the MP's party voting form a central part of his analysis (see also Kam, 2001).¹³ Based on survey responses he is able to place British and Canadian MPs in a two-dimensional policy space and show that contrary to received wisdom it is not MPs close to the ideological

¹⁰Bartels (2008) extends this type of analyses to cover other policy areas.

¹¹In his study of the Danish parliament Skjaeveland (1999) finds an increase in cohesion before elections. Interestingly enough this effect runs counter to Diermeier and Feddersen's (1998) argument that as election approaches party discipline should be more difficult to maintain as the confidence procedure assorted with a threat for early elections becomes less credible.

¹²Strictly speaking both of these studies are based on the dispersion of the estimated ideal points around the party group, resp. national parties' position. In addition, the latter study does not assess the MPs' preferences independently. Schonhardt-Bailey (2003) proceeds in a similar fashion, namely by employing Kalt and Zupan's (1990) approach (see above), when wishing to assess how decisions by British MPs in the 19th century are influenced by their own ideology and their principals' interests.

¹³Both Stratmann (2006) and Sieberer (2010) offer related analyses for Germany assessing especially if MPs elected on party lists vote differently than those elected in single member districts. They both find that the latter deviate from the party line more frequently.

divide between the two main parties that deviate most frequently from their party's line, but the more extreme MPs. Kam (2008), in a related analysis, also shows how constituency characteristics, MPs' preferences and partisanship affect three specific votes in the Canadian legislature on hate crimes. He finds that both partisanship and the MPs preferences affect considerably the MPs' voting behavior.¹⁴

Thus, the major developments in the area of understanding individual voting by MPs have been to pay much more attention to the necessary data to determine the importance of the several principals of MPs. At the same time, more theoretically refined analyses have also allowed for new insights.

When turning to studies dealing with the cohesion of political parties in parliament, the field experienced mostly developments in the area of measurement and the geographical coverage of the studies (see for a review of this literature Owens, 2003). While Rice's (1925) index to measure cohesiveness still plays a central role, several scholars have proposed modifications and extensions. As Rice's (1925) index only considers the yes- and no-votes, some authors suggest that abstentions should also be considered. Attina (1990, 564) proposes an "index-of-agreement" which subtracts from the number of votes in the modal category the sum of the two remaining categories before dividing the result by the total number of votes including abstentions.¹⁵ Attina's (1990) "index-of-agreement" has the disadvantage that it may, contrary to Rice's (1925) index, yield negative values (i.e., each time when the modal category does not form a clear majority). Based on this criticism Hix, Noury and Roland (2006) propose an "agreement index" that also considers the third option an MP may have when considering voting, namely to abstain. Their measure, however, will always yield positive values, contrary to Attina's (1990). Relatedly, Desposato (2005) shows that Rice's (1925) index yields inflated cohesion measures for small parties and offers a way to correct for this bias. Similarly, though in another field, Häge (2011) demonstrates that the affinity measures based on voting in the UNGA (widely used in scholarship in international relations) do not consider that agreement might be due to chance. Correcting for these chance agreements yields a new measure

¹⁴As both Hix (2002) and Kam (2008) simply control for partisanship they might well fall prey to the inferential perils highlighted by Fiorina (1975).

¹⁵Lijphart (1963) also proposes an agreement index when criticizing earlier work measuring the affinity of different member states in the UNGA. In his measure abstentions are only considered as a partial disagreement (to be precise, they are counted only half).

questioning also the robustness of results presented in studies using these affinity scores.

Perhaps even more impressive is the increased geographical coverage of studies dealing with the cohesion of parties and other groups in parliament. Desposato (2005, 731) nicely shows how the Rice (1925)-index has been used extensively in many country-specific studies since its inception. Similarly, cohesion has also been studied in supranational assemblies like the EP (e.g., Attina, 1990; Brzinski, 1995),¹⁶ the UNGA (e.g., Hovet, 1960; Luif, 2003; Luif and Radeva, 2007) focusing on party groups and national delegations in the former case and groups of countries like for instance the member states of the European Union or of other groups in the latter one. In parallel, scholars have also started to carry out comparative studies. Özbudun's (1970) early study offered some systematic results on the cohesion of parties in a small number of western democracies. Depauw and Martin (2009) extend this work to compare the cohesion of parties in several parliaments in mostly western democracies,¹⁷ while Thames (2007), for instance, covers new democracies in eastern Europe, namely Russia and the Ukraine. Both studies find that electoral rules influence the cohesion of parties, while the former also shows that centralized candidate selection leads to more unified parties.¹⁸

Such comparative studies are probably the most severely exposed to the problems related to partial observability of parliamentary voting. As Hug (2010), based on a unique dataset, shows the cohesion of parties in roll call votes is different than in other votes. As the rules for requesting roll call votes differ across parliaments (see for instance Saalfeld, 1995; Carrubba, Gabel and Hug, 2008; Carey, 2009; Crisp and Driscoll, 2012), this makes comparisons quite difficult and lead to biased inferences. This even more so as several authors have demonstrated that roll call votes differ systematically from other votes in the US Congress (VanDoren, 1990; Roberts, 2007; Clinton and Lapinski, 2008), the Swiss parliament (Hug, 2010), the Austrian parliament (Jenny and Mller, 2011), regional parliaments in Germany (Stecker, 2011), the European parliament (Carrubba,

¹⁶Two recent studies on the EP focus on two specific aspects, namely the role of the party group leader (Bailer, Schulz and Selb, 2009) in assuring cohesion, and how the ambition of MPs in the EP affect their defection from the party group (Meserve, Pemstein and Bernhard, 2009).

¹⁷See also the work by Kristinsson (2011) who, while focusing on the cohesion of parties in Iceland offers a comparison with several other western democracies, and Jensen's (2000) focusing on Nordic countries.

¹⁸See Sieberer (2006) and Carey and Reynolds (2007) for other studies focusing on party cohesion in established, respectively new democracies.

Gabel, Murrah, Clough, Montgomery and Schambach, 2006; Thiem, 2009), or the UNGA (Hug, 2012).

Work on measuring cleavages and conflict lines based on parliamentary voting has largely started in research on the UNGA.¹⁹ Alker (1964) suggested to employ simple factor analytic methods²⁰ to uncover the basic “dimensions of conflict in the general assembly.”²¹ Weisberg (1972) explores different other existing methods to position MPs in a political space based on their voting behavior, while Poole and Rosenthal (1985) proposed an empirical model based on explicit behavioral assumptions to derive an estimator for MPs’ ideal points. This methodology has been applied extensively to the US Congress (see for a survey for instance Poole and Rosenthal, 1997), but to many other parliaments as well. Studies covering Poland (Noury, Dobrowolski and Mazurkiewicz, 1999), the Czech Republic (Noury and Mielcova, 1997; Lyons and Lacina, 2009), the UNGA (Voeten, 2000), France (Rosenthal and Voeten, 2004), Great Britain (Spirling and McLean, 2006, 2007), Italy (Curini and Zucchini, 2010), Switzerland (Hug and Schulz, 2007), Korea (Jun and Hix, 2010), Brazil (Desposato, 2009) and even a large set of countries (Hix and Noury, 2007) have recently been carried out to position MPs (mostly) on a left-right dimension and others if necessary.²²

At the same time critiques and innovations in the estimation of ideal points have appeared in the literature. Both Rosenthal and Voeten (2004) and Spirling and McLean (2006, 2007) make the argument, that in order to provide credible estimates of MPs’ ideal points the underlying behavior of MPs has to follow the assumptions of the spatial model (see also Londregan, 2000*a*; Kam, 2008). As both sets of authors demonstrate, this is hardly the case in the French and British parliaments, leading to odd results. In parallel Clinton, Jackman and Rivers (2004) (see also Martin and Quinn, 2002) have proposed a method to estimate ideal points that allows for more flexibility in integrating also in part the critical

¹⁹Interestingly enough studies on the French parliament have also seen early developments of specific tools to measure cleavages and their innovative application to answer specific research questions (see for instance MacRae, 1967; Warwick, 1977).

²⁰Anderson, Watts Jr. and Wilcox (1966) provide an early review and discussion of the various methods used in this research area, while Poole (2005) offers a more up to date discussion.

²¹Heckman and Snyder (1997) provide a rationale for using factor analysis relying on a linear probability model linking estimated ideal points with the likelihood of voting in favor or against a proposal. Both Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart (2001) and Andrews (2002) use this approach in analyses focusing on the US Congress, respectively the Russian Duma.

²²Related is obviously Kam’s (2008) study.

points raised by Rosenthal and Voeten (2004) and Spirling and McLean (2006, 2007).²³ This approach as well as Poole's (2000) have been used to study the MPs' positions in the Weimar republic (Debus and Hanse, 2010; Hansen and Debus, 2010), the Canadian legislature (Godbout and Høyland, 2011), the Irish parliament (Hansen, 2009),

4 Recent research frontiers

The use of these recent methodological innovations also characterizes the current research frontier. More specifically scholars have started to address either directly or indirectly the main problems in the study of parliamentary voting, namely that the latter are often only partially observable and subject to considerable agenda influences.. Drawing on Clinton, Jackman and Rivers's (2004) approach both Clinton (2006) and Høyland (2010) offer new insights into the influence of various principals on MPs in the US Congress and the EP. The former's study of the US Congress highlights the influence of voter preferences on Congressmen's decision. The latter argues that as many roll call votes in the EP concern resolutions (i.e., non-legislative business) if party pressure is exerted it should be done in (consequential) legislative votes. Taking this into account leads to revised estimates of MPs' ideal points a new assessment of the influence of party groups in the EP.

While implicitly these studies address some of the selection issues discussed above, other more recent studies do so more directly. Carrubba, Gabel and Hug (2008) propose a theoretical model based on the assumption that roll call votes are requested to allow for disciplining of MPs.²⁴ As they show, if this model is correct, not taking into account the selection issues will lead to rather biased inferences on how MPs behave in parliament. At the more empirical level Hug (2010) evaluates a simple way that may allow to correct for some inferential biases when

²³Strictly speaking Spirling and McLean (2007) question whether a less constraining method proposed by Poole (2000) allows circumventing the problems of possibly non-spatial voting. A useful survey of these various methods appears in Poole (2005).

²⁴The literature on the reasons why roll call votes are requested is still rather thin. Fennell's (1974) study of why roll call votes are requested in the Argentinean parliament is probably the earliest such study. More generally, one may distinguish between disciplining and two types of signaling motivations. The latter distinguish themselves by the fact whether the requesters' voting or the voting of other actors is to be signaled to a particular audience. See Carrubba, Gabel and Hug (2008) for a more detailed discussion.

assessing the cohesion of parties based exclusively on roll call votes. This relies on estimating at the same time a selection equation (i.e., did a roll call vote occur or not) and an outcome equation (in this case, the level of cohesion of parties). The results suggest, however, that more theoretically informed approaches, like for instance based on the model proposed by Carrubba, Gabel and Hug (2008) are likely to yield better results. Crisp and Driscoll (2012), on the other hand, offer for a series of Latin American legislatures detailed information on the conditions under which roll call votes are requested. These authors can also show that roll calls are requested under very specific circumstances in the Mexican and Argentinean legislature.

Related to this issue of partial observability is the more general question how votes in parliament have to be conceived in the larger context of parliamentary decision-making. Londregan (2000*b*), for instance, shows that parliamentary voting is related to the various previous stages leading up to a parliamentary decision. This may lead to more complex strategic calculations by politicians wishing to achieve their preferred outcome. While Krehbiel and Rivers (1990) argue that this leads to strategic behavior in the committee- and agenda-setting-stage rather than during the floor debates and votes, other scholars explore whether strategic behavior might also prevail on the parliamentary floor.²⁵ Clinton and Meirowitz (2003, 2004) propose, based on Martin and Quinn's (2002) and Clinton, Jackman and Rivers's (2004) approach to estimate MPs' ideal points, a way to assess more in detail whether strategic voting has occurred. Taking advantage of the flexibility of these newer tools Clinton and Meirowitz (2003, 2004) offer two studies of how strategic voting might be detected and demonstrated with the help of sophisticated methods.²⁶ In doing so they consider much more closely the sequence of votes and the relationships among the latter. Thus, they also offer a more direct way to consider the effects that the voting agenda has on the behavior of MPs. As strategic voting leads automatically to interdependent votes in parliaments, this generates an additional problem in the analysis of roll call votes, as most basic estimators of ideal-points assume independent votes. Consequently, more

²⁵I refrain from discussing here the rather extensive and specialized literature that had developed between the publication of Farquharson's (1969) early study of sophisticated voting and Krehbiel and Rivers's (1990) article, which constituted some sort of a death knell for this literature (a bibliometric analyses of Farquharson's (1969) book clearly demonstrates this).

²⁶Relatedly Bütikofer and Hug (2008) show that strategic voting may be prevalent in parliaments other than the US Congress.

complex estimators, following in part Clinton and Meirowitz's (2003, 2004) lead, would need to be deployed.

Related to these innovations are studies that wish to assess cleavages and ideal points in more than one institution (or across time) Shor, Berry and McCarty (2010) and Treier (2011) show the utility of such approaches in the context of the US Congress,²⁷ while Hug and Martin (2012 (forthcoming)) and Masket and Noel (2012 (forthcoming)) use this method to position MPs and their voters on the same political scale.²⁸ These latter studies show how roll call votes analyzed with new methodological tools allow insights in research areas not directly related to the focus of studies on parliamentary voting.

5 Conclusion

The combination of easy access to rich behavioral data with the development of new methodological tools has led to a considerable progress in the literature on parliamentary voting. More and more studies appear offering new insights, for instance, into what determines MPs' voting decisions. Similarly, scholars have branched out considerably to cover parliaments from other geographical areas than Capitol hill. As institutional rules are likely to structure an MP's behavior, having variation in these institutional rules is of importance and can be obtained only in comparative studies.

At the same time, however, despite the fact that various studies have alerted scholars to problems in the use of roll call votes, considerable headway is still needed. As in many if not most parliaments roll call votes are far from being the rule, neglecting the conditions under which such votes take place is of central importance. Several recent studies have been able to demonstrate that roll call votes are systematically different compared to other votes. As there might be different reasons for requesting roll call votes, solid theoretical underpinning are important to know how potential inferential biases might be addressed. Some headway has already been made in this area, but quite a few problems have

²⁷Bütikofer and Hug (2010) proceed similarly to assess the relative positions of MPs in the two chambers of the Swiss parliament.

²⁸Portmann, Stadelmann and Eichenberger (2012) use another approach to assess whether, as a function of the electoral system employed, MPs represent more or less well the voters' preferences. Similarly, Kaniowski and Mueller (2011) explore whether MPs in the EP represent well the voters' preferences.

still to be dealt with. Finding solutions to the latter will allow research on parliamentary voting to base itself on much more solid footing.

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