19. Legislative Party Cohesion and Discipline

Oda Nedregård* Martin Søyland†

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This chapter provides an overview of cohesion within legislative party groups in the Norwegian parliament. On the one hand, parties in the Storting are observed as highly cohesive i voting. On the other hand, MPs can have preferences that cross the interests of the party. By defining cohesion as observable unity of party groups, the chapter starts by discussing what incentives MPs have to dissent from the party and when party leaders might be expected to allow such dissent. Further, the chaper outlines the anatomy of parliamentary party groups in context of the Norwegian electoral system, the formal rules guiding parties in parliament, intraparty rules and structure, and the important role committees in Stortinget. Further, the chapter reviews, corroborates, and extends the findings of previous research in the Norwegian parliament by analyzing cohesion in voting and parliamentary debates. The main conclusion is that party cohesion is high, but also that MP discretion is contingent on the arena in which the MP participates.

Keywords: legislative parties, cohesion, discipline, roll call votes, parliamentary debates

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*Department of Economics, Sciences Po oda.nedregard@sciencespo.fr
†Department of political science, University of Oslo martin.soyland@stv.uio.no

Introduction

In February 2023, Ole Kristian Bergsgjerdet was removed from the Conservative ballot in the small municipality of Gjerdrum prior to the local election later that year. The reason was that he had posted a post on social media which compromised the party line of the Conservative Party. In the aftermath, former Mayor in Gjerdrum Hanne Bakke von Clemm proclaimed that:

> It is not acceptable to have a loose cannon on deck. Matters should be discussed internally and tolerance is high there, but externally we must stand together. Otherwise, it will be perceived [by the electorate] that the Conservatives are all over the place. (Aasum, 2023)[1]

This example illustrates some important features of party-centered electoral systems: parties control access to power through the ballot (Cox et al., 2019; Duverger, 1954), they value cohesion (Volden and Bergman, 2006), and dissent has consequences (Proksch and Slapin, 2015). It also highlights, as shown in Chapter 12, the central role parties play in the Norwegian political system. In this chapter, we provide an overview of cohesion within legislative party groups in the Norwegian parliament – the Storting. On the one hand, parties in the Storting appear highly cohesive on the surface and the rare occurrences of MP shirking can lead to party sanctions. On the other hand, MPs can have intrinsic preferences that cross the interests of the party. For instance, Norwegian politicians have historically had strong ties to their constituencies and strong cleavages between center and periphery have always been a prominent part of political life (Rokkan, 1967, p.368-369). To this day members of parliament (MPs) are seated by constituency, not party affiliation.

The chapter is structured as follows. We start by defining what a legislative party group is before discussing the concepts *cohesion* and *discipline*, as well as which incentives and opportunities MPs have to dissent. We also place the Norwegian case in a comparative perspective and outline the formal rules and norms guiding the proceedings of the Storting. We then analyze party cohesion in two key legislative activities: voting and debates. Our main take-away is that party cohesion is strong in Norway. However, the level of cohesion varies substantially between voting and debates. Legislative party groups, we

[1] Translated by the authors from: *Det er ikke greit å ha med seg en løs kanon på dekk. Saker skal drøftes internt og der er takhøyden stor, men utad må vi stå samlet. I motsatt fall vil det bli oppfattet som at Høyre spriker i alle retninger.*

argue, allow their members to dissent when it is to the party's benefit, and when it does not compromise the party brand.

Legislative party groups

We follow Heidar and Koole (2000) in defining the legislative party group[2] as:

> an organised group of members of a representative body who were elected [...] under the same party label [...] and who do not explicitly create a group for technical reasons only. (Heidar and Koole, 2000, p.249)

These legislative party groups do, of course, not operate in a vacuum. The functioning of legislative party groups is heavily influenced by the distribution of power within party organizations (see Chapter 12), the electoral system (see also Sieberer (2006) and Chapter 6) and the relative importance of these groups in the legislature's rules of procedure (Saalfeld and Strøm, 2014).[3] A key central question in the literature is how these constraints shape the strategies parties pursue in terms of policy, office, and votes (Müller and Strøm, 1999). By understanding how the institutional environments in which parties and MPs operate, we can get a better grasp of the tools the party leadership have at their disposal to secure these goals, and why the interests of party elites might at times be in conflict with the interests of individual MPs (Saalfeld and Strøm, 2014; Proksch and Slapin, 2015).

Across institutional setups, MPs have varying incentives to dissent from their party. As outlined by Kam (2009, p. 21-23), building on the seminal work of Müller and Strøm (1999), the motivation behind MP's behavior is a trade-off, combination of, and/or an interaction between the desire to attain policy, office, and votes. This could induce situations where individual MPs are incentivized to diverge from the party line. For instance, local grievances in specific constituencies could drive vote-seeking MPs to diverge from the party line, if that is deemed to be necessary for getting re-elected (Proksch and Slapin, 2015; Carey and Shugart, 1995). Similarly, the party might also want to indulge in such divergence

[2] *Legislative* and *parliamentary* party group is used interchangeably in the literature. Here, we follow Saalfeld and Strøm (2014) in using *legislative*.

[3] As outlined by Kam (2009), parties will vary across electoral systems, from between each other (within a system), institutional rules, preferences, and sociological aspects within the system. In this chapter, we mainly focus on the institutional aspects affecting legislative party groups.

because they want to retain the seat in that constituency, or they want to restrict MPs in order to maintain party unity. The crucial point for this chapter is that these motivations and trade-offs between MPs and parties are vary greatly across different types of institutional contexts (Sieberer, 2006; Huber, 1996).

Here, it is important, following the tradition of Ozbudun (1970, p. 304-305), to make the distinction between party *cohesion* and *discipline*. *Cohesion* in this context is "the extent to which [...] group members can be observed to work together for the group's goals", and *discipline* is the degree to which "[...] followers regularly accept and act upon the commands of the leader or leaders". Clearly, the concepts are connected – the stronger disciplinary line within a party, the higher threshold for dissent, and thus more incentives for cohesion (Bowler et al., 1999). But, high levels of cohesion can also be a product of MP self-selecting into party groups. And, discipline might not be enforced at either very high levels of cohesion where discipline is not needs or very low levels of cohesion where discipline is of no use.

It is important to keep in mind that any study of cohesion is limited to *observable* party discipline. It is very hard to capture true legislative group cohesion because discipline can be enforced before dissent happens (Proksch and Slapin, 2015, p. 26-27), and in arenas that are hidden for the observer. Committee meetings are, for instance, not open to the public in Norway. Consequently, as discussed by Bowler et al. (1999, p. 5), we are generally unable to pin down whether a united front follows genuine party coherence, forced coherence by discipline, or (more likely) a combination of the two.

Comparative perspectives

In a comparative perspective, Norwegian legislative party groups are deemed quite cohesive compared to legislative party groups in other countries. According to the Varieties of Democracy's comparative measure on legislative party cohesion,[4] Norway has the 20th highest cohesiveness score of *all* countries and the 12th highest among high-scoring democracies.[5] Figure 1 shows that legislative party group cohesion in Norway has been stable for a long period of time, although it is slightly lower than their Scandinavian neighbors. Further, countries commonly perceived to have more room for dissent in

[4]This question is formulated as: "Is it normal for members of the legislature to vote with other members of their party on important bills?". The answers are scaled from 0 ("Not really [...]") to 3 ("Yes, absolutely [...]") (Coppedge et al., 2024).
[5]High scoring democracies are defined as scoring higher than .75 on V-Dem's polyarchy measure (v2x_polyarchy).

parliament, such as the United Kingdom (Proksch and Slapin, 2015) and Switzerland (Traber et al., 2013), do score a lot lower on this measure.

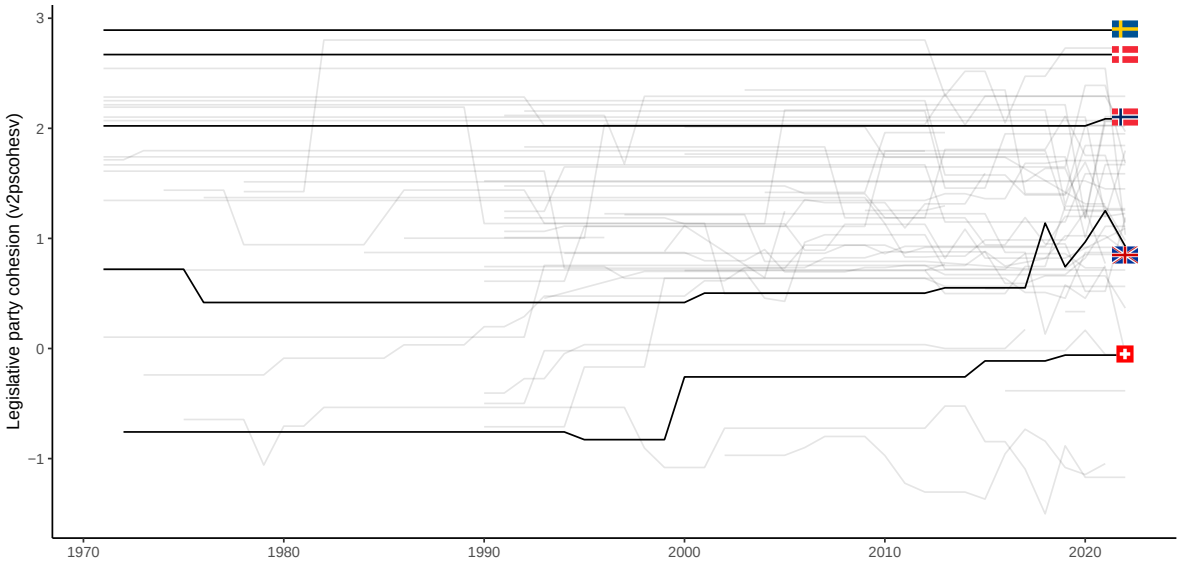

Figure 1: Temporal trend of V-Dem expert coded legislative party group cohesion (v2pscohesv) in high quality democracies ($v2x\_polyarchy > 0.75$) (Coppedge et al., 2024).

Focusing on the case of the United Kingdom, the institutional differences to Norway that should incentivize both parties and MPs to think differently about cohesion. In plurality systems like the UK, MPs are much more tied to their constituency and bolstering the personal vote is much more important vis-à-vis the party label than in party-list systems like Norway (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Slapin and Kirkland, 2019). Consequently, legislative party groups operate differently depending on how much dissent can compromise MPs re-election prospects (Wagner et al., 2020). Put simply, the general cost of dissent in the UK will be lower than in Norway, which should also lead to less cohesive parties. Comparative studies have also, to some extent, shown that institutional explanations are important drivers of cross-system variation in cohesiveness (Hix, 2004; Sieberer, 2006). With this theoretical and comparative framework in mind, we now move to the specifics of the legislative party groups in Norway.

Party groups in Stortinget

As discussed above, the Norwegian electoral system (see Chapter 6) gives a lot of influence to political parties (Heidar, 2014*a*; Strøm et al., 2003). However, party groups have, historically, had a remarkably modest role in the formal rules of parliament. Although parties have been influential in practice, the first electoral system(s) were a lot more candidate centered than the current system. In 1919, the Storting passed an electoral reform that changed the system from plurality in single-member districts to proportional representation (Haffner, 1949). This increased the informal strength of the parties, but the formal rules changed more gradually (see Heidar (2014*b*)). In the current closed-list PR system, party groups function as gatekeepers for candidates in upcoming elections, because legislators' re-election probabilities largely depend on the position they have on the ballot (Fiva and Nedregård, 2024; Nedregård, 2024*b*). If an MP does not follow the party line, they can lose their place on the ballot (but see Chapter 6 and 12 for remarks on candidate selection in elections). As a case in point, the Progress Party (FrP) forcefully sanctioned MP Ingebjørg Godskesen after she voted against merging three municipalities within her constituency (Cosson-Eide et al., 2017), ultimately leading to her resignation from the party. Further, parties also act as gatekeepers to legislators' ability to affect policy by controlling committee composition, appointment to coveted positions (cabinet), and the policy agenda. However, the legislative party group also need to trust their MPs and the specialized work they do in the committees (Rasch, 2014). In sum, MPs have strong incentives to stay loyal to their party group, as a favorable intra-party standing improves their likelihood of being (re)elected and influence policies in the long run.

As there are no formalized within-party rules in the legislature, it is up to the party to create their own. These rules are, across the parties in parliament, quite similar. Typically, the legislative groups have a parliamentary leader, group leadership, and an election committee (see Strøm (1994, p. 202-206) for an overview of leadership structures). The election committee is responsible for assigning MPs to the various positions in the Storting, including the standing committees (Heidar, 2014*b*, p. 401). All party groups have some sort of rule set (*gruppereglement*) where positions, division of labor, routines, and so on are specified (Heidar, 2014*b*, p. 401). How strongly worded the rules are varies across parties, with some parties strongly encouraging cohesion and others having binding decisions by voting

in the group meetings (*gruppemøte*). These group meetings are also important for coordinating and sharing information between members of the different committees (see chapter 3 on the importance of committees), with ministers (when the party is in government), and even coalition partners (when the party is in a coalition government). It is also worth noting that legislative party groups are part of larger organizations and the relationship between the extra-parliamentary and legislative party groups is important in the Norwegian system (see Allern and Saglie (2012) and Allern et al. (2015)).

While this discussion shows that there is a lot of accumulated knowledge on legislative party groups and their roles in Parliament, it lacks behind the more general party organization literature (see Chapter 12). Especially, the literature on intra-party rules and norms and how these vary across groups are characterized by anecdotal accounts and lack of empirical evidence. Here lies great potential for future research. For instance, a systematic analysis of the different rule sets (*gruppereglement*) could highlight and corroborate the elite surveys (Heidar, 2013) on how parties vary in terms of decision-making rules, the use of whips, within-group streamlining of information, deliberation, and so on.

In sum, we have outlined the overall structure encompassing legislative party groups in Norway and how this is expected to result in highly cohesive units. In the following, we first show that these patterns do emerge in analyses of voting behavior. However, we also argue that this cohesive facade conceals substantial degrees of intra-party disagreement. Consequently, we devote a section to analyze cohesion in parliamentary debates, where representatives are allowed more leeway than in votes.

Cohesion in voting

The ultimate act in legislatures is to vote, and voting behavior has been used extensively historically and extensively to map and analyze individual behavior and party cohesion (Rice, 1924; Cox and Poole, 2002) in a large variety of countries' legislatures. As the formal rules and dimensionality of voting was covered in Chapter 3, we focus on the cohesiveness of legislative parties. For Norway, this literature is quite sparse. Shaffer (1991) analyses 402 roll call votes over the course of the 1985-86 parliamentary session. In what is described as "[...] exceedingly high levels of intra-party cohesiveness" (Shaffer, 1991, p. 65), his findings quite clearly show that government versus opposition is the most important dimension the roll call votes of Stortinget. This finding is also robust when analyzing votes over specific

committees. Further, mapping roll calls in the period from 1979 to 1994, Rasch (1999) finds very high degrees of intra-party cohesion for all parties. He also notes that large-scale analyses of voting in the Storting have been lacking "because everyone (correctly) believes party discipline to be very high" and that MPs are only allowed to break rank in based on localism or moral grounds (Rasch, 1999, p. 128).

In order to append the descriptive overview of roll call votes in Norway, we extract votes from the 2011-2012 through the 2020-2021 sessions using the *stortingscrape* package for R (R Core Team, 2023; Søyland, 2021).[6] By following a similar approach to Rasch (1999), we can thus describe cohesion in an (to our knowledge) unexamined period.

	Rice index (mean)	**Participation (%)**
Socialist Left Party (SV)	0.973	60.3
Labour Party (A)	0.990	55.6
Centre Party (Sp)	0.991	59.0
Christian Democratic Party (KrF)	0.993	54.1
Liberal Party (V)	0.993	51.0
Conservative Party (H)	0.994	47.0
Progress Party (FrP)	0.984	55.3

Table 1: Rice index and participation over all parliamentary parties in Stortinget (2011-2022). Parties are ordered from left to right.

Table 1 shows the mean Rice index[7] across all votes and participation percentages for all parties in Stortinget in the 2011-2022 period. The Rice index shows how unified the party is on a particular vote (1 is perfect unity). As is evident, the scores are overall extremely high with the Socialist Left (SV) and Progress Party (FrP) having marginally lower scores than the other parties. Indeed, the Rice index is 1 (perfect unity) in 94.9% of votes. Even looking at only the instances where party are not

[6]The time period covered spans the coverage of roll-calls in Stortinget's API to the start of this project.

[7]The Rice index is the absolute difference between yes and no votes divided by the total amount of votes (Rice, 1924; Hix et al., 2007):

$$\text{Rice Index} = \frac{|yes - no|}{yes + no}$$

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perfectly united – 5121 votes – the scores are generally above 0.85 for the larger parties (A, H, FrP), and somewhat lower scores for smaller parties; small party bias is a known problem of vote based cohesion scores (Desposato, 2005). Further, it might also be the case that some of the votes against the party are voting errors (pressing the wrong button is quite common, and not always corrected), meaning the score in reality could be even higher. We conclude that party cohesion is similar, or even higher, in the 2011 to 2022 period as compared to the 1979 to 1994 period studied by Rasch (1999).

If we zoom in on the largest party, Table 2 lists the six least loyal members of the Labour Party (A) in the covered period. The lowest-scoring MP for the Labour Party (A) has a loyalty score of 82.4%, followed by scores up towards 90% for the six least loyal members. Except Jan Bøhler, the lowest-scoring MPs have participated in very few votes and voted against the party majority only in a couple of votes. Jan Bøhler's presence on the list is, nevertheless, interesting because he left the Labour Party (A) and joined the Centre Party (Sp) after conflicts in the renomination process before the 2021 election (Hirsti et al., 2017). This might be an indication of party discipline being in play, although, at best, anecdotal in character.

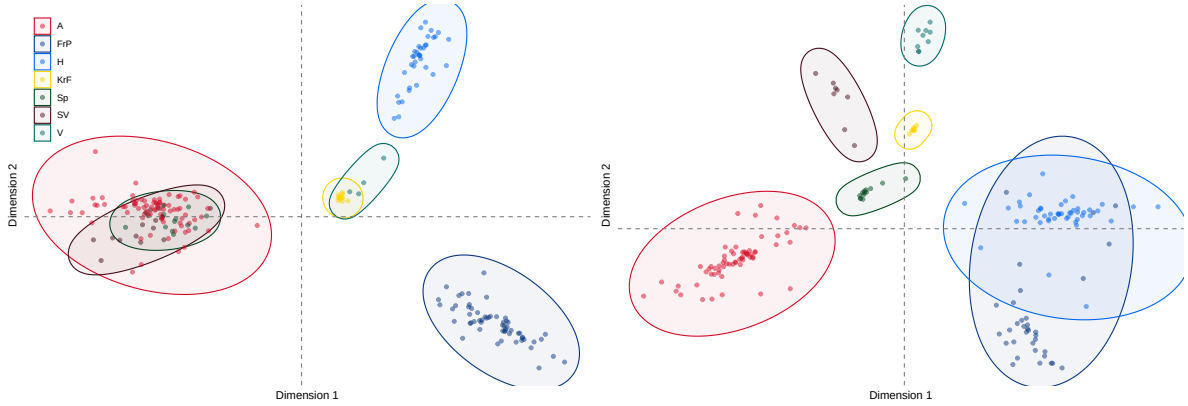
	Majority voting (%)	**Majority voting (N)**	**Total votes**	**Participation (%)**
Sonja Edvardsen	82.4	14	17	94.4
Helge Steinsvåg	86.4	19	22	91.7
Berit Tønnesen	87.5	7	8	61.5
Pål Sture Nilsen	90.9	10	11	73.3
Jan Bøhler	91.6	2849	3111	41.6
Didrik Beck	91.7	11	12	92.3

Table 2: Labour Party (A) members with the lowest ratio of votes in line with the majority of the party.

Government versus opposition

We can also study party cohesion with overall roll-call votes between parties, more similar to the analyses of Shaffer (1991). Here, we opt to use a two-dimensional model (Jackman, 2024) of the

2012-2013 and 2013-2014 sessions for illustrative purposes.[8]. The choice of these sessions are by no means arbitrary; the former were under a center-left majority coalition between the Labour Party (A), Socialist Left Party (SV), and Centre Party (Sp), whereas the latter is a right wing minority coalition between the Conservative Party (H) and Progress Party (FrP). As such, we get a glimpse at how parties vote change their voting behavior when they go from government to opposition and vice versa.



(a) 2012-2013 (b) 2013-2014

Figure 2: Two-dimensional roll call votes model over two dimensions. The points are MPs and the color indicates party affiliation. Circles mark the smallest possible ellipse encompassing all MPs in a given party.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of MPs on the two dimensions in 2012-2013 (Figure 2a) and 2013-2014 (Figure 2b), with the dashed vertical and horizontal lines indicating the means for each dimension within the respective sessions. From the left panel, we see the government parties of the period – Labour Party (A), Socialist Left Party (SV), and Centre Party (Sp) – grouped tightly together on both dimensions, whereas the opposition parties are grouped on dimension 1 but not on dimension 2. Similarly, in the right panel, the two governing parties of the 2013-2014 session — the Conservatives (H) and the Progress Party (FrP) — are indistinguishable on dimension 1, and also closer to its support parties — the Christian Democrats (KrF) and the Liberals (V). On dimension 2, however, the governing parties are slightly further apart and the Conservatives (H) closer to the Labour Party (A). Nevertheless, the main

[8]This is a spatial (with two dimensions) item-response model utilizing roll call votes to estimate where MPs stand in relation to each other. The model is, however, not well-suited for making inference about the distance between MPs in systems with high unity. Consequently, we focus on inter-party relations here. See Chapter 3 and Rosenthal and Voeten (2004) for an overview.

takeaway from Figure 2 is that dimension 1 perfectly separates the government from the opposition and that parties in coalition governments tend to be almost as united as the parties by themselves; when calculating the Rice index for the government as a whole, the resulting score is 0.99 for the government parties the 2012-2013 session and 0.97 for 2013-2014.

Our analysis of voting in the Storting has shown that party cohesion is very high, both within parties and coalitions. Loyalty to the party is reflected in both overall party scores and individual scores for MPs. Interestingly, we have also shown that there is high degrees of government cohesion in voting; when parties are coalition partners, they tend to vote as if they were one party.

Legislative Debates

As we have shown, there is a high degree of cohesion in legislative votes. Because intra-party disagreement is mostly settled before the voting stage, roll call votes convey little information about party cohesion. In parliamentary speeches, however, legislators are allowed substantially more discretion. By studying legislative debates, we can get a more nuanced picture of party cohesion. Speeches also have a number of additional advantages that makes them useful for researchers interested in capturing party discipline. While votes are binary, debates are high-dimensional data. Consequently, speeches can be used to capture deviations along dimensions that are not possible to capture using votes only. Also, as votes are outcomes of bargaining processes, they convey little information about the content of the discussions resulting in the policy proposal. In contrast, speeches can give us a better grasp of the policy formation process, where even minor digressions between speakers can provide useful insights about individual legislators' priorities and preferences.

Because MPs have more leeway in debates, the plenary plays an important role in the *linkage* process between the electorate and the executive (Kreppel, 2017, p. 123), where speeches are used to voice constituency concerns and keep voters informed about the proceedings of the legislature. Speeches are also habitually used to express disagreement with coalition agreements (Itzkovitch-Malka et al., 2023; Umit and Auel, 2019; Martin and Vanberg, 2008) when these forces uncomfortable compromises in votes. One example is Heidi Nordby Lunde from the Conservative Party (H), February 27th, 2014. After the ruling coalition proposed a bill which would secure medical doctors the right to reserve themselves

against referring women to abortions, Lunde signaled her disagreement with her party's position by stating: "Our collaborators should know that when we have entered an agreement, we stand by it, even when it is hard. Even when it is desperately hard." While parties tend to force their rank-and-file to adhere to coalition agreements in voting, there are many examples of parties loosening their grip in speeches.

Debates in Stortinget

The plenary debates in Stortinget are subject to strict formal rules, which are outlined in the rules of procedure (Stortinget, 2022). However, the policy content of these speeches are largely decided by the MPs themselves (in dialogue with their party), and which debates they participate in is strongly dependent on their committee assignments (Søyland and Høyland, 2021). Formally, deliberations in the plenary follow strict time limits. The tone should be formal, and all speeches must be addressed to the parliamentary presidency. In contrast to the UK, the audience is not allowed to shout, be boisterous, or signal disagreement with a speaker during a debate.[9]

As shown in Table 3, there are notable differences in MPs' debate participation between the legislative party groups. The overall takeaway is that MPs from small parties participate substantially more in debates compared to those from large parties. The exception is the Christian Democrats (KrF) whose MPs deliver about as many speeches in a month as the Conservative Party (seven versus six). MPs from the Progress Party (FrP), which comprised the third largest party in Parliament for the majority of the period covered by our data, participate in the parliamentary debate at about equal rates as those from Labor (A) and the Conservatives (H).

The overrepresentation of MPs from smaller parties is, however, not surprising. If parties want to be able to take stances on as many of the issues discussed in the plenary as possible, smaller parties have fewer MPs to distribute the speeches across. The fact that parties prioritize participation in debates underlines how important role debates play in affecting the policy, and allowing parties to signal their policy stances to both the electorate and other parties. This is especially relevant in debates where parties do not have an MP represented on the committee that is responsible for an issue discussed in the

[9] See both Nedregård (2024*b*) and Søyland (2020) for detailed descriptions of how parliamentary debates in Stortinget are structured and Søyland and Høyland (2021) for determinants of participation in parliament.

plenary.

	Mean	Median
SV	9	6
A	4	2
Sp	9	6
V	10	7
KrF	7	4
H	6	3
FrP	6	3

Table 3: Mean and median number of speeches in the Norwegian Parliament by party (1993-2021)

Figure 3 shows how parties rank in terms of speech attendance, proportional to their seat share. Also here, there is a negative correlation between party size and how much each party member contributes to the parliamentary debate. MPs representing the Liberal Party (V) – the party with the lowest number of representatives through the period covered – deliver almost twice as many speeches as they would have done if speeches were distributed proportionally.

Cohesion in debates

As previously discussed, parties have a diverse toolkit for incentivizing their elected officials. These tools determine MPs' re-election probabilities, but also their ability to affect policy, and control over the legislative agenda.

In addition, intra-party politics is characterized by strong seniority norms (Cirone et al., 2021). By creating career paths within the party through the renomination of incumbents to safe list ranks, parties pave the ground for intrinsically motivated electoral teams that serve the overall course of the party even in the absence of party control. The significance of political selection is demonstrated by Fiva and Nedregård (2024) who use re-nomination shocks to study the importance of parties in ensuring that MPs induce efforts and adhere to the party line. They find that when MPs unexpectedly learn that they are ineligible for re-election in the following term, they attend fewer votes and deliver fewer speeches.

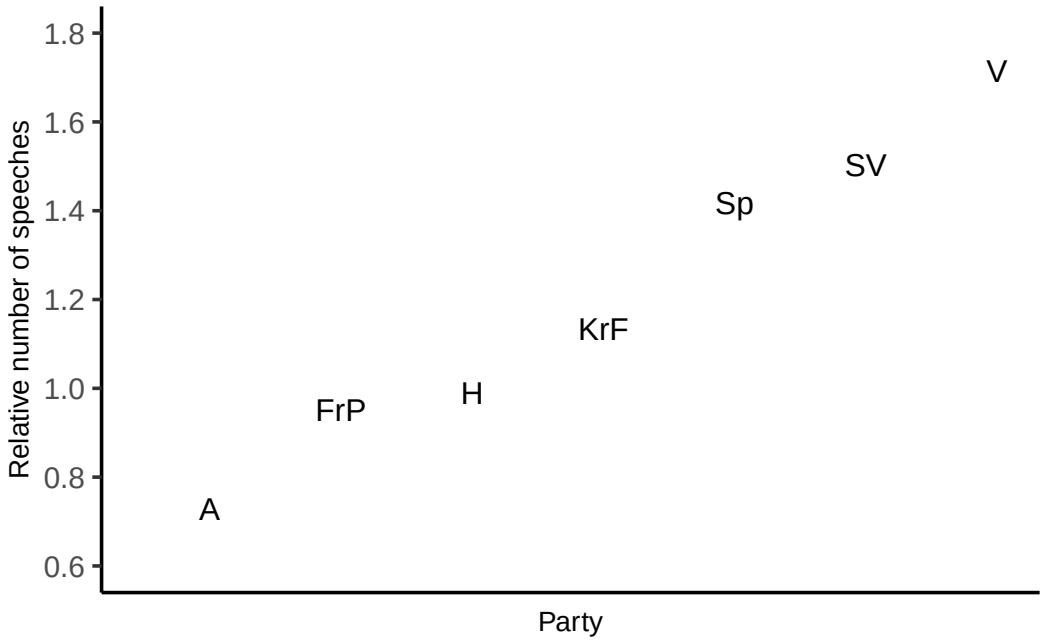


Figure 3: Number of floor speeches in a month by party, proportional to their seat share, where a value of 1 indicates perfect proportionality (1993-2021)

However, the absence of party control does not make MPs deviate more from the party line in debates. MPs abide by the party line at equal levels, regardless of electoral incentives (Fiva and Nedregård, 2024, p.26). How seniority affects legislative speeches is also studied by Røed et al. (2023), who find that inexperienced MPs are much more likely to speak negatively about opposing parties than their more experienced colleagues.

Although MPs are allowed more leeway in floor speeches compared to votes, debates are not absent of party control. For dissent to happen in debates, three conditions need to be satisfied. First, the MP must want to deviate from the party line publicly. Second, the topic where the party and MP has different preferences has to be debated. Third, the MP needs access to the floor in the debate. Parties can both directly and indirectly affect observable party cohesion by incentivizing their rank-and-file to stay off the parliamentary floor, or alter the legislative agenda. Consequently, a cohesive facade can hide substantial intra-party disagreement. Intra-party disagreement tends to be more concealed when the issue that is debated is sensitive, or has a high probability of compromising the party line. One example

of such issues are foreign affairs and security concerns. In 2016, the Norwegian prime minister Erna Solberg defended her unwillingness to openly discuss Norway's stances on asylum seekers from Russia, which she referred to as "foreign-political extreme sport".

Censoring of debates is, however, not only limited to security concerns. While individual legislators formally represent their districts, parties need to consider the interests of all districts simultaneously. Competing interest between districts can be challenging to balance for parties. Nedregård (2024*a*) sheds light on censoring in Norwegian parliamentary debates by studying how parties are coordinating speeches between MPs in response to local unemployment. She finds that only MPs in safe seats speak more about unemployment in Parliament when the districts they are representing are experiencing economic downturns. When MPs in unsafe seats do speak during local downturns, they deviate significantly more from the party line than MPs in safe seats. This reflects how parties can use speech allocation to maintain a coherent front stakes are high.[10] Similarly, Finseraas et al. (2021) use the oil price shock in the summer of 2014 to study how changes in the opportunity cost of green policymaking to affect MPs' attentiveness to green topics in parliamentary speeches. They find that only MPs who faced low political costs of climate policies spoke more about environmental issues in response to the oil price collapse, while MPs who faced high political costs avoided these topics.

MP characteristics and loyalty

Earlier in this chapter, we shed light on party cohesion by examining the degree to which MPs vote against the majority of the party in legislative votes. In a similar manner, we can shed light on loyalty in speeches by examining deviations from the party line in legislative debates. Figure 4 shows how the tendency to deviate from the party line varies by speaker characteristics. In contrast to our analysis of votes, where we used the majority opinion of the party as a baseline, we here define the party line as the mean position of the party leadership in a parliamentary session. The points in Figure 4 represent coefficients from regressions testing for different means between MPs of opposing genders, government and minister status, seat safety, and seniority. On average, female MPs deviate more from the party line than male MPs, while senior MPs are somewhat more loyal to the party line compared to

[10] This is in line with Bäck et al. (2019) who find MPs are less likely to speak in parliament in general, and about unemployment in particular, when their districts are experiencing economic downturns in the open-list system of Sweden.

their less experienced counterparts. Unsurprisingly, serving as minister or being in government also influence party coherence. On average, ministers and government MPs deviate less than non-ministers and opposition MPs. Once again, we see how legislative constraints are important to understand MPs' speech behavior. When in government, legislators consolidate their speeches around the party leadership, while the opposition diverges. Seat security has little effect on cohesion in speeches.

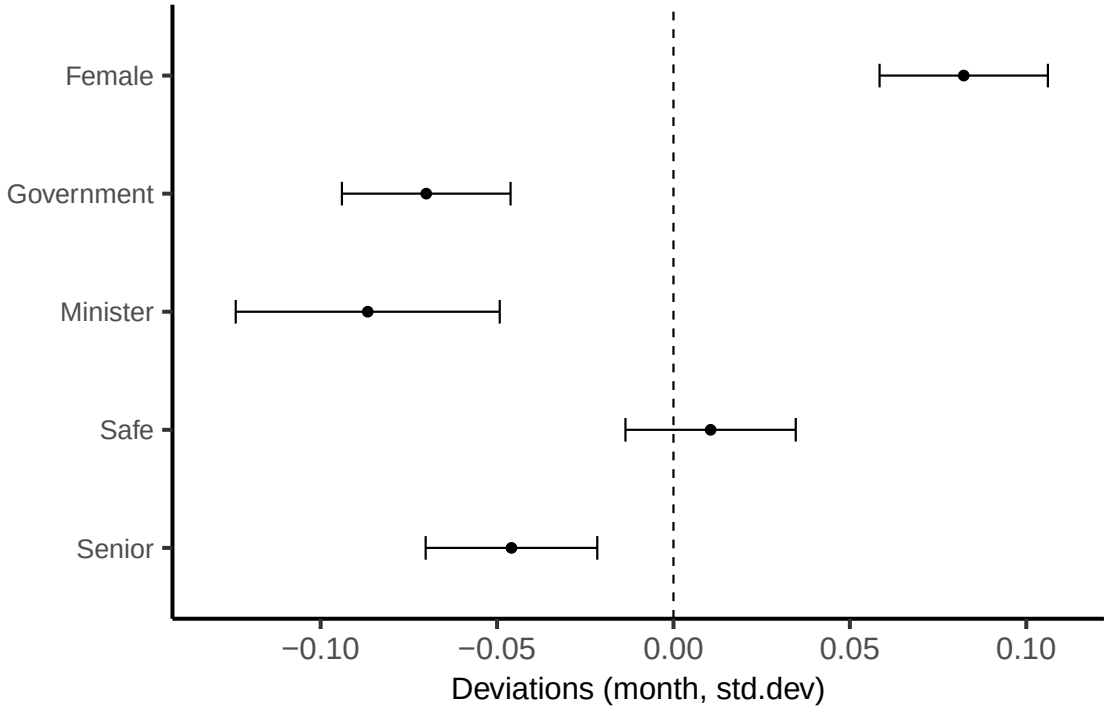


Figure 4: Tendency to deviate from the party line in floor speeches by speaker characteristic (1993-2021).

There are also notable differences between parties in terms of speech cohesion, as shown by Figure 5. Here, deviations are denoted in absolute values and are standardized to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. The value zero indicates perfect alignment with the party leader, while higher values indicate a larger difference between the MP and the leadership. MPs representing the Socialist Lefts (SV) deviate the most from the party line, followed by the Labour Party (A). The Centre Party (Sp) is the party with the highest level of speech coherence. The remaining parties are fairly similar in terms of how much they deviate from the party line. As with speech attendance, we lack knowledge

about what drives heterogeneity in speech cohesion between parties.

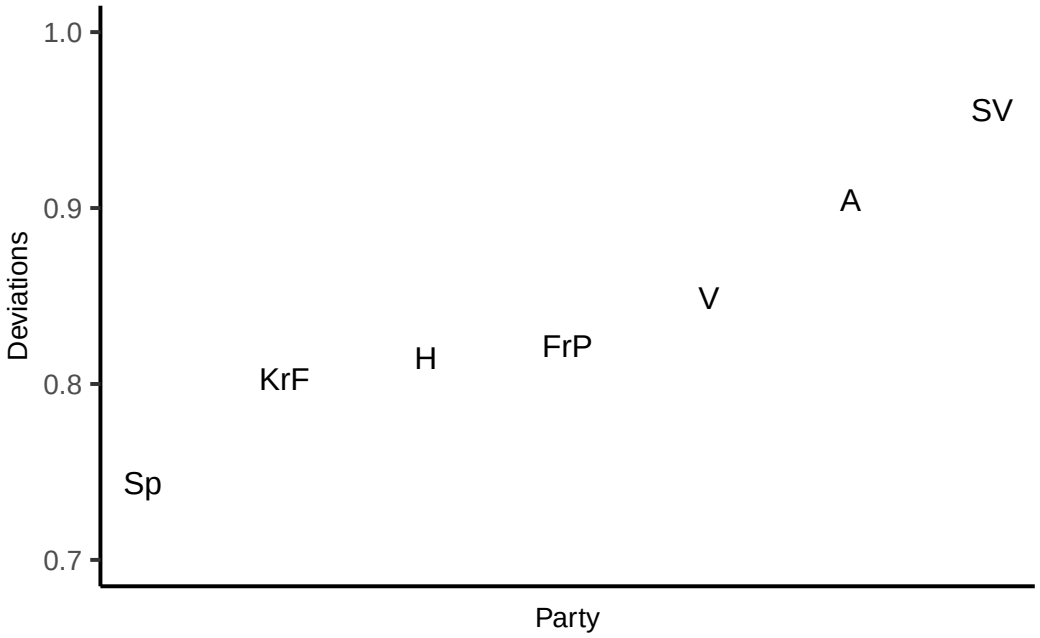


Figure 5: Deviations from the party leadership along an economic and an urban-rural dimension speeches by party (1993-2021). See Nedregård (2024*a*) for details.

We do, however, know what affects cohesion *within* parties. Fiva et al. (2023) shed light on intra-party cohesion by studying how MPs' social ties – their gender, age, urban-rural affiliation, and social background – shape their speech patterns in the Norwegian Parliament. They find a strong association between descriptive and substantive representation in the Norwegian parliament (Mansbridge, 1999). They show that, across all background characteristics, MPs tend to speak more about topics that align with the policy preferences of voters with the same background characteristics as themselves. Female MPs speak more about family and education policy than their male counterparts, even when comparing MPs from the same political party and policy committee. Male MPs, on the other hand, are more likely to speak about fiscal and foreign policy than women. The differences in which topics female and male MPs speak about mirror differences in the policy concerns of female and male voters. The same patterns are present for legislators of opposing age groups, urban-rural affiliations, and social backgrounds.

The fact that also legislators' social background and urban-rural affiliation are important to understand

which concerns MPs raise in debates indicates that the patterns are not solely driven by parties allocating topics to their rank-and-file based on observable characteristics. Instead, it suggests that a substantial degree of the diverging speech patterns can be attributed to self-selection into topics. These findings underline the importance of minimizing political entry barriers to prevent selection bias into politics from biasing policymaking.

How can we explain differences in which topics MPs dedicate attention to that go beyond committee membership and strategic concerns by parties? Self-selection into debates can be perpetuated by career opportunities, where, for instance, women can improve their career prospects if they focus on topics that concern female voters (Paxton et al., 2013). This can partly be explained by a composition effect, where females face less competition from their male counterparts when specializing in issues that traditionally have been seen as 'female'. However, it can also be driven by a legitimacy effect, where women can be seen as having a stronger claim to issues that concern female voters because they share their experiences and identities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have studied party cohesion – the extent to which party group members are observed working together – of the Norwegian legislative party groups. The main takeaway is that party cohesion is strong, but also varies across the legislative arenas of voting and debates. We have shown that the institutional setup, especially the electoral system, gives a lot of power to the parties through control of the ballot and that the Norwegian case ranks Comparatively high in terms of cohesive legislative parties. We concentrate our analyses of legislative party cohesion on two key legislative arenas: voting and debates. In voting, we find parties to be almost perfectly united. In debates, however, parties let their members deviate from the party line if seems beneficial and not costly to do so. In sum, we have demonstrated that parties are cohesive, but also that MPs are not a mirror of the party they represent; parties value a unified front, but also has tolerance for internal discussions on issues.

This is not to say that voting behavior and debates are necessarily directly comparable when it comes to cohesion; rather, we argue, the institutional setup funnels a lot of power to the parties, making them able to bar MPs from dissenting in voting. Nevertheless, the divergence between the individual and the

party does not disappear; it manifests in less consequential arenas of parliament, such as debates. Thus, in the hunt for observable party dissent in parliamentary systems, it is important to take the institutional arena of the dissent into account (Proksch and Slapin, 2015). Voicing an opinion in a debate is less consequential for policy output than actively voting yes or no when push comes to shove. Indeed, as we have argued in this chapter, only allowing for dissent in arenas is a way for the party leadership to discipline their members while also retaining a unified facade. In this hierarchy of institutional arenas, there also is great potential for further research of intra-party cohesion in the Norwegian system. Indeed, even individual participation in arenas such as traditional and social media, where the risk of compromising the party line is much higher than in parliamentary debates, are promising avenues for further investigation. These platforms are both more likely to reach voters than parliamentary debates, and parties are much less able to censor content here; there is no formal rules for "floor access" on social media.

We have also argued that mapping legislative party groups and the institutional framework they work under has great potential for future research. Even at the low levels in the hierarchy, institutional rules "create opportunities for particular individuals or groups, impose constraints on others, and thus affect who wins and who loses the competition to influence policy outcomes" (Huber, 1996, p. 1).

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