

Party Behaviour in the Finnish Parliament

Guy-Erik Isaksson, Åbo Akademi

This article focuses on party behaviour in the Finnish Parliament. We consider the political parties as vote-seekers, office-seekers, or policy-seekers in a multiparty system. We presume that the parliamentary position of a party affects its behaviour, and that the behaviour of a party differs from one arena to another in Parliament. The party activity is measured in terms of proposed motions, reservations to committee decisions, debates and statements at plenary sessions, and roll-calls at plenary sessions. The empirical findings indicate that political parties in opposition act first and foremost as vote-seekers. Only opposition parties make reservations to committee decisions and initiate roll-calls at plenary sessions. On the other hand, the governing parties seem mainly to focus on policy-seeking.

Introduction

Models of party behaviour consider parties as vote-seekers, office-seekers, or policy-seekers. Briefly, the vote-seeking party is assumed to be vote maximizing, the office-seeking party seeks to maximize its control over political office, and the policy-seeking party maximizes its effect on public policy (Strom 1990, 566–568). Obviously, pure vote-seekers, office-seekers, or policy-seekers are unlikely to exist. The behaviour of a party reflects a complex combination of these goals, a combination based on ideological and strategic calculations.

This paper focuses on party behaviour in the Finnish Parliament. The comprehensive question is: how does the parliamentary position of a party affect the behaviour of the party? In general, we presume that a party in governing position behaves differently from a party in opposition. An opposition party is probably more oriented towards vote-seeking than governing parties which, in turn, are more likely to be oriented towards office-seeking or policy-seeking. In the following, this basic assumption will be empirically tested by measuring party activity in Parliament.

In this context the analysis of party behaviour is based on two basic assumptions. First, we presume that the parliamentary position of a party affects its behaviour. Among other things, this implies that we expect a *change* in the behaviour of a party when a party in opposition enters a governing coalition, and vice versa. This can be studied empirically by analysing different types of coalition formations. The second basic assump-

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tion claims that party behaviour varies from one parliamentary arena to another. The parties give varying priority to different arenas and institutions, thus affecting their behaviour. For instance, one party may consider work in the committees more important than work at plenary sessions. However, some special features are consistently characteristic of the Finnish decision-making system. To begin with let us first discuss these peculiarities.

Conditions of Party Behaviour in Finland

The most significant, and curious, features in the Finnish decision-making system consist of some *constitutional rules* and the *position of the President*. Both these features affect party behaviour in different ways. Thus, party behaviour in general, and especially party behaviour in Parliament, is impossible to grasp without paying attention to these factors. We shall briefly discuss the essence of these peculiarities.

The general rule for a bill to be passed is the same in Finland as in most Western democracies: a bill is passed if a parliamentary majority supports it. However, until the 1990s there was an essential exception to this rule. According to the Finnish Parliament Act, one-third of all MPs (i.e., at least 67 of 200) could postpone an adopted bill to be considered anew by Parliament (Arter 1987, 45–50). In such cases the bill had to be confirmed unaltered by that particular ordinary session of Parliament that follows the next ordinary session of Parliament. Until 1987, in addition to this, a parliamentary election was required between these two acts of Parliament.

This arrangement was a rather dramatic expression of the highly organized and quite extensive protection of political minorities in Finland and can only be understood against its specific historical background. Furthermore, this arrangement increased rather dramatically the level of support that a cabinet had to secure in Parliament in order to secure the realization of government policy. To be on the safe side the cabinet had to be able to command a two-thirds majority in Parliament (Brotherus 1963; Hidén & Saraviita 1978).

The real importance of this rule is difficult to assess. Actually, the minority used this instrument rather carefully. From 1917 to 1990 only 110 bills were rejected by the minority in this way. This constitutes a highly insignificant share of the approximately 10 000 laws that passed Parliament during this period. Primarily, the importance was *indirect* in the sense that a cabinet had to take the *existence* of this rule into consideration (Helander 1990).

Regarding this constitutional rule the crucial point is that the consequences of the rules have changed during the last two decades. Originally, these rules were meant to protect a political minority. However, the societal

development has made the use of these rules more and more undesirable. The building and expansion of the welfare state have made public decision-making much more complex. A new ideology of decision-making has emerged. A consensual decision-making system accentuated the need to avoid the use of the special constitutional rules mentioned above. A large use of these rules on the legislative arena could effectively have obstructed this development. Consequently, the importance of as large a majority cabinet as possible essentially increased (Anckar 1991).

Another peculiarity in the Finnish Constitution is the strong position of the *President*. This position is strong in general, and in the field of foreign policy it is highly dominant. Here we are interested in his position with respect to the *nomination of governments*, and the effects of this authority on party behaviour. According to the Constitution Act, the President appoints the members of the cabinet who must be recognized as "honest and capable Finnish citizens". Once appointed, the cabinet must enjoy the confidence of Parliament. This indicates that the Finnish Constitution is dualistic. The cabinet must enjoy the confidence of Parliament on the one hand and, on the other, the President has a strong and independent position regarding the cabinet formation process. The historical reasons for this arrangement will not be discussed in this connection (Nousiainen 1985, 241–265; Lindman 1979).

In sum, the Finnish political system requires large majority coalitions, the composition of which, to a great extent, depends on the preferences of the President. How do these basic conditions affect party behaviour? We assert that the major effect is that elections become less important. This, in turn, is a consequence of the fact that the significance of an electoral success or loss is rather limited. The legislative weight of a party is not directly translated into bargaining power. In the first place, the preferences of the President determine the bargaining power of the parties. It is not unusual for a party to enter a cabinet coalition, though the same party has just lost an election (Hakovirta & Koskiaho 1973, 158–162).

Consequently, the Finnish parties probably do not consider vote maximization as important as do parties in more parliamentary multiparty systems. However, all parties are not in the same position with respect to the coalition formation process. When large majority coalitions are formed the major parties are, of course, in a more favourable position than the smaller ones. Though many parties are represented in Parliament, the real alternatives for a majority coalition are rather few. In fact, a majority coalition must include at least two major parties, and usually also one or several minor parties. On the other hand, there are minor parties that have never been represented in office, and the probability of them entering a coalition in the future is rather limited.

Since the independence of Finland in 1917 there have been 65 cabinets

Table 1. Type of Government in Finland, 1917–91.

Type of government	1917–45	1946–91	Total
All-party government	8	–	8
Majority coalition	7	21	28
Minority coalition	9	4	13
Single-party government	4	3	7
Civil-service caretakers	2	7	9
Total	30	35	65

in all (from Svinhufvud I to the cabinet of Aho). Most of these have been coalitions of three to five parties. About half of all the coalitions have been majority cabinets. The Centre Party has taken part in almost all coalitions and, with the exception of one (1987–91), in all majority coalitions! The Centre Party is obviously the number one cabinet party in Finland. The other major dominating party, particularly since the 1960s, is the Social Democratic Party. In fact, these two major parties have provided the base for all majority coalitions during the last decades.

The Swedish and Liberal People's Parties, two minor parties, have usually been included in majority coalitions as supplementary parties to the major parties. For the most part, the Conservatives took part in majority coalitions before the war, and the Communists after the war, especially in the 1970s. The Rural Party has been included in two majority coalitions (1983–90). The Conservatives were in opposition from 1966 to 1987 when a new coalition formation came up. That year a majority coalition was formed by the Social Democrats and the Conservatives, supplemented by the Swedish People's Party and the Rural Party. For the first time the Centre Party was left outside a majority coalition (Jansson 1982, 79–82; Arter 1987, 50–56).

Design

The behaviour of Finnish parties is here studied by measuring their *activity* in Parliament in connection with four different issues and four different years (1966, 1975, 1981, and 1988). These years have been chosen for two reasons. First, differently composed majority coalitions were in office during these years. This makes it possible to analyse whether the parliamentary position of some parties affected their behaviour. Secondly, all issues studied represent the same policy area. Each year Parliament dealt with a bill determining the goals and means of the regional policy for the

	Motions	Reservations	Debates	Roll-calls
Cabinet-makers	+++ (v)	-- (p)	++ (v,o)	-- (p)
Supplementary parties	+++ (v)	-- (o)	++ (v,o)	-- (o)
Outsiders	+++ (v)	+++ (v)	+++ (v)	+++ (v)

Fig. 1. Expected Variations in Party Activity.

near future (Isaksson 1980). The fact that all issues represent the same policy area – regional policy – makes them more comparable. Therefore, it is more likely that changes in the activity and behaviour of a party are by-products of changes in the parliamentary position of the party.

We will measure the party activities in four different ways: proposed *motions*, *reservations* to committee decisions, *debates* and *statements* at plenary sessions, and *roll-calls* at plenary sessions. Thus, the basic forms of activity exercised in Parliament are covered. Different sections of the parliamentary decision-making process are also covered. All in all, these measures provide a rather complete picture of party activity in Parliament. *Activity* is, naturally, only one aspect of party behaviour. However, the proportions and the timing of party activity are quite indicative of the preferences and the intentions of the parties. The activity measures in particular reflect the relations between the Cabinet parties and the opposition parties. In this perspective the results of the measurements can serve as a basis for interpretations according to the models of party behaviour.

The parties are categorized in two different ways which do not exclude each other. Primarily, we make a distinction between *governing parties* and *opposition parties* at every measuring point. In addition, we distinguish between *cabinet-makers*, *supplementary parties*, and *outsiders*. In other words, we distinguish between the major parties of a cabinet and the minor, supplementary, parties. The outsiders are identical to the opposition parties. The position of the parties according to this categorization depends on the structure of each coalition formation. A major coalition in Finland, usually, includes two major parties, these parties being classified as cabinet-makers. In Fig. 1 this categorization of the parties is related to the different types of empirical measurements which we will make. The more + signs, the more party activity we expect to find. Moreover, the presumed profile of the parties – vote-seeking (v), office-seeking (o), or policy-seeking (p) – is included in the figure.

We expect the greatest variations to be found between the opposition parties (the outsiders) and the governing parties. In general, the opposition parties are expected to be much more active than the cabinet parties. The variations between the cabinet-makers and the supplementary parties are assumed to be very small. We can express the expected variations as four propositions, one for each measure:

Proposition 1: The parliamentary position of a party does *not* affect the disposition to present *motions*. All parties are active and essential variations between the parties do not occur. This indicates that the parties use the institution of proposing motions primarily as a vote-seeker.

Proposition 2: The cabinet parties are unanimous in parliamentary committees. Only opposition parties make *reservations* to committee decisions. These parties are primarily focused on vote-seeking. The governing parties are concentrated on policy-seeking, or office-seeking.

Proposition 3: At *plenary sessions* the opposition parties are more active than the governing parties. The opposition parties are primarily focused on vote-seeking, the governing parties on vote-seeking and office-seeking.

Proposition 4: Only opposition parties initiate *roll-calls* at plenary sessions. The opposition parties are focused on vote-seeking, the governing parties on office-seeking or policy-seeking.

The composition of those cabinets in power when Parliament was dealing with the four issues mentioned above can be seen in Table 2. The two major parties of each cabinet which are considered as cabinet-makers are indicated by (CM), and the supplementary parties by (SP).

The cabinets relevant in this context represent the four major alternatives of majority coalitions in Finland. Three of these are varying formations of both non-socialist and socialist parties. Purely non-socialist majority coalitions are rather unusual. The Centre (formerly Agrarian) Party and the Social Democrats have formed the nucleus of most of the majority coalitions since the late 1930s. In practice, no majority coalition can be formed without the participation of one of these two parties (Suhonen 1980, 252–255; Pesonen & Thomas 1983, 74–78). All four cabinets which here stand in focus have included either both or one of these parties. The Conservatives have participated in two, whereas the Communists and the Rural Party only in one of the four cabinets. Only the Swedish People's Party has taken part in all these coalitions. The cabinet of *Koivisto* (1979–82) had a majority of exactly two-thirds (133) of the parliamentary seats.

Results

In the following our four propositions will be separately tested. On the basis of the empirical findings we will try to interpret the party activity according to the concepts included in the models of party behaviour. We start by examining the extent and patterns of proposing motions.

Table 2. The Composition of the Majority Coalitions When Party Activity Studied.

Year	Type of cabinet	Parties	Number of seats in	
			Cabinet	Parliament
1966	Non-socialist coalition (Virolainen)	Centre Party (CM)	7	53
		Conservatives (CM)	3	32
		Liberals (SP)	3	13
		Swedish Party (SP)	2	14
			15	112
1975	"Red soil" (Sorsa)	Social Democrats (CM)	7	55
		Centre Party (CM)	5	35
		Swedish Party (SP)	2	10
		Liberals (SP)	1	7
		Independent (-)	1	-
			16	107
1981	"Popular front" (Koivisto)	Centre Party (CM)	6	36
		Social Democrats (CM)	5	52
		Communists (SP)	3	35
		Swedish Party (SP)	2	10
		Independent (-)	1	-
			17	133
1988	"Red blue" (Holkeri)	Social Democrats (CM)	8	56
		Conservatives (CM)	7	53
		Swedish Party (SP)	2	12
		Rural Party (SP)	1	9
			18	130

Motions

Finnish MPs can propose varying forms of motions. In this way a single MP, or group of a party, has the opportunity to make proposals which he considers important. Proposing motions is a highly popular and extensively used form of activity in the Finnish Parliament. Every year 2000–4000 motions are submitted. However, only a few percent of these are accepted. Mostly, they are either rejected or not dealt with at all. A submitted motion is dealt with if, and when, a bill concerning the same issue is prepared in a parliamentary committee (Nojonen 1989, 213–222; Wiberg 1989, 205). The extent to which motions are proposed only expresses the degree of interest regarding certain issues among the MPs. In Table 3 the number of motions is related to the seats of the governing parties and the opposition parties respectively. For example: in 1966 the governing parties had 112 seats in the Parliament. MPs representing the governing parties had initiated nine motions regarding the same issue of regional policy that the government bill was dealing with; $(9:112 = 0.08)$.

Table 3. The Inclination to Propose Motions.

Year	Governing parties	(n)	Opposition parties	(n)	(N)
1966	0.08	(9)	0.07	(6)	(15)
1975	0.10	(11)	0.13	(12)	(23)
1981	0.10	(13)	0.21	(14)	(27)
1988	0.02	(3)	-	(-)	(3)
Total	0.08	(36)	0.10	(32)	(68)

In our first proposition we stated that all parties are active in proposing motions, and that no essential variations occur between cabinet parties and opposition parties. On the whole, the empirical evaluations verify these statements. Every year while dealing with the bill regarding the guidelines for regional policy, the finance committee also discussed a number of proposed motions on the same issue. A total of 68 motions was dealt with. All of these motions were, however, rejected by the committee.

The interest of the parties pertaining to regional policy seems to have peaked at the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s. In 1988 only three motions were proposed, all by the Conservatives. On the whole, only one party was more active than the others. In 1975 and 1981, in particular, the populist Rural Party was active in proposing motions. In 1988, however, when also the Rural Party was in governing position, not even this party proposed any motions.

Contrary to our other propositions we expected motion activity *not* to be affected by the parliamentary position of the parties. On the whole this seems to be the case. Considering the nature of the motion institution this is hardly surprising. Every party, and every MP, knows that only a negligible share of all motions will be accepted. Despite this they propose thousands of motions every year. *Why?* It seems obvious to us that the basic reason is vote-seeking. This need is shared by all MPs regardless of whether their party is in office or not. All know that this is the most inefficient parliamentary instrument to influence policies. Party executives are also aware of this. Therefore, no party discipline is exercised as to the proposing of motions. The urge to seek votes is satisfied, but the influence of the cabinet parties on policies is not disturbed.

Reservations

In the Finnish Parliament the vast majority of legislative proposals are subject to three different readings at plenary meetings. At the first reading

Table 4. The Decisions of the Finance Committee.

Year	Majority	Minority (reservations)
1966	Cabinet parties + Social Democrats	Communists
1975	Cabinet parties	1. Communists 2. Rural Party 3. Conservatives
1981	Cabinet parties + Conservatives, Christian League	–
1988	Cabinet parties	1. Communists 2. Centre Party

the plenary meeting deals with the report of the appropriate standing committee. Often there evolves a preliminary discussion on the issue before the bill is sent to the committee in question. Then, the bill proceeds to the Grand Committee, and at the second reading the report of this committee is considered. At the third reading, finally, no amendments are permitted; now the bill must either be accepted or rejected (Arter 1987, 47).

This means that when the first reading is initiated at a plenary meeting the important work of the committee has already been completed. Thus, the political compromises, if needed, are made *before* the three readings at plenary sessions. The parties involved in a majority coalition are in a majority position not only at plenary meetings, but also in every committee. These conditions essentially enhance the importance of the work in the committees (Norton 1990, 143–151).

Our second proposition stated that the cabinet parties act unanimously in the committees. Reservations to the committee decisions are expected to be made only by opposition parties (outsiders). Table 4 illustrates the empirical evidence of these statements with respect to the four issues on regional policy studied here.

The governing parties acted unanimously every single year, thus constituting the majority of the committee decisions. Twice, in 1966 and 1981, the governing coalitions were supported by some opposition parties. Only in 1981 all opposition parties represented on the finance committee (the Conservatives and the Christian League) supported the committee decision. It must be noted that the Rural Party held seats on the committee only in 1975, when it also made a reservation. The Liberals were represented in 1966 and in 1975 when they took part in the majority coalitions. The Christian League held seats on the committee only in 1981 when the party supported the governing coalition.

Considering the crucial role of the committees in the parliamentary system it is not surprising that the cabinet parties act unanimously in the committees. In this way the parties involved in a majority coalition ensure that their own bills become laws. In other words, they make sure that their influence on policies is not reduced by the parties in opposition (Laundy 1989, 96–116). If an opposition party systematically supports the cabinet parties in the committees, this can be interpreted as office-seeking. On the other hand, if an opposition party systematically contests the governing front, this can be interpreted primarily as vote-seeking. On the basis of the few cases studied here, the Communists in particular seem to have exercised vote-seeking in the finance committee. Every time the party was in opposition it opposed the committee majority. However, as a part of the large coalition in 1981 the party was in keeping with the majority.

Earlier studies on the Finnish Parliament confirm that the influence of the committees has increased at the expense of the plenary meetings. In turn, the influence of the cabinet has increased at the expense of the committees. Today, the general rule is that a bill passes through Parliament without any modifications. In 1960 only about half of all the bills passed through Parliament without any modifications. In 1983 this figure had increased to 70 percent. Usually, the final decisions of Parliament are identical to the decisions of the committees. For example, in 1960 this was the case regarding 91 percent of all the bills that Parliament dealt with that year. In 1983 the corresponding figure was 97 percent. In sum, to an increasing extent Parliament abides by the suggestions of the cabinet and particularly those of the committee (Portin 1988; Nummenmaa 1990).

Plenary Activity

The plenary sessions present quite a different scene for the parties. The plenary sessions are overshadowed by the importance of the committees. In fact, the opportunities to influence policies on this scene are very limited. Against this background we argue that plenary sessions essentially become a platform for vote-seeking. Moreover, the committees work behind closed doors, whereas the plenary sessions are a public affair. Especially owing to the presence of mass media, plenary sessions constitute a very attractive arena for vote-seeking. At plenary sessions the opposition parties have a golden opportunity publicly to criticize the cabinet. Thus, we expect the opposition parties to be more active than the governing parties at plenary meetings.

Table 5 illustrates the activity of the parties at plenary sessions in terms of *debaters* and *statements*. The activity at all three readings is included. As for debaters, the figures express the share of MPs who took part in the plenary discussions. The figures pertaining to statements are index values

Table 5. Activity at Plenary Sessions; Debaters (Percent) and Statements (Index).

Year	Debaters (percent)		Statements (index)	
	Cabinet parties	Opposition parties	Cabinet parties	Opposition parties
1966	18	17	36	38
1975	10	24	9	47
1981	19	28	23	46
1988	12	34	28	116
Total	15	26	24	62

expressing the debate intensity of the parties. (Index = number of statements of the party group divided by the number of seats of the group $\times 100$).

On the whole the opposition parties were clearly the most active in discussing the four issues studied here. The figures for the cabinet parties vary unsystematically from one year to another. However, the activity of the opposition parties has continuously increased over the years. On the average, one-fifth of the opposition MPs were involved in the debates. In 1988 this share rose to 34 percent. To a great extent this is a consequence of the extreme activity that the Centre Party mobilized that year. About one-third of all debaters and half of all statements derived from this party. One year earlier the Centre Party had, for the first time in history, been left outside a majority coalition. In addition, the Centre Party has always given high priority to issues in the field of regional policy.

The index values pertaining to statements show that the opposition parties also participated more actively in the plenary discussions. The high value for the cabinet parties in 1966 reflects disagreements within the cabinet. The Swedish People's and the Centre Parties did not agree on the regionalization to be applied by the first frame law of regional policy. On the other hand, in 1975 the cabinet parties were very passive. This is somewhat surprising because that year the major cabinet parties, the Centre and the Social Democratic Parties, had a major disagreement on the content of the new law. Obviously, this dispute was not discussed, or solved, in the parliamentary arena (Kiljunen 1979).

Let us take a closer look at the activity of the parties at plenary meetings. In particular, we want to find out whether the activity of a party changes when the parliamentary position of the party changes.

First, both in terms of debaters and statements, the general pattern is for the cabinet-makers (CM) to be least active, the supplementary parties (SP) to be more active, and for the outsiders (O) to be most active. We

Table 6. Activity at Plenary Meetings by Party; Debaters (Percent) and Statements (Index).

Party	Debaters (percent)			Statements (index)		
	CM	SP	O	CM	SP	O
Conservatives	12	–	17	31	–	32
Christian League	–	–	33	–	–	61
Liberals	–	0	25	–	0	25
Swedish Party	–	22	–	–	30	–
Rural Party	–	22	68	–	44	148
Greens	–	–	100	–	–	250
Centre Party	16	–	33	27	–	133
Social Democrats	12	–	16	18	–	30
Communists	–	26	19	–	29	39
Total	13	18	39	25	26	90

can assume that the limited participation of the cabinet-makers primarily consisted of defending statements against the extensive activity of the opposition parties. Secondly, the variations in debate activity are much larger among parties in opposition than among parties in governing position. There are several reasons for this. One is that the activity of the major parties was apparently unaffected regardless of whether they were in opposition or in a cabinet position. This pertains especially to the Conservatives and to the Social Democrats. In this respect the Centre Party is an exception to the rule. Another reason is the extreme activity mobilized by the Greens and the Rural Party. The four MPs of the Greens all played a highly active part in the plenary discussions in 1988. However, the Rural Party, the parliamentary “bad boys” of the 1970s, was essentially less active in cabinet position in 1988 than it usually was in opposition.

Roll-Call Behaviour

In the Finnish Parliament roll-calls can be initiated at the time of the second and third readings. At the second reading MPs can make detailed proposals aimed at modifying some part of the bill. At the third and last reading, amendments as regards the content of the bill can no longer be initiated. At this stage the MPs can initiate roll-calls suggesting that the bill be entirely rejected. Finally, the members can initiate roll-calls with respect to a resolution of Parliament. If accepted, the resolution will be included in the final answer of Parliament, but not in the law in question (Nousiainen 1985, 194–198).

As far as the issues studied here are concerned, about two-thirds of the roll-calls took place at the second reading, and one-third of them at the

Table 7. Number of Roll-Calls at Plenary Sessions by Parliamentary Position.

Year	Cabinet parties	Opposition parties	Total
1966	2	8	10
1975	2	90	92
1981	–	25	25
1988	–	12	12
Total	4	135	139

third reading, referring to resolutions mentioned above. According to our last proposition, we surmise that only parties in opposition initiate roll-calls at plenary sessions. For these parties, putting a question to a vote represents a proper and final opportunity for vote-seeking.

The general pattern is, almost, as obvious as it can be. Though the cabinet parties initiated four roll-calls, we can conclude that submitting issues to a vote at plenary sessions is a weapon in the hands of the opposition parties. In 1975, in particular, there prevailed a real roll-call rally. It is interesting to note that only three voting proposals were carried. Significantly, all of these were initiated by cabinet parties. The accepted proposals, one in 1966 and two in 1975, were all initiated by the Centre Party. They all had the form of resolutions, and can essentially be characterized as last moment compromises among the cabinet parties. On the contrary, *all* voting proposals (135) initiated by the opposition parties were defeated! Obviously, when a majority coalition is in office, this is a *very ineffective* way to influence policies. To what extent is the voting behaviour determined by the parliamentary position of the parties?

We can conclude that parties initiate roll-calls primarily as outsiders (see Table 8). Especially the wing parties – the Conservatives and the Communists – and the Rural Party were very active as outsiders, but completely passive as cabinet parties. The real cabinet-makers in a historical perspective, the Centre Party and the Social Democratic Party, were more moderate even as outsiders. The extreme activity of the Rural Party was exercised *only* as an outsider. When this party was in governing position it did not initiate a single vote in 1988. All in all, the Rural Party stands for 54 percent of all roll-calls studied. In 1975 this fraction was 60 percent (54 of 92), and in 1981 as much as 84 percent (21 of 25). In sum, the impact of the parliamentary position of the parties seems obvious, especially for the Rural Party.

The proportion of committee reports that are modified at plenary meetings has decreased during the last decades. In 1983 only about 3 percent

Table 8. Number of Roll-Calls at Plenary Sessions by Party and Parliamentary Position.

Party	Cabinet makers	Supplementary parties	Outsiders	Total
Conservatives	0	–	21	21
Christian League	–	–	3	3
Liberals	–	0	–	0
Swedish Party	–	1	–	1
Rural Party	–	0	75	75
Greens	–	–	0	0
Centre Party	3	–	6	9
Social Democrats	0	–	2	2
Communists	–	0	28	28
Total	3	1	135	139

of the committee reports were modified. Twenty years earlier this figure was still 9 percent. At the same time the voting frequency at plenary meetings has increased (Portin 1988, 71–76). Thus, more roll-calls are carried out, but fewer modifications are made.

To a great extent the readings and roll-calls at plenary sessions can be described as an arena on which frustrated parties in opposition are acting. The plenary meetings have become a stage for the losers on which they can legitimate their own loss. In fact, at plenary meetings they no longer have the opportunity to influence policies, but they can always try to maximize their votes. Considering the reactions of the electorate they must create a distinctive image for themselves and explain the reasons for the loss. When a majority coalition is in office, this often seems to be the fate of the opposition parties.

Conclusions

One of our basic assumptions was that the parliamentary position of a party affects its behaviour. In the light of our empirical findings this really does seem to be the case. The form as well as the proportions of the activity clearly reflect the parliamentary position of the party. The behaviour of a party obviously *changes* when the party enters a governing position, and vice versa. In general, when a party is in opposition it is much more active than when in a governing position with respect to the activities studied here. The only exception from this general rule pertains to the initiation of motions. On this point all political parties, regardless of their parliamentary position, seem to be equally active.

Moreover, the activity of a party varies from one parliamentary arena

Type of party	Motions	Type of activity		
		Reservations	Debates	Roll-calls
Cabinet-maker	High	None	Low	Low
Supplementary party	High	None	Low	Very low
Outsider	High	High	High	Very high

Fig. 2. Degree of Party Activity in Parliament; a Summary.

to another. In particular, a party is much more active at the plenary sessions as an opposition, as an outsider, than in governing position. When in opposition a party more frequently takes part in the debates and initiates more roll-calls at plenary meetings. These late activities on the parliamentary floor, however, seldom affect the final decision which has usually, in practice, already been made in a committee. Using this method, an opposition party only makes use of the opportunity, and need, to act as a vote-seeker.

It is obvious that the political parties adopt some basic patterns of behaviour in governing position as well as in opposition. In a parliamentary system this is quite normal; it reflects the rules of the game. On the other hand, the parties always have to make calculations on how to behave in the parliamentary arena. In the final analysis, the basic question is: how shall frequently conflicting goals be optimally combined?

Basically, all parties have a need to be successful vote-seekers. In Finland the electoral and legislative weight of the parties is not directly transformed into bargaining power. However, the greater the legislative weight, the greater the *probability* that this legislative weight will be transformed into bargaining power. The need for large majority coalitions in the Finnish system further increases this probability. Usually, even the President has to take this into consideration.

On the other hand, it is difficult to be an effective vote-seeker when the party is in government. This is an obvious problem for major parties which are almost permanently in office. Cabinets also have to make unpopular decisions. Sooner or later, the electoral support of these parties will decline. In the long run, a typically policy-seeking party must be a vote-seeker as well. In the Finnish party system this problem is familiar to the Centre Party and to the Social Democrats. For the real cabinet-makers a period in opposition usually results in an increase in electoral support. The last case in point was the success of the Centre Party in the 1991 parliamentary elections.

The minor cabinet parties, the supplementary parties, have to balance between vote maximization on the one hand, and maximization of policy influence on the other. Considering the size of such a party its impact on policies might be rather limited. Despite this, the party is collectively

responsible for all cabinet decisions. As shown also in this study, such a party has to behave in harmony with the major cabinet parties. If a supplementary party acts too independently, it may be omitted from the next governing coalition. The impact that the party has on policies is thus further reduced. This dilemma is familiar to the Swedish People's Party.

The outsiders, parties which are never or seldom in office, have the best opportunities of being effective vote-seekers. However, if such a party wants to be an office-seeking party as well, the forms of vote-seeking must be moderate. If the major cabinet parties are attacked too aggressively, the party remains an outsider. On the other hand, the greater the legislative weight of the party, the greater value the party will receive as a potential partner in future governing coalitions. All in all, an optimal party behaviour is not easily found.

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