

# Plenary Votes and Voting Cohesion in the Finnish Parliament 1991-2006\*

Antti Pajala

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Email: anpaja@utu.fi / Tel: +35823335907

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## Abstract

We recommend that votes not related to the state's annual budget i.e. non-budget votes constitute the appropriate set of votes from which plenary voting cohesion should be computed regarding the Finnish parliament 'Eduskunta'. Budget related votes comprise over 58 per cent of all plenary votes and more relaxed voting rules and practices are applied to these votes by the political party groups. Budget votes were found to have a systematically lower voting cohesion compared to other votes, which would distort the computation results if all plenary votes were applied as a single pool of votes. Overall the voting cohesion was found very high in Eduskunta while the variation of voting cohesion was quite marginal over time (1991-2006).

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## **Introduction**

In the Finnish parliament 'Eduskunta' as well as in other national parliaments the Members of Parliament (MPs) belong to a political party group (PPG). The choice of a PPG follows the party affiliation of an MP. In plenary sessions as well as in other parliamentary activities the members of a PPG appear or at least try to appear in unison. In Finland this is evident already in the PPGs written rules or practices. In fact, Eduskunta would probably perform very poorly if at all in the case that the PPGs would not try to act in a unitary manner as there would be only very little predictability in the policy making. Moreover, in a parliamentary system where the government is fused to the support of the parliament it would be very hard to sustain a government or come up with one in the first place. One way the party unity culminates in the plenary votes. Voting against the party line may lead to (mostly rather modest) sanctions in Finland; however in an extreme case a PPG may expel an MP permanently.

Already in the beginning of the 1970s a number of country specific PPG voting unity i.e. voting cohesion studies had been published. Ozbudun (1970) was the first to do a survey of the country studies. The comparative study resulted in some macro level ideas of why some parliaments appear more cohesive than others. The most important factor turned out to be the existence of parliamentary system (*vis-a-vis* a presidential one). If the government is depending on the support of the parliament this was found to raise the voting cohesion. Among other factors the electoral system (candidate nomination) has been found to have an effect on the PPG voting cohesion. In addition to Jensen (2000) and Owens (2003) the study of Sieberer (2006) are recent and most systematic statistical comparisons and analyse many other factors affecting voting cohesion as well. However, instead of trying to evaluate thoroughly the factors

affecting the voting cohesion in Finland our main focus is on a data oriented problem.

A growing number of articles are paying more careful attention to features and problems in the country specific vote data which tends to be applied as such (at least in the survey type of studies). While the Rice (1928) cohesion index used in the computations is very simple the voting cohesion analyses are not necessarily without problems. The data regarding some parliaments have been found to suffer from selection effects (Carrubba et al. 2004; Hug 2005; Schwartz 2005). A major problem is that in some parliaments only a fraction of the plenary votes are public, published or recorded which will make the results unreliable. For example in the Italian parliament the votes are at least partly secret. A further difficulty can be found in the Netherlands where the leader of the PPG casts the party vote on behalf of the whole PPG. Another problem appears if the votes are not a representative set of all passed legislation in which case it is hard to make generalizations from the results. In Finland, as we shall see below, all votes are recorded and public, but over half of the plenary votes are related to the state's annual budget. Another issue appears if the parliament is very unanimous and only very few parliamentary decisions are voted upon. It is probable that politically contagious issues are resolved by other means. Finally, there is a question of whether the various types of votes show an equal level of cohesion. For example, is the level of voting cohesion equal between a preliminary reading and final reading of a law proposal? In what follows, we shall focus on the last feature of vote data.

What we know from previous literature is that cohesion computation is almost exclusively applying final divisions. One cannot escape the interpretation that the final divisions are seen as the most (or only) important plenary votes by the

researchers. What the case is with other types of vote is more or less an open question. If the cohesion level is very similar between final and other votes then in this sense it would be appropriate to apply the other votes as well in order to strengthen the result. If there are differences in the voting cohesion between the categories the data should be examined in detail. In our datasets (Pajala 2006; Pajala and Jakulin 2007a) more than one category of plenary votes can be distinguished quite easily. On top of the final (2<sup>nd</sup> reading) divisions there are the 1<sup>st</sup> readings of law proposals. Off the legal agenda are various votes of confidence. Over half of all votes are (main or supplementary) budget related in Finland, so the large number of these votes can have a noticeable impact on the average of all votes. The nature of this impact should be studied. The point is that we need to be aware of what the votes represent in order to correctly interpret the results. Do the cohesion values tell us something about e.g. all plenary votes, budget votes or just the final divisions?

Our research problem is threefold: 1) which sensible vote categories or classes can we distinguish in the Finnish vote data? 2) What is the level of PPGs voting cohesion with respect to these categories? 3) As the data cover 16 parliamentary years we will also analyze the level of voting cohesion variation over time during 1991-2006.

As we shall argue later five quite ‘natural’ vote categories can be identified while a sixth one is the super category of all plenary votes. The level of voting cohesion is found very high in each category and for each PPG; however budget related votes appear to have a lower level of voting cohesion. Moreover, the lower level of budget vote cohesion is systematic over time. This phenomenon is expected as the PPGs have slightly more relaxed rules and practices regarding budget voting. Hence, we argue that most the appropriate data regarding Finland are the non-budget related votes.

The remaining of this article is organized as follows: Subsequent to the introduction we shall shortly walk through previous research in Eduskunta as well as in other parliaments. In the next section we first introduce the key features and practices in plenary voting in Eduskunta and then create and analyze the vote categories together with an analysis of the distribution of the votes over time. In the following section we introduce our measurement tool, the Rice index, and then present the voting cohesion results. Finally, we discuss our results and findings.

### **Cohesion research in Finland and elsewhere**

In a nutshell the cohesion literature has shown that there are parliaments with very high voting cohesion such as the Nordic countries. Finland is a parliamentary system and thus shows high cohesion, however among the Nordic countries the level of voting cohesion has been found slightly lower mainly due to electoral system applying open candidate lists. There are also voting bodies with a low level of voting cohesion, for example the U.S. Congress and the EU Parliament (Patterson and Caldeira 1988; Hix et al. 2005). Most parliaments fall between the above two extremes.<sup>1</sup> Various factors have been found to have an effect in the level of voting cohesion. One important study and rather similar to that of Ozbudun (1970) is Owens (2003) which is included in the *Journal of Legislative Studies'* (2003) special issue on voting cohesion. In fact, Owens (2003) lists almost every relevant voting cohesion related reference within the last 30 years. Among the classics is also Collie (1985). Among recent works are especially Jensen (2000) comparing the Nordic countries and Sieberer (2006) which is a survey of 11 parliaments.

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<sup>1</sup> For the available results see Sieberer (1996, footnote 12) and Owens (2003).

Regarding Finland Pekka Nyholm carried out the first cohesion studies regarding Eduskunta. Nyholm's doctoral thesis *The Cohesion of Party Groups in the Finnish Diet during 1948-51 and 1954* was published in 1961, however Nyholm published some preliminary observations already in 1959 (Nyholm 1959; 1961). Later Nyholm covered some more years (1930-54) in Nyholm and Hagfors (1968; see also Nyholm 1969). Worth noting is also Ilkka Heiskanen's (1963) rather critical article in which Heiskanen argued that voting cohesion studies were at the time more or less measurement without theory. An obvious improvement in this sense was Ozbudun's (1970) survey. Almost three decades later a set of cohesion computations were carried out by MA student Niko Mellanen in 1997. Mellanen's (1997) unpublished report and the results therein have been later cited at least in Jensen (2000), Wiberg (2000), Depauw and Shane (2005) and Sieberer (2006). Mellanen's (1999) MA thesis covered the electoral period of 1995-8.

A methodological article by Pajala et al. (2005) explored the use of two data mining techniques in connection with binary voting data in Eduskunta in the parliamentary year 2003. Pajala and Jakulin (2007b) analysed voting cohesion regarding 1991-2006 parliamentary years in Eduskunta. Pajala and Jakulin (2007b) found that the status of a group as a member of the opposition or government did not systematically affect the level of voting cohesion lending support to the respective finding in Sieberer (2006). A common (and now questionable) opinion in the literature has been that the government PPGs should show a higher cohesion to opposition PPGs. Another result in Pajala and Jakulin (2007b) was that the level of group cohesion had risen compared to the 1950s, and the level of voting cohesion was found higher compared to Nyholm's (Nyholm and Hagfors 1968) or Mellanen's (1997; 1999) studies. Pajala (2006) studied the evolution of the number of budget and non-budget votes during

1945-2005 in Eduskunta. The above ‘third wave’ studies are based on two datasets: Pajala and Jakulin (2006) cover 1991-2005 parliamentary years and include every plenary vote taken. This dataset is available at the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD). The Pajala and Jakulin (2007a) dataset is supplementary to the first one covering the 2006 parliamentary year.

### **Eduskunta and the Political Party Groups**

Eduskunta’s voting system is defined in Eduskunta’s (2000) rules of procedure and the Constitution. The voting system and PPGs have earlier been studied in detail in Pajala (2006), Pajala et al. (2005) and Wiberg (1989). In the following we shall shortly outline the key aspects of the voting environment.

In general the most important factors in PPG voting unity are obviously ideological similarity among the MPs in a PPG and/or the MPs are otherwise more or less like-minded. On top of that the PPGs have written or oral rules and/or practices. In Finland the government also follow an additional set of written rules which the government groups agree upon in the beginning of a term.<sup>2</sup> The rules and practices aim at strengthening the unified behaviour of a PPG. In the 2003-6 electoral term five PPGs (Center Party, Christian Democrats, Conservatives, Social Democrats and Greens) applied written rules while three PPGs (True Finns, Swedish People’s Party and Left Alliance) applied common but non-written practices.

The written rules are rather similar among the PPGs and could best be characterised as user manuals for a particular PPG. A common factor is that the MPs are required to

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<sup>2</sup> The tradition started in the mid 1980s (Wiberg 1989; 2006, 192).

be present in PPG meetings as well as in plenary sessions. Under some circumstances all rules also allow an MP to deviate from a party decision (including plenary votes). The Christian Democrats and the Greens have the most liberal formulations in this respect and the groups do not have any sanctions or rules of discipline stated in their rules. The Center party, the Conservatives and the Social Democrats, in turn, do have explicit rules of discipline and sanctions according to which an MP can in an extreme case be expelled from the group. Only the Conservatives nominate two whips who's responsibility is to keep other group MPs informed about current affairs and activities, e.g. about plenary votes.<sup>3</sup>

When a proposal is voted upon in the floor it has undergone a process of many stages: first a proposal has to be handed to the central office by an MP. The speaker then decides in which plenary session the vote shall take place (votes tend to be grouped up). In the respective session the MP has to present the proposal and at least one other MP must support it. Only after this procedure is a proposal voted upon. There are no legal or other matters creating automatic votes (Pajala 2006). Clearly a plenary vote in Eduskunta is a place for MP opinion registration rather than a place for MP opinion formation. An exception to the PPG rules is (a very rare) free hand vote. A second exception to voting unity is a budget related vote as here the MPs are allowed more voting flexibility compared to non-budget votes. One could say that a whole other set of practices apply to the budget matters. The reason is that the budget votes include a substantial amount of regional amendments.

A typical yearly voting pattern in Eduskunta is that within two or three very busy days in December there are hundreds of budget votes that are initiated by both opposition

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed case of group rebellion (SDP property tax rebels in year 2005) see Pajala and Jakulin (2007b).

and government MPs. For the rest of the year there are some votes within a week in average. The non-budget votes are almost exclusively initiated by the opposition MPs. We can say that voting in Eduskunta is mostly exercising opposition politics. In contrast to Eduskunta there are parliaments where decisions can only be reached by voting. Eduskunta is a rather unanimous institution: According to Pajala et al. (2005) only about 15 per cent of all processed matters in year 2003 were voted upon while Wiberg (2004, 263) reports that only 11.5 per cent of all legislation is passed by voting after WW II.

### **Plenary vote categories**

Altogether 8845 plenary votes took place during 1991-2006.<sup>4</sup> So far we have brought up some possible vote categories. Let us begin with the legislative process, as the main bulk of literature appears to utilize the final divisions. In Finland there are the first and the second reading (which is the final reading) of a law proposal. Before the current constitution which came into force in year 2000 there used to be three readings. The first law reading during the old constitution was merged into the second reading and these two became the first reading after year 2000. Consequently, the third reading became the new second (and final) reading. This constitutional reform is taken into account regarding our data, so hereinafter we refer only to the first and second reading.

In the first reading the law text is examined section by section while each section is a subject to one or more resolutions which all have to be voted upon. The data include 2014 first reading votes. In the second reading a law proposal can only be accepted or

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<sup>4</sup> Voting can also take place in the various committees.

rejected, but no amendments or changes can be made to the actual law text any more, so it is processed completely in the form emerging from the first reading. The second reading may also include additional votes which relate to any statements the Eduskunta wishes to make on the matter. The data include 1010 second reading votes. The first and second reading votes constitute two very natural categories of votes.

In addition to the legislative matters Eduskunta as well as other parliaments do from time to time vote upon the confidence of the government. Government interpellations belong to such category of votes. The reply to an interpellation is given off the parliamentary agenda. Depending on the reply Eduskunta can adopt a simple formula (no vote) and revert to its agenda, or a reasoned formula (vote of confidence) shall be adopted in order to revert to the agenda. From time to time the government also presents government statements and government reports to Eduskunta. These matters are taken up for deliberation off the parliamentary agenda. In the conclusion of the deliberation, quite following the procedure regarding interpellations, Eduskunta will revert to its agenda using a simple or a reasoned formula. This set of votes, which we shall refer to as non-legislative votes, appears to be quite a natural category of votes. The data include 392 non-legislative votes.

The state's annual budget, as stated above, will create hundreds of votes every parliamentary year. On top of the main budget there are usually one or more supplementary budgets within a parliamentary year. Taken together there were 5161 (58.3 % of all votes) budget votes during 1991-2006. Somewhat self-evidently these votes form a fourth category of votes. In practice the budget is prepared at the ministry of financial affairs and then introduced as a government proposal in the legislative agenda. Eduskunta has the final word on the matter. The budget can be

accepted or rejected as such or it can be amended. In what comes to the PPG rules of unitary action here the MPs are allowed some voting flexibility as rather many of the budget amendments are 'pork barrel' initiatives aimed at the MPs own election district. Nearly all of the MPs' budget amendments do not pass. In fact, they have to be voted down or otherwise the spending side of the budget will become completely unrealistic *vis-a-vis* the income side. Although some flexibility is allowed there are still certain restrictions of how the PPGs guide the MPs voting behaviour. The MPs are usually allowed to support only amendments which relate to their own election districts. While it is the case that the main purpose of a budget amendment is to highlight the various needs of the MPs own election districts there are some funds reserved for the budget amendments. It seems to be worth trying especially if you are a government group MP as only a proposed amendment can be accepted.

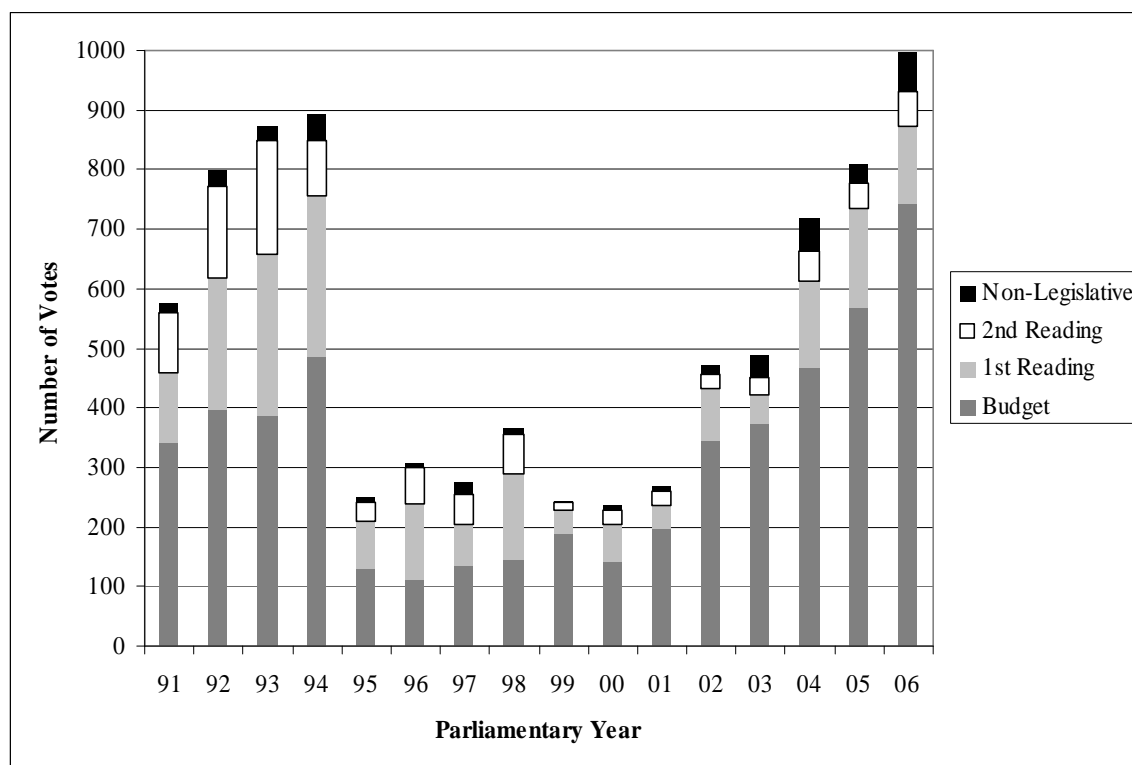
Out of the total 8845 votes we are at this stage left with 268 miscellaneous votes, which are non-legislative, non-confidence and non-budget ones. These remaining votes do not form a coherent category, so we shall take the miscellaneous votes into account by creating the category of non-budget votes. This category will allow us to compare the voting cohesion between budget and all other votes which include the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> reading votes, the non-legislative vote of confidence votes and the miscellaneous votes. Taken together there are 2694 non-budget votes.

It is very hard if not impossible to come up with a rank order from the most important category to the least. A rank order would be convenient as it would allow us to make a hypothesis that the most important votes should show the highest voting cohesion. It is a very difficult question of how and why or in what sense (and to who) is a vote more important than another. Let us now shortly address this problem by shortly

discussing some properties of the various vote types. The 2<sup>nd</sup> reading votes are very important as the law proposal is either accepted or rejected at this stage. However, it is also of great importance when the contents of a law proposal are processed section by section in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading. For some MP or PPG only one section in the law text might not be satisfactory and not the whole law. For this MP or PPG the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading vote can then be practically irrelevant. In the other hand if the whole idea of a law is unacceptable to some MP or PPG the 1<sup>st</sup> reading could be irrelevant. In votes of confidence the fate of the government is at stake which is of utmost parliamentary importance. However, a slightly different set of PPG practices apply to the budget votes. As the MPs are allowed a bit more voting flexibility here, we can make an *a priori* prediction that the budget votes should show a lower level of voting cohesion compared to others. In fact, Pajala et al. (2005) and Pajala and Jakulin (2007b) lend support for this prediction. Still, the budget votes could be almost a matter of life and death to the MPs as a passage of a hefty pork barrel amendment to the MPs own election district could at best ensure re-election as a successful guard of the district interests.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

**Figure 1.** Number of Non-legislative, 1<sup>st</sup> reading, 2<sup>nd</sup> reading and Budget votes in Eduskunta during 1991-2006



How are the various votes and vote types are distributed over time (1991-2006)?

Figure 1 shows that Eduskunta voted 249-1002 times within a parliamentary year.

The total vote amount range (753) is rather wide as in the year 2006 the MPs voted four times more often than in the year 1999. The yearly vote amounts form a cycle as in the last year of an electoral term the vote amount is always at maximum. This is because incomplete matters tend to be postponed and pile up towards the end of the term. During the last year the MPs are trying to process as many items as possible since all incomplete items lapse after the term. Quite a variation in the vote amounts between the electoral terms is apparent. During PM Lipponen's I and II governments (1995-8 and 1999-2002) there are noticeably few votes (excl. 2002). This is due to

Lipponen's surplus 'rainbow' coalition. Among the three largest parties only the Center party was in the opposition. Lipponen's time is, however, an exception. According to Pajala (2006) after year 1945 there has been only one short period in the late 1960s when there were roughly as few votes as in 1995-2002. During PM Aho's (1991-4) and PM Vanhanen's governments (2002-6) the yearly amounts of votes are close to the long term average.

Among the four vote categories in figure 1 there are 112-774 budget votes depending on the parliamentary year. The budget votes constitute some 36-76 per cent of all plenary votes. During a parliamentary year in average approximately 55 per cent of all plenary votes spawn from less than five government proposals. During Lipponen's governments the amount of budget votes was at minimum, however during the subsequent Vanhanen's government there was a significant raise. The absolute amount of budget votes is at maximum in the last year of an electoral term and the first year of terms always has relatively the most budget votes. This is due to lack of government or MP proposals, which will appear in greater numbers later (see especially 1998-9).

The next largest vote category is the 1<sup>st</sup> reading votes. There variation in figure 1 is 39-271 per year. Most of the 1<sup>st</sup> reading votes were taken during Aho's government in the early nineties. The two exception are year 1998 when there are nearly as many budget votes as 1<sup>st</sup> reading votes (145 and 143) and year 1996 when there surprisingly are more 1<sup>st</sup> reading votes than budget votes (127 and 112).

The two clearly smallest vote categories are the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading (13-190 of them) and the non-legislative (4-68) votes. The most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading votes were taken during Aho's government, after which the yearly amounts practically collapse. The most non-

legislative votes appear during Vanhanen's government. The latter observation is perhaps unexpected as during Aho's years the country was in a deep recession and one would have expected that the opposition would have tried to overthrow the government more often. It is of course possible arguing the opposite, i.e. perhaps it was strategically more advantageous for the opposition to let the prevailing cabinet deal with the hard years of economic recession and unemployment.

### **The Rice index**

Nearly all studies of voting cohesion apply the Rice (1928) index. In some cases where PPG voting cohesion is nearly perfect (as in Denmark) a simpler index can be applied. The Rice index which we shall shortly introduce next has had some later modifications; however we shall use the original form.

The Rice index measures the voting cohesion of a group (PPG) in a vote and provides the result in a numerical form. The index is limited to two voting options 'yes' and 'no'. However, in Eduskunta as in many other parliaments MPs can choose to abstain as well. Abstention in Eduskunta it is rather rare, besides, introducing a third voting choice is not without problems.<sup>5</sup>

The Rice index ranges from zero to one. The former indicates that the group is fifty-fifty split between yes and no. Value one indicates that the group stands perfectly united behind either yes or no. Let us denote the number of 'yes' votes cast by a group on a given vote  $i$  by  $Y_i$  and the number of 'no' votes by  $N_i$ . Then, formally, the  $RI_i$  can be calculated as

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<sup>5</sup> The Rice index modifications allowing for voter abstention are Attina (190) and Hix et al. (2005). Note that in Eduskunta the vote outcome is determined only by the relation between the yes and no votes (does not apply to qualified majority votes).

$$RI_i = 2 * \left( \frac{\max\{Y_i, N_i\}}{Y_i + N_i} - 0.5 \right).$$

As an example consider a PPG of 40 voters. If 30 MPs in the PPG vote for yes and 10 MPs vote for no the Rice index value is then  $2 * (30 / 40 - 0.5) = 0.5$ .

## Results

During 1991-2006 there have been 11 PPGs in Eduskunta from which eight are currently in Eduskunta. These groups are the Swedish Peoples Party (SPP), True Finns (TF), Center Party (Cent), Conservatives (Cons), Left Alliance (Left), Social Democrats (SD), Greens (Greens) and Christian Democrats (CD). Three minor groups do not exist any more: The Young Finns (YF) and a defected fraction from the Left Alliance (Rem) were in Eduskunta 1995-8 (see Pajala and Jakulin 2007b). The Rural Party (FRP, 1991-4 in the data) did not get any of its candidates elected after the 1995 elections. The parliamentary history of the Finnish Rural Party as started already in the 1960s so it has considerably longer history than the above two minor groups. Sometimes the True Finns are seen as a continuum of the Rural Party legacy. There are three rough PPG size categories with respect to their size. The three large PPGs are Cent, Cons and SD. The middle sized groups are CD, Left and Greens. The small groups are TF, SPP, FRP and Rem.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

**Table 1.** Average voting cohesion in Eduskunta in six plenary vote categories during 1991-2006

	Non- budget	1 <sup>st</sup> reading	2 <sup>nd</sup> reading	Non- legislative	Budget	All votes
Rem	.982	.997	.953	.992	.958	.972
TF	.977	.962	1	.983	.953	.961
YF	.970	.973	.956	.982	.968	.968
Left	.952	.952	.947	.957	.899	.921
Cons	.951	.951	.949	.946	.916	.926
SPP	.945	.946	.952	.893	.965	.957
SD	.944	.947	.946	.936	.901	.921
CD	.943	.943	.954	.929	.830	.876
Center	.943	.942	.952	.950	.875	.902
Greens	.931	.935	.926	.913	.886	.903
FRP	.903	.912	.905	.848	.848	.875
All	.945	.948	.950	.934	.900	.918

Note: Yearly averages are available upon request. See also Pajala and Jakulin (2007b, table 2 and the two appendices).

In table 1 the PPGs appear in descending order with respect to the non-budget vote column. All eleven PPGs are shown, although only eight are currently present in Eduskunta. The average of all of the PPGs cohesion values is on the bottom row<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The average is computed as follows: For 1991 compute the average of all PPGs voting cohesion. Then repeat the procedure for all years. The bottom row is now the average of the previous yearly

while the rightmost column is the super category including all votes. The first observation is that nearly all of the cohesion values in table 1 are well over 0.9 as there are only nine exceptions to this. Five of them are in the budget category, two in the non-legislative and two in the all votes category. The range of the values is 0.17 which is very narrow considering the total range of the index from zero to one. The vote category showing the highest cohesion regarding all PPGs is the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading votes (.950) yet there is hardly any difference to the next cohesive 1<sup>st</sup> reading votes (.948) and the non-budget votes (.945).<sup>7</sup> Even the non-legislative votes are quite close (.934). Only the budget votes (.900) show a noticeably lower cohesion to the other categories and can be regarded as the deviant vote category from others. The above prediction seems to hold as the budget votes are the least cohesive. The very large number of votes in the budget category shifts the super category average down close to the budget vote average.

Which PPG is the most cohesive? The answer seems to depend on the vote category one looks at table 1. However, as the only real difference seems to be between budget and non-budget votes we argue that the most appropriate category would be the latter. The three most cohesive (Rem, TF, Nuors) PPGs are small size practically in a voting cohesion class of their own. Next appears a set of six PPGs (Left, Cons, SPP, SD, CD, Cent). The least cohesive PPGs are the Greensr and FRP.<sup>8</sup> Taking Eduskunta as a whole the most appropriate average cohesion value for 1991-2006 is the non-budget average of 0.945. This value is considerably higher compared to the values reported by Mellanen (1997) and Nyholm (Nyholm and Hagfors 1968). Considering all votes Eduskunta's average cohesion is 0.918 but this average value is affected by the very

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averages. It is thus *not* the average of the PPGs in the above rows.

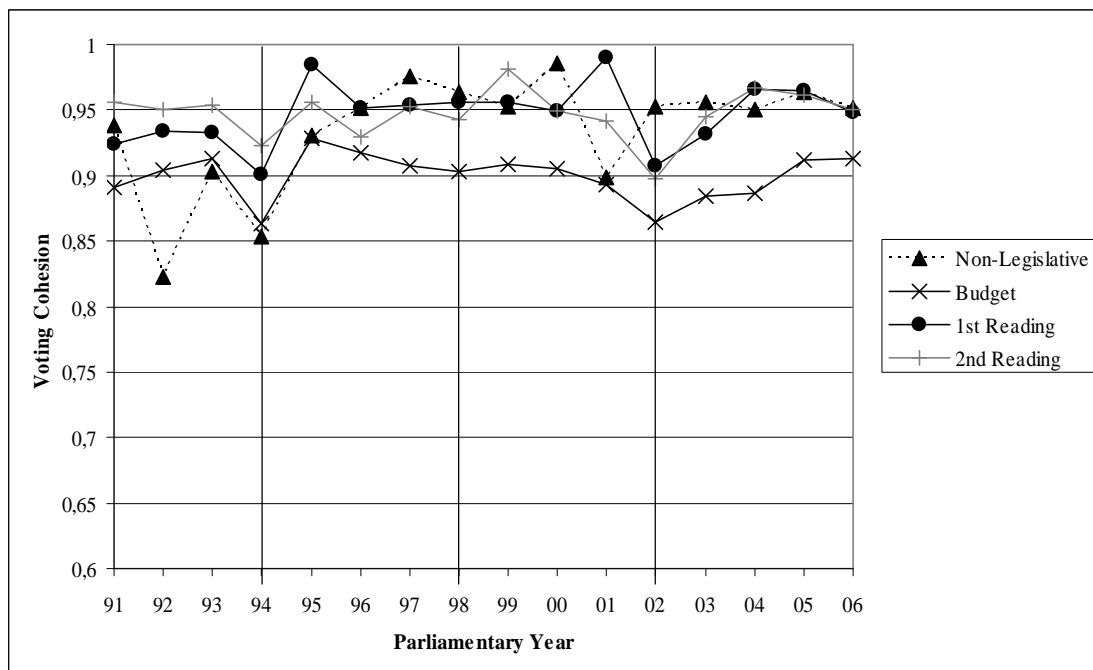
<sup>7</sup> This result indicates that the average of the miscellaneous votes (which is not computed separately) cannot be far from the average on the non-budget votes.

<sup>8</sup> It would be interesting to see how FRP performed in the previous term (1987-90) as during 1991-4 the MPs disintegrated one by one.

large number of budget votes, which we now know to be less cohesive and slightly different from other votes.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

**Figure 2.** Variation of voting cohesion of various plenary vote categories during 1991-2006



Note: Vertical lines denote the last year of a parliamentary term.

As the average cohesion values in table 1 do not show possible variation in the values over time figure 2 shows the longitudinal variation of the PPGs average cohesion during 1991-2006 in four of the vote categories. In general the yearly variation does not appear to be high especially when keeping in mind that the range of the y-axis is only 0.6 – 1. It is also clear that the budget vote cohesion is systematically lower

compared to the other categories (excl. 1992-4). Another observation is that the general level of voting cohesion seems not to have changed within the last 16 years. There were four governments during 1991-2006 and if we look at the details of each of these time periods (Lipponen I and II combined) they seem to have a cohesion pattern of their own. Regarding 1991-4 three of the vote categories are separated, quite stable and only the non-legislative category has noticeable variation. In 1994 prior to the elections next year, the general level of cohesion diminishes. A drop in cohesion level prior to elections takes place also in 2002 which is the last year of Lipponen's two governments.<sup>9</sup> Three of the vote categories show some variation over the years while budget votes have a lowering trend towards 2002. The most recent time period show steady growth in budget cohesion while the other vote categories practically converge. Finally, the constitutional change in 2000 or the change from qualified majority voting to simple majority voting in legislative matters in 1992 seem not to have had any observable effects in the level of voting cohesion. In other respects (stripping down the power of the president) these reforms have shifted the former semi-presidential system into a parliamentary one.

## **Conclusion**

The vote categorization made above is of course but one possibility. Instead of looking at the parliamentary 'roles' of the votes (e.g. law readings or votes of confidence) another division could be based on various policy sectors. Some 58 per cent of the votes are budget related, so we know that the Finnish data are biased in this respect. Overcoming the budget bias by applying only the non-budget votes (as above) includes a further open question of which policy sectors appear among the

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly a drop in cohesion level did not take place in 1998 when Lipponen continued to his 2<sup>nd</sup> term as the PM after the elections. Regarding the 1995 and 2003 elections both resulted in a major change to the party composition of the government.

non-budget votes. In this sense the whole product of plenary sessions should be examined as only this would enable us to track biases in the vote data. Yet another categorization could be based on the parliamentary committees that processed the bills and proposals. While the relevant and appropriate policy sectors could be difficult to come up with the latter criteria could readily be carried out in future research.

How did our data turn out? We identified six vote categories which were related to legislative matters, votes of confidence, budget and some miscellaneous votes. These votes included every plenary vote taken during 1991-2006. After computing the respective Rice index scores our result was that this categorization could be simplified to budget and non-budget votes as the former category somewhat deviates from all others. The budget votes could perhaps best be characterized as a world of their own as the rules, restrictions and practices of the PPGs are more relaxed compared to other votes. Consequently the Rice scores are lower for the budget votes and this difference is systematic over the years with only three exceptions from the early 1990s. The conclusion here is that the appropriate set of votes for the evaluation of voting cohesion in Finland is the non-budget votes. Last we note that while the yearly variation in the index scores is marginal the index score averages are higher than in the previous Finnish reports.

We showed that the Rice index scores can provide an answer to various questions depending on the applied data. The difficulty that needs to be dealt with is that a researcher using some (mathematically correct) computation result of voting cohesion has to be aware of into which question the results provide an answer to. If we would have included the very large set of budget votes in the previous computations the results would have told us mostly about Finnish budget voting which was not our aim.

Our recommendation is must be that the average cohesion of Eduskunta should be measured using the category of non-budget votes. An interesting and open question is thus: Should a recommendation like this be made regarding other parliament(s)?

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