Strategic Abstention in Parliamentary Voting

David Willumsen¹ & Patrik Öhberg²

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Comments are very welcome

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Abstract
Legislators’ voting behaviour has a crucial role in the parliamentary process, both in terms of representation and in terms of accountability. However, the study of voting behaviour has not fully been able to understand the motivations of legislators when they dissent from their party, in part due to two main stumbling blocks. The first is the general lack of recorded votes in many parliaments, as well as the non-universality of recorded votes in parliaments that do record votes, with the attendant potential for selection bias (Carrubba et al., 2008, 2006; Hug, 2009). The second is that the researcher usually lacks good measurements of MPs’ policy preferences, which is essential if in order to conclude anything with certainty about the influence of either parties or institutions (Krehbiel, 1993). These dual restrictions mean most work on parliamentary legislative behaviour suffers from great uncertainty about the generalizability of their findings.

In order to address these issues, this paper combines the complete voting records of the Swedish Riksdag, where all final votes are recorded, over an 8-year period with a series of unique surveys of Swedish MPs, with response rates of over 90%, covering two parliamentary periods, with over 1.2 million individual voting decisions analysed. Drawing on these data, the paper finds crucial differences between the decisions to vote against the party line and abstaining from it. Further, strong evidence is found supporting the hypothesis that being in government makes MPs less likely to both defect and abstain from their party line.

¹ Geschwister-Scholl-Institut für Politikwissenschaft, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München: david.willumsen@gsi.lmu.de
² Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg. Patrik Öhberg is currently visiting scholar at the Department of Political Science, University of Montreal: patrik.ohberg@pol.gu.se
1: Introduction

In parliamentary democracies, near-perfect party voting unity is the norm, rather than the exception. When calculating party voting unity in parliaments, as measured by the Rice index (Rice, 1925), using recorded votes, Rice scores often approach 100 (that is, perfect unity, all MPs always voting with their party), and are almost always in the high 90s (Carey, 2009, 2007; Depauw and Martin, 2008; see e.g. Sieberer, 2006).

Yet defections from the party line do occur on a regular basis – simply assuming away the issue, by position that parties in legislatures are unitary actors glosses over a substantial problem. As the ability of parties to ensure that ‘their’ MPs to vote as a block is crucial for their performance as accountable electoral actors, understanding what explains the variation in party voting unity is a key concern.

Previous research, however, has focussed on the voting behaviour at the group level (Carey, 2009, see e.g. 2007; Depauw and Martin, 2008; for exceptions, see Kunicova and Remington, 2008; Sieberer, 2010, 2006). Nevertheless, legislative parties as such do not actually behave one way or another; they lack agency. Rather, their individual members behave in a certain way (vote with or against the party line), which is then aggregated up to the group level to calculate the Rice index. As such, the key decision, when it comes to understanding party voting unity, lies with the individual MP, and should therefore be analysed at this level as well.

Analysing voting at the individual level also allows for the inclusion of individual MPs’ policy preferences in the analysis, which are crucial to any complete understanding of legislative behaviour (Krehbiel, 1993; Levitt, 1996). Despite its key role in MPs voting behaviour, the difficulty of collecting accurate measures of MPs’ preference that are not merely artefacts of their past voting behaviour has meant that legislative research including such measures is limited (Ansolabehere et al., 2001; Kam, 2009, but see 2001; Kunicova and Remington, 2008 for exceptions).
This paper seeks to advance our understanding of defections in parliamentary systems in two ways: First of all, by including individual-level measures of MPs’ policy incentives to defect in the analysis, we address a key gap in the literature. Secondly, by using data at the individual level, over multiple parliamentary terms, it becomes possible to assess the effects of variation at the institutional level, rather than merely using a snapshot of a single term. In particular, it becomes possible to clearly identify the effect of an MP belonging to a party that is in government by observing behaviour when MPs (and parties) are both in government and in opposition.

The next section introduces a simple model for analysing the decision-making process that lead MPs to either vote with their or defect from it, reviews previous work on this topic, and sets out the hypotheses. Section 3 introduces the case chosen for the analysis, namely the Swedish Riksdag, and its role in the political and legislative process. Section 4 introduces the data set, and discusses the operationalisation needed to test the hypotheses. Section 5 presents the models, and discusses the findings.

2. Preferences, Incentives and Party Voting Unity

It is generally accepted that MPs can be assumed to have three over-arching goals. Primarily, they seek to be re-elected, as all subsequent political goals depend on their continued presence in the political sphere (Fiorina, 1989; Mayhew, 1974). Second, MPs seek policy influence, that is, to influence policy outcomes towards their preferred policy, and third, they seek career advancement, either for its own sake, or for the improved chances of influencing policy outcomes that comes with more senior positions (Müller and Strøm, 1999; Schlesinger, 1960; Sieberer, 2010; Strøm, 1990).

As the electoral process in parliamentary regimes tends to be dominated by political parties, as well as the process of career advancement, being perceived as a good 'party soldier' is of great use in terms of achieving two of the three main goals outlined above. However, if an MP holds policy preferences that differ from his party, substantial incentives exist to rebel against the leadership in floor votes. As MPs will have self-selected into their parties based to a very
substantial extent on ideology, and party selectorates\(^3\) will have sought to select ideologically compatible candidates, such policy differences need not occur very often; particularly in a stable party system, such (self)-selection processes will have had a substantial amount of time to interact and create distinct ideological profiles for each political party. Therefore, observing united party behaviour in itself will tell us little of potential party effects, as MPs might simply be voting similarly due to their having similar preferences (Krehbiel, 1993).

However, even in such a regime, it is unlikely that all parties will be in perfect agreement, all the time. Further, the extent to which MPs will tend to find themselves in disagreement with their party cannot be assumed to be constant across either individuals or parties. As such, in order to estimate the effects of any other potential influences on the behaviour of MPs correctly, it is necessary in any analysis of floor defection to include measures of the extent to which MPs’ policy preferences differ from those of their party as a whole. Failing to do so will not only over-estimate the effects of other potential influences on MPs’ floor behaviour, but will also bias such estimates, due to the near-certain variability in the preference heterogeneity in different parliamentary parties.

Including measures of MPs’ ideological differences (if any) with their party is thus crucial to the analysis of floor voting; here, it is important to note that there exists no reasonable behavioural proxy for legislators’ ideology, as any such measure will potentially be contaminated by electoral and party concerns (Levitt, 1996, p. 428; see also Rosenthal and Voeten, 2004; Spirling and McLean, 2007). We thus have:

Hypothesis 1: The more different an MP’s ideological preferences are to those of his/her party, the more likely she is to defect in floor votes.

While party voting dominates elections in parliamentary regimes, they are not exclusively a party affair. Oftentimes, a substantial number of a party’s voters may dislike specific policies that their party advocates, making them

\(^3\) That is, the individuals and groups in a party that control the nomination process (Hazan and Rahat, 2006; Pennings and Hazan, 2001; Rahat et al., 2008).
receptive to voting for a representative who does not always vote the party line. As such, cultivating a personal profile with the electorate can be both beneficial in terms of immediate re-election prospects (Carey and Shugart, 1995), and in case the MP considers moving to other professional arenas (both political and professional) (Tavits, 2009). Further studies have shown that representatives with career ambitions sometimes want to distance themselves from their party in order to cultivate a profile within the parliamentary party, in order to further their career (Matthews, 1960; Öhberg, 2011). This gives us:

Hypothesis 2: The larger incentives an MP has to cultivate a personal electoral vote, the more likely he/she is to defect from the party line in floor voting.

Government MPs face different pressures than opposition MPs; they have to take ‘unpleasant’ but necessary decisions, which opposition MPs can avoid doing, either by opposing such decisions (knowing that their opposition will not change the outcome), or by avoiding voting on the issue (Rahat, 2007; Wood and Jacoby, 1984). At the same time, conversely, being an MP from a governing party also provides a number of benefits, in particular the chance of holding ministerial office. As such, MPs from parties in government have a substantial interest in keeping control of the government, which should induce MPs to vote with their parties when they might otherwise be tempted to otherwise (Carey, 2009, 2007). As such, the effect on an MP’s behaviour of belonging to a governing party could be both to make them more likely to vote the party line, and to make them more likely to rebel. As such, we have two competing hypotheses:

H3a: MPs from governing parties are, ceteris paribus, more likely to vote with their party than MPs from non-governing parties.
H3b: MPs from governing parties are, ceteris paribus, less likely to with their party than MPs from non-governing parties.

The last of the three goals of legislators discussed above, achieving and remaining in office may influence their floor voting behaviour through the gate-
keeping power to these offices held by the parliamentary party leadership. As the power to make committee appointments and promote MPs into government positions is in the hands of party leaders, they have substantial incentives to attempt to induce specific behaviour in MPs through this prerogative (Groseclose, 1994; Krehbiel, 1991; Londregan and Snyder Jr, 1994). Of course, such inducements do not have to be explicit; as long as MPs know that voting the party line is a factor in determining who gets promoted, they may alter their behaviour without any direct action by the party leadership. At the same time, those who already hold office will also be influenced; not only will they desire to hold on to their position, but they will also desire higher levels of voting unity in and of itself, due to their increased influence over legislative output in the issue area in which they hold office. Hence, it is unclear whether backbench and frontbench MPs will behave similarly: the lure of promotion for backbenchers may, or indeed may not, be sufficient to make them vote as much along the party lines as the front benchers. Hence, we have:

H4a: MPs holding office will, ceteris paribus, be less likely to defect from the party line in floor votes.

H4b: There will be no difference in the tendency towards defections of front- and backbench MPs.

It should also be noted that while many systems give near-absolute power of promotion to the party leaders, such power always comes with informal constraints: Not only does someone have to be appointed to each position, but the pool of applicants is also quite limited, and becomes smaller over time, as MPs are forced to leave parliament due to either incompetence or scandal (Dewan and Myatt, 2010). Further, the party leadership will also have to balance various (ideological) factions within their parliamentary group, limiting their freedom of manoeuvre even more. As an example of this, it has been found that, in the UK, where the power of ministerial appointment by the PM is, legally speaking, absolute, this can still be effectively restricted by the ideological make-up of the governing party (Kam et al., 2010).
Finally, we have to consider the potential effects of parliamentary socialisation on the MP (Newman, 1987; Skjæveland, 1999). We would expect MPs to become more positively attuned to their party the longer they have served in parliament, and have been exposed to the prevalent norms of the organisation. We thus have

Hypothesis 5: *Ceteris paribus, the longer a MP has been a member of parliament, less she will defect in floor votes.*

When conceptualising ‘defection’ as a phenomenon in legislative politics, it is important to make the distinction between voting against the party line on the floor and abstaining from the vote. While both involve an MP denying her party her vote, the effect is moderated in the case of abstention by the simultaneous denial of a vote against the MP’s party as well. That is, the potential negative effect (from the perspective of the MP’s party) is smaller in the case of abstention than in the case of outright refection. While the motivation of the MP not voting the party line remains the same, that is, not voting for something they (or their constituents) disagree with, abstention allows the MP to register her disapproval at a lower cost. We would therefore expect that the explanatory patterns with regards to defection and abstention would be in many ways similar. However, this does not mean that the two should be simply pooled together; rather, they (as will be done below), should be analysed separately, to ensure that we can observe how different consequences alter legislators’ behaviour.

3. The Swedish Riksdag

The Swedish Riksdag is a working parliament with strong and influential standing committees. Most parliamentarians are members of at least one of these committees, but each legislative period includes a number of newcomers in parliament who find themselves without a placement in a committee (Hagevi 1996). The fact that Sweden is characterized by the rule of minority governments, the work with finding parliamentary majorities is crucial and this work takes place within the specified committees. The standing committees are
important in the legislative process. They can initiate legislation and parliamentary decisions have to be prepared in one of the committees, so called obligatory preparation. The number of the committees is not regulated by the constitution. It is decided by the parliament itself by a simple majority vote. During the current election period, 16 committees are used, and that has been the standard number of committees over the years (Mattson et al. 2011). The MPs are elected by a semi-open party list in multimember districts. The election system is comparatively proportional with large constituencies and a high total number of MPs (349 for a population of around 9 million citizens). The parliament was reformed from a bicameral setup to a unicameral one in the late 1960s (Mattson et al. 2011). As agenda setting power within the Riksdag is dispersed among all the parties, the government is unable to dominate the agenda to the exclusion of non-governing parties (Döring, 2001, 1995).

Sweden, similarly to other Nordic countries, has often been characterized as a stable five party system (with a left party, a social democratic party, a centre party, a liberal party and a conservative party) (Arter, 2006; Bergman and Bolin, 2011; Pierre and Widfeldt, 1996). In later years, this description has become insufficient. The parliament now hosts eight parties (the Green party, the Christian Democratic Party and the anti immigrant Sweden Democrats have institutionalized themselves as normal features of the system). The country has a long history of strong party discipline and party cohesion. This has kept the parties as the dominant actors of the system, even now when membership is decreasing and voters become less and less loyal to their parties (Esaiasson & Holmberg 1996). Overall, Sweden presents us with a highly salient case for the analysis of legislative behaviour and party unity. In particular, two of the main (hypothesised) drivers of high parliamentary voting unity, centralised candidate selection procedures and the threat of early elections are missing, yet unity remains very high (Jensen, 2000; Sieberer, 2006).

Theoretically, the threat of early elections, with its attendant risks of loss of both seats and office, may induce MPs to vote the party line in situations when they would otherwise not do so (Diermeier and Feddersen, 1998; Huber, 1996). However, this threat is not present in Sweden. While the Prime Minister has the
power to dissolve parliament, the ‘replacement’ parliament will only sit out the remainder of the previous parliamentary term, rather than starting a 4-year term afresh. As such, the threat of early elections is much less credible than it would otherwise be, and no early election has been held in Sweden since 1958. Similarly, the effect of party selectorates (that is, who gets to decide which candidates get to stand for the party at the next election) would not be expected to increase levels of party voting unity. While the effect of the group that has control over the nomination process has the potential to exert a substantial influence on MPs’ behaviour (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Hazan and Rahat, 2006), in Sweden, the nomination process is decentralised, and central party interference both resented and, outside of the increase in the number of female candidates, successfully resisted (Bergman and Bolin, 2011). As such, we would not expect MPs’ re-selection concerns to be easily influenced by the parliamentary party leadership. Further, there is also very little variation across parties as to the nomination rules (Lundell, 2004). Thus, the potential effect of the selectorate upon MPs’ floor behaviour will not be analysed here, due to this lack of variation.

At the same time, with the Swedish case, there is substantial variation within the institutional framework over time, with single-party, multi-party, minority and majority governments all being present in the timeframe analysed in this paper, allowing for the analysis of the effect of these while holding the country stable, as it were\(^4\). We will also be able to discuss the potential influence a strengthened personal vote might have on MPs’ behaviour. Looking towards the future, in the national election of 2014, the threshold for personal votes is lowered from eight percentage points of the party’s vote share to five percent, increasing MPs’ incentives to cultivate a personal vote.

\(^4\)Further, in time for the 1998 election, the electoral system was changed to allow personal voting that could alter the order of party lists. Future work will extend the dataset backwards in time, beyond this time.
4. Data & Operationalisation

To test the theory outlined in Section 2, two sources of data were combined. Firstly, in order to measure the policy preferences of MPs, two surveys of the Swedish Riksdag were used (Brothén and Holmberg, 2006, 2002). These were conducted at the beginning of the 2002-2006 and 2006-2010 terms of the Riksdag, and consisted of a questionnaire sent to all MPs. Crucially, the response rates from these surveys were very high: 94% in 2002 and 94% in 2006. This means that concerns about a potential selection bias in who chooses to respond to the surveys are not present; further, it also means that including preference variables in the analysis of floor voting behaviour will not lead to a significant drop in the number of observations available.

We combined these two surveys of Swedish parliamentarians with the voting records of the Riksdag in the period from the start of the 2002-2006 term until the end of the 2006-2010 parliamentary term. One key problem with the analysis of parliamentary votes is that often, not all votes held in a legislature are recorded. Further, the process that determines what votes are recorded or not is usually controlled by actors within the parliament who have an interest either in hiding their own behaviour, or highlighting that of their political opponents. As such, the potential for substantial non-randomness in the selection process of which votes are recorded, and the attendant potential problems of making inferences based on such data, is substantial (Carrubba et al., 2008, 2006; Hug, 2009). However, in the Swedish Riksdag, all votes in the final reading are recorded; as such, there is no potential selection bias in the data analysed here.

Defection can be understood in two ways, depending on whether abstaining is seen as an act of rebellion or not. Given the majoritarian nature of parliamentary decisions, abstaining has the potential to be costly, in that it may lead to a different outcome than would have occurred if all MPs had voted. However, ceteris paribus, the cost to a legislative party of an abstention by one of

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5 We thank Lars Brink for being enormously helpful with our collection of these data.
6 Sweden provides a good example of this: In the 1973 to 1976 term, the two blocks in the parliament split exactly 175-175, meaning that any abstention had the potential to change the outcome of a vote. As deadlock was widespread during this parliamentary term, the Riksdag reduced the number of members from 350 to the current 349 in time for the 1976 election, to prevent a repeat of this situation.
its MPs is nonetheless lower than the cost of the same MP voting against the party line. Because of this, three different dependent variables were used in this paper.

First, a measure of whether an MP votes with the majority of his party (yes = 0, no = 1). This will be referred to as ‘defection’. Second, a measure of whether an MP abstained in a floor vote when the majority of her party voted either for or against a proposal. Third, a measure combining these two, that is, whether an MP voted against the majority of her party or abstained. Note that, in the Riksdag, abstaining requires an active decision: MPs vote by pressing either an ‘aye’, ‘nay’ or ‘abstain’ button. Hence, abstaining is not merely the effect of failing to be present; it is an active decision to not vote along with your party.

Instances of MPs not being present in the Riksdag chamber when a vote is held (18.58% of the observations in the data) were coded as missing, as there are a number of legitimate reasons for not being present in Stockholm on all voting days, and in any case, mere absence from the chamber provides no information on whether an MP intended to vote with their party or not.

Lastly, in the cases where an MP left his party and sat as an independent, subsequent voting behaviour was not analysed, as they no longer had a party to defect from\(^7\).

To measure an MP’s ideological incentives to defect (H1: Effect of policy differences), the answers to two questions in the surveys were used: One asking the MP to place herself on a 0-10 left-right scale, and another asking her to place her party on a similar scale. By calculating the difference between these two answers, it is possible to measure the extent to which an MP differs ideologically from his party. Here, it should be noted that since both the positioning of the MP and that of his party are made by the MP himself, there are no concerns as to what the respondent perceives the varying positions on the left-right scale to mean politically; rather, what is being measured in the MP’s self-perceived ideological distance (or lack thereof) from his party (‘ideological distance’).

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\(^7\) In the period covered by the roll-call data, 2 MPs left Vänsterpartiet, and 1 MP left Moderaterna.
As all Swedish MPs are elected under the same electoral system (semi-open lists, with 8% of the party’s votes in that constituency required to ‘break’ the list) (The Elections Act 1997), the incentive to cultivate a personal vote (hypothesis 2) was measured by the size of the electoral district an MP was elected in (‘Constituency Size’). As in a fully open-list system, where larger districts result in greater incentives to cultivate a personal vote (Carey and Shugart, 1995, pp. 430–432), we expect larger districts to lead to a larger incentive to cultivate a personal vote, as there is more competition for obtaining 8% of the party’s votes in a constituency, the more seats and candidates there are in said constituency. In order to capture the existing levels of electoral success of individual MPs, the percentage of his/her party’s vote in a constituency each MP had received in the more recent election (‘Personal votes’) was also included. Thus was done to distinguish the incentives to cultivate a personal vote from the extent to which MPs had already successfully done so.

To measure the effect of an MP belonging to a governing party (Hypothesis 3), a dummy variable, equal to 1 if the MP belonged to a party that was in government at the time of the vote, and else equal to zero, was constructed.

Further, to measure party-specific effects, dummy variables were created for the Left Party (‘Left’), Greens (‘Greens’), Christian Democrats (‘CD’), Sweden Democrats (‘SD’ – only present after the 2010 election), Liberals (‘FPL’), the Conservatives (‘Moderaterna’) and the Social Democrats (SAP). The Centre Party served as the baseline category.

The effect of holding a leadership position (Hypothesis 4a/4b) was operationalised as a dummy variable, where MPs who were spokesmen or deputy spokesmen for their party on a policy, served on the central committee of their party, served as spokesman or deputy-spokesman for their party on a committee or group leaders in the parliament were coded as 1, and else zero (recall that in Sweden, MPs who join the government automatically take a leave

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8 The official electoral returns of Statistics Sweden were used (http://www.scb.se/Pages/List___250611.aspx)
of absence; as such, they cannot vote in the Riksdag for the duration of their service in government).

While general ideological preferences clearly matter to the views an MP may have on a given piece of legislation, much legislation is highly technical, and it is not possible for any given MP to have an informed opinion about every piece of legislation that comes before them. Hence, committees are ubiquitous in legislatures, as they allow for superior information-gathering and, hopefully, improved legislation (Cox, 2005; Krehbiel, 2004). By allowing the necessary trust between legislators needed for such a division of labour to develop, political parties play a crucial coordinating role within legislatures. Further, because such specialisation allows MPs to not form an opinion on many issues, but rather defer to their party specialist, this can increase levels of party voting unity (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2011; Skjæveland, 2001, pp. 37–39). Since such party specialists play a much greater role in the formulation of a party’s policy on a given piece of legislation, we include a control variable to account for this increased influence. This dummy variable was coded as 1 when an MP was a full member of the committee from which a piece of legislation originated, and else equal to zero (‘committee’). Shown in Table 1 are descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defect only</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defect + Abstain</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstain only</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological distance</td>
<td>0.404</td>
<td>0.600</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituency size</td>
<td>15.707</td>
<td>10.273</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal votes</td>
<td>4.813</td>
<td>5.221</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governing party</td>
<td>0.444</td>
<td>0.497</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership position</td>
<td>0.299</td>
<td>0.458</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own committee</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.216</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years MP</td>
<td>4.866</td>
<td>5.190</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To analyse these data, we fitted six models, two for each of the three dependent variables: One with measures of MPs ideological incentives to defect
included, and one without such measures, in order to illustrate the importance to including preferences in the analysis of floor voting behaviour. As the data covered three electoral periods, every party that had been in government has also been in opposition for at least one period. Thus, it was possible to include both the government status variable and party fixed effects at the same time, which would not be possible if the data covered only a single electoral period (as Swedish governments historically serve out their terms without changing their partisan composition). The use of party fixed effects\(^9\) allows us to disentangle the effects of party and government status; that is, it allows a test of whether the fact of being in government alters behaviour on the individual level, controlling for the fact that parties that go into government might simply be systematically different than those that do not. Lastly, we included a dummy variable indicating parliamentary term (‘2002-06 Riksdag’, with the 2006 to 2010 Riksdag being the baseline), to control for any term-specific variation in the incentives of MPs to defect from the party line. Following Sieberer (2010), we used a multi-level model, with MPs as the upper level (as votes cluster by MP) with random intercepts at the MP level, allowing the capture of any differences in behaviour due to individual characteristics not explicitly modelled (see Sieberer, 2010, p. 487\(^{10}\)).

5. Models & Analysis

The results of the models are shown in Table 2. The results are given in odds ratios, which should be interpreted as meaning that a one-unit increase in the independent variable leads to a change in the odds of an MP defecting from the party line in floor voting equal to the odds ratio. For example, an odds ratio of 1.1 for a dummy variable indicates that an MP who has said characteristic is 1.1 times as likely (or 10% more likely) to defect as one who does not have that characteristic. Similarly, an odds ratio of less than 1 indicates that an MP with that characteristic is less likely to defect than one who does not have said characteristic.

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\(^9\) The Centre Party was used as the baseline category.

\(^{10}\) This was done using the ‘xtmelogit’ command in Stata 12.
Looking at the models in the first two columns, which analyse the cases where MPs vote against their party line in floor voting, we observe that hypothesis 3a (governing party MPs defect less) is supported by the data, along with hypothesis 4b (no effect of holding a leadership position). The ideological distance of an MP to her party does increase the odds of them defecting in floor votes; however, this effect is not significant. Neither of the variables measuring the electoral incentives of MPs (constituency size and personal vote) are significant either. Lastly, the reverse relationship of that posited by hypothesis 5 (socialisation) is found – the more years an MP has served in parliament, the more like she is to defect in floor votes, not less as expected by the hypothesis. These results hold regardless of whether we control for the preferences of MPs.

Hypothesis 3 (effect of belonging to a governing party) finds clear support in the first two models, with significance at the .1% level. This significance is found even though party dummies are also included in the models. Thus, the effect of government is due to the incentives that come with being in power, rather than being an effect of parties that have been in government being systematically ‘different’ to those parties that are always in opposition. It is worth noting the very large substantive effect of belonging to a governing party in terms of propensity to defect. The odds of a governing party MP defecting are less than .04 of the odds of an opposition MP defecting in floor voting, indicating that the need for governing parties to maintain their majority outweighs the costs associated with governing. As the governing party variable was highly significant in all models which included the party dummies, and all of the parties that were part of a government in the period in question were also in opposition in another part of the period, we can be quite confident in the support found for hypothesis 3a.

The lack of a significant effect of the leadership position variable (hypothesis 4b) indicates that the lure of office is as strong as the effect of holding it. While MPs serving in leadership positions do defect less, this effect is not significantly different from zero.

Looking at the control variable, it can be seen in both models that MPs are less likely to defect on pieces of legislation that originate from the committee on
which they sit, when compared to all other pieces of legislation; however, this variable does not attain statistical significance. Thus, the informational and or/influence advantages that an MP has through his membership of a parliamentary committee do not mean that they are less likely to defect on floor votes regarding legislation from ‘their committee’, when compared to behaviour on all other pieces of legislation.

[Table 2 about here]

When comparing these results with those in the second set of models, where the dependent variable is both defecting and abstaining, the results are near-identical. While the substantive effect of belonging to a governing party is smaller than in the first two sets of models, it remains highly significant; the odds of a governing party MP either defecting or abstaining are only around one-tenth of those for opposition MPs. Also replicated is the finding that the more years an MP has served in parliament, the more like she is to fail to vote the party line in floor votes. Further, as in the first two sets of models, those MPs in leadership positions are not statistically different in their behaviour when compared to MPs in non-leadership positions.

It would thus appear that the drives of behaviour are similar for both defection and abstention. However, the last two models, which use only abstention as the dependent variable, clearly indicate that this is not the case. The results differ from those found when using defection as the dependent variable in two key ways. First of all, there is support for hypothesis 1 (effect of preferences). When it comes to abstaining, MPs are more likely to do so the further they are ideologically from their legislative party; for each step on a 0-10 left-right scale they are distanced from their party, the odds of their defecting increases up by .13. However, the remaining results are not significantly affected by not including the preference variable.

The second way in which the results differ when comparing the drivers of MPs’ decisions to defect and to abstain is that there is no longer any support for
hypothesis 5 (socialisation). While MPs are still found to defect more, this effect is no longer significant, even at the 5% level. This suggests that experienced MPs only differ in their propensity to vote against the party line, but are indistinguishable in terms of their tendency to abstain.

The lack of any effect of either electoral incentives to defect or prior electoral success is replicated\textsuperscript{11}, along with the lack of a significant effect of holding a leadership position. Similarly, there again is no significant effect with regards to a piece of legislation coming from the committee an MP’s serves on, compared to all other legislation.

Turning briefly to the effect of the party dummies, we again find different effects across the two types of failing to vote the party line. While on the Moderates (Conservatives) are significantly different from any other party in the two models analysing defection (MPs from this party being significantly less likely to defect), this is not the case for abstentions. While the Moderates are also significantly less likely to abstain in floor votes, this is also the case for the Social Democrats (SAP), the Christian Democrats and (when not controlling for preferences) Folkpartiet. Both the Greens (Gröna) and the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet) are not statistically different from the baseline party (the Centre Party). While patterns of abstention and defection thus differ across the parties, it is unclear what drives this. One possibility is that the Greens and the Left Party were the only parties not in government in either of the legislative periods covered here. Interestingly, however, the Greens and the Left Party are not significantly different from the Centre Party, which was in government during the 2006-2010 term; as such, the lack of government service cannot explain why the Greens and the Left Party are outliers.

Overall, the first two models of the data provide support for the theory presented in the second part of this paper, namely that MPs alter their behaviour in terms of floor voting behaviour according to the incentives that are in place to influence their career, policy preferences, and electoral prospects. Choosing to

\textsuperscript{11} One potential concern is that the inclusion of both the measure of the individual-level electoral incentives to defect and a measure of actual individual-level electoral success is that this leads to an over-specification of the model. However, re-running the models including only one of these two variables in turn yields substantively identical results.
defect from the party line in floor voting is a rational act, and MPs are sufficiently rational, and sufficiently aware of their incentives, to act upon this. Similarly, the final two sets of models showed that abstaining is also related to MPs’ incentives, but in a different way, due to the different consequences of the act of abstaining vis-à-vis defecting in floor votes. Further, when comparing these findings to the second set of models, we see that it would be a mistake to simply code ‘defection’ as including abstention, as the differences in the drivers of the two actions would be obscured by combining them.

6. Conclusion & Future Work

This paper aimed to analyse the effects of individual floor voting behaviour in a parliamentary regime. In particular, it aimed at exploring the effect of ideological heterogeneity in legislative parties on MPs’ voting behaviour, as well as the different incentives caused by the differing consequences of defection and abstention, while analysing a dataset of parliamentary votes not subject to selection bias concerns. By combining two surveys of the Swedish Riksdag with 8 years of voting data, it was shown that when analysing MPs’ propensity to defect, ideological preferences do not appear to matter. In and of themselves, such measures were not statistically significant, and failing to include them did not lead to skewed results. Future work will seek to incorporate more fine-grained measures of MPs’ policy preferences, to explore whether it truly is the case that preferences do not matter for floor voting. An indication that they do matter was provided by the finding that preferences do matter when it comes to the decision to abstain.

Secondly, it was found that being in government matters, both with and without controlling for MPs’ preferences, and both in terms of defecting and abstaining. The desire to maintain control of the levers of government, and the importance to behaving in a united manner to achieve this aim found strong support in the data. Crucially, it was shown that this effect was different from any party-specific effects. It was the fact of being in government that altered behaviour, not the ‘nature’ of the parties that actually form governments.
Thirdly, no effect of socialisation was found, rather the opposite was the case. The more years an individual had been an MP, the more they defected. However, this behaviour did not extend to abstaining.

Finally, it was found that the different consequences of defecting and abstaining meant that different incentives mattered. Merely pooling the two forms of failing to vote the party line was found to over-simplify the behaviour of MPs, and it was shown that abstaining is a conscious decision by MPs, and as such deserves to be fully studied as a type of legislative behaviour.
Table 2: The effect of incentives on MPs floor defection rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>DV: Defection</th>
<th>DV: Defection + Abstention</th>
<th>DV: Abstention only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideological distance</td>
<td>1.038 (0.058)</td>
<td>1.072 (0.049)</td>
<td>1.130* (0.066)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituency size</td>
<td>0.996 (0.004)</td>
<td>1.001 (0.003)</td>
<td>1.002 (0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal votes</td>
<td>1.01 (0.007)</td>
<td>1.002 (0.005)</td>
<td>0.99 (0.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government party</td>
<td>0.033*** (0.004)</td>
<td>0.105*** (0.006)</td>
<td>0.253*** (0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.072 (0.004)</td>
<td>1.130* (0.006)</td>
<td>0.257*** (0.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership position</td>
<td>0.947 (0.003)</td>
<td>0.949 (0.005)</td>
<td>0.943 (0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own committee</td>
<td>0.904 (0.068)</td>
<td>0.939 (0.054)</td>
<td>0.999 (0.091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as MP</td>
<td>1.035*** (0.008)</td>
<td>1.026*** (0.007)</td>
<td>1.013 (0.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vänsterpartiet</td>
<td>0.908 (0.168)</td>
<td>0.808 (0.132)</td>
<td>0.789 (0.156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>0.801 (0.145)</td>
<td>0.692* (0.095)</td>
<td>0.552*** (0.096)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkpartiet</td>
<td>0.974 (0.186)</td>
<td>0.809 (0.135)</td>
<td>0.703+ (0.138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderaterna</td>
<td>0.660* (0.122)</td>
<td>0.543*** (0.085)</td>
<td>0.494*** (0.121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.594** (0.107)</td>
<td>0.751+ (0.076)</td>
<td>0.649* (0.090)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristdemokraterna</td>
<td>0.817 (0.160)</td>
<td>0.693* (0.120)</td>
<td>0.581** (0.118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gröna</td>
<td>1.335 (0.282)</td>
<td>1.186 (0.220)</td>
<td>1.151 (0.256)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.394+ (0.278)</td>
<td>1.248 (0.214)</td>
<td>1.208 (0.247)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-06 Riksdag</td>
<td>1.190* (0.091)</td>
<td>1.294*** (0.066)</td>
<td>1.509*** (0.098)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.239** (0.088)</td>
<td>1.305*** (0.062)</td>
<td>1.542*** (0.094)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.005*** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.008*** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.003*** (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.005*** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.009*** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.003*** (0.001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lns1_1_1</td>
<td>0.364*** (0.039)</td>
<td>0.364*** (0.035)</td>
<td>0.451*** (0.051)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.420*** (0.042)</td>
<td>0.388*** (0.035)</td>
<td>0.473*** (0.050)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (Votes)</td>
<td>1172088</td>
<td>1271520</td>
<td>1174663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (MPs)</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aic</td>
<td>49581.337</td>
<td>56003.551</td>
<td>75971.068</td>
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<tr>
<td>bic</td>
<td>49772.925</td>
<td>56184.387</td>
<td>76162.692</td>
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<td>chi2</td>
<td>1082.166</td>
<td>1256.216</td>
<td>1685.034</td>
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</table>

+ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001 (Results in odds ratios)
Bibliography


