

Silent conflict in parliament?

Party cohesion, absences and the scaling of MPs' ideological positions

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Silent conflict in parliament

Introduction

- ▶ a good MPs attends parliamentary sessions and participates in parliamentary votes
- ▶ minimum presence required to conduct parliamentary business and reach valid decisions
- ▶ government parties need to maintain high presence of own MPs to safeguard their majority in votes

The phenomenon of absenteeism in parliament

- ▶ non-political reasons:
 - ▶ time conflicts
 - ▶ health-related reasons
- ▶ political reasons
 - ▶ deny legitimacy of parliamentary decisions
 - ▶ obstruct/stop conduct of parliamentary business/decision-making
 - ▶ solve cross-pressure situation brought by competing principals

Ways of dealing with cross-pressure

take a side and be

- ▶ loud: vote against the party line
- ▶ louder: announce it in debate speech, defend it in vote explanation
- ▶ silent: abstention in the vote
- ▶ more silent: stay away from the vote or stay away from the parliamentary session altogether

Absence:

- ▶ face-saving for party leadership and MP under cross-pressure
- ▶ in the best case public doesn't take notice

Methods of ideological scaling with voting data

- ▶ W-Nominate (Poole and Rosenthal 2005)
- ▶ Optimal classification (Poole 2000)

developed for binary data: yes/no, produce two-dimensional scaling

What happens if we feed absences into the classification?

Data

Plenary votes in the Austrian *Nationalrat* (lower chamber) in most recent legislative term, between 2019 and 2021.

number of observations: 172 198 votes by >183 MPs

Voting: yes (stand up) or no (remain seated). Abstention is not allowed.

Expectations

- ▶ H1: Party hierarchy

High-ranking MPs are more likely to influence the party's line. The higher an MP is in the party hierarchy, the lower is the number of absences in votes; operationalized as seat row

- ▶ H2: Distance from constituency

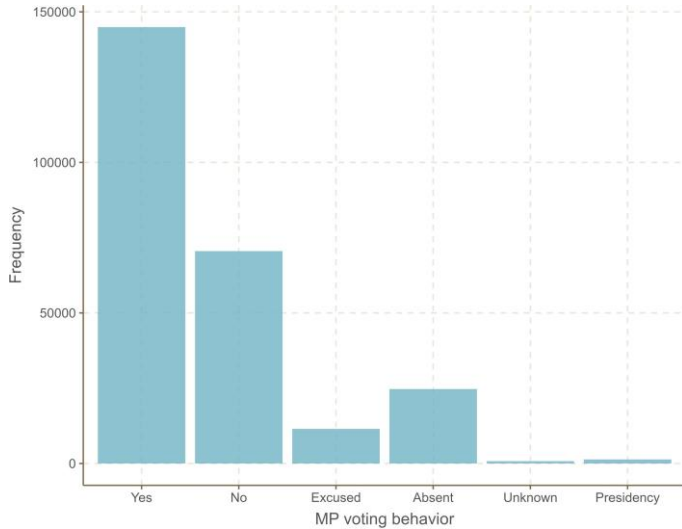
The greater the geographic distance, the greater is the propensity of cross-pressure between party line and constituency preferences and thus the larger is the number of absences in votes; operationalized as travel time

- ▶ H3: Closeness of regional elections

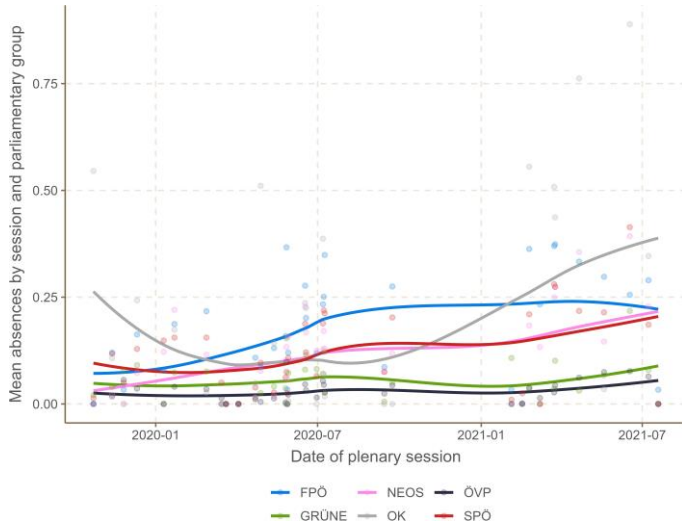
The closer a regional elections is, the more likely it is that MPs experience stronger constituency pressures that lead to greater absence in votes.

- ▶ H4: Government / Opposition Party

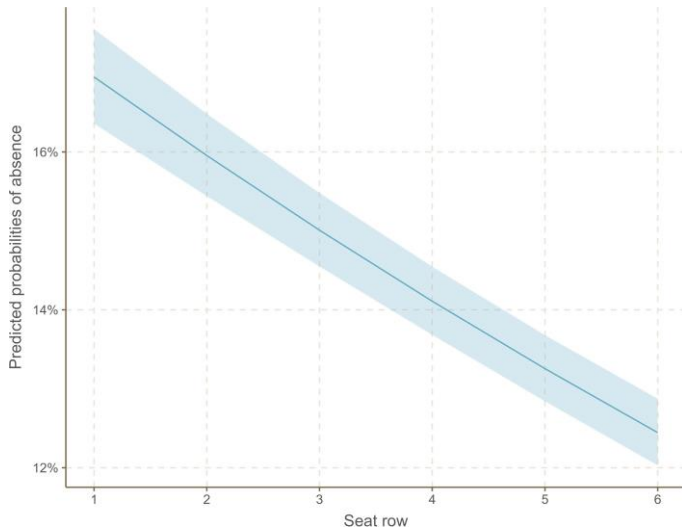
Patterns of behavior



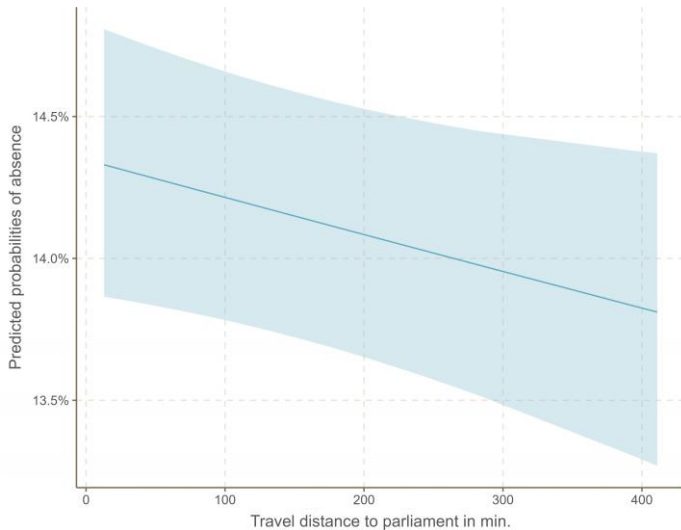
Absences over time



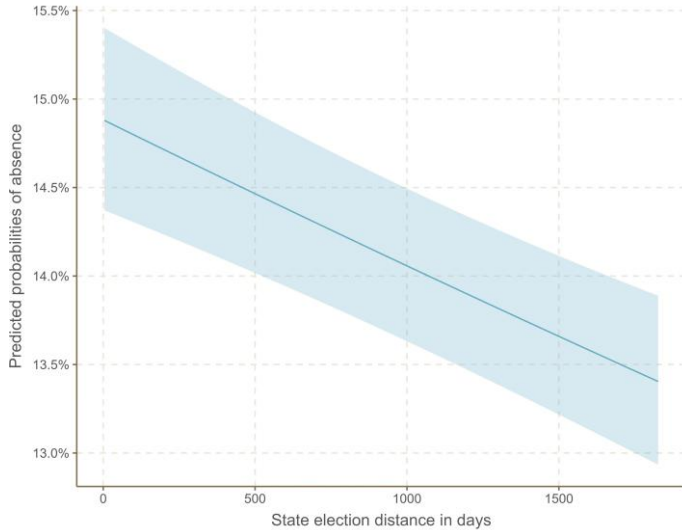
Absences by party hierarchy



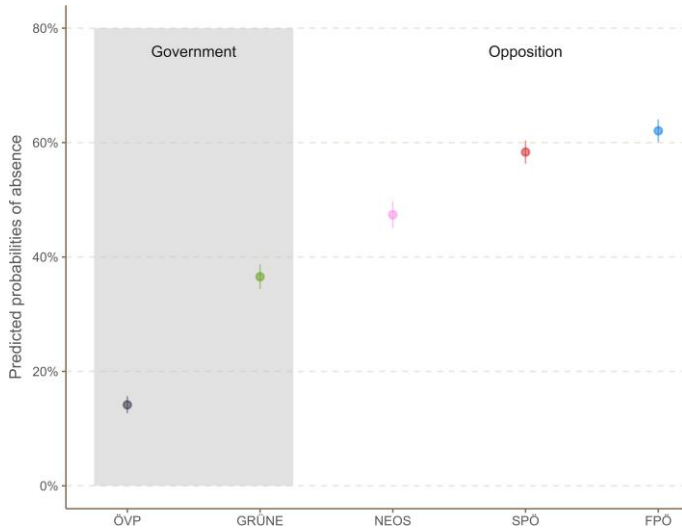
Absences by travel time from/to constituency



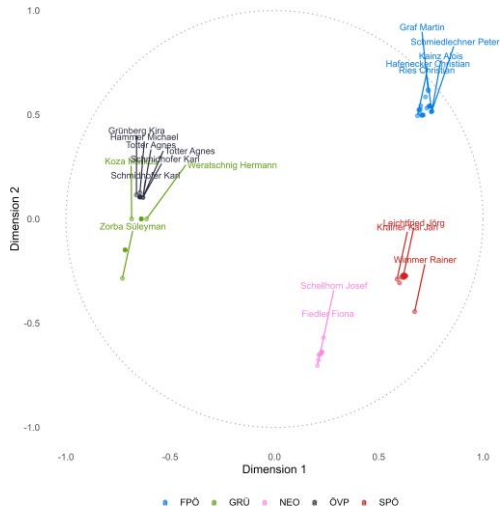
Absences by distance to regional election



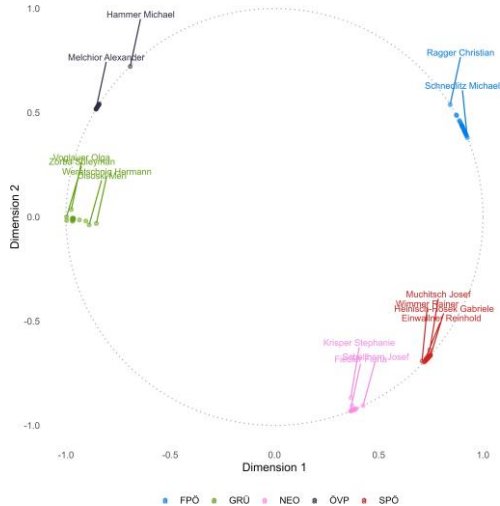
Absences by party



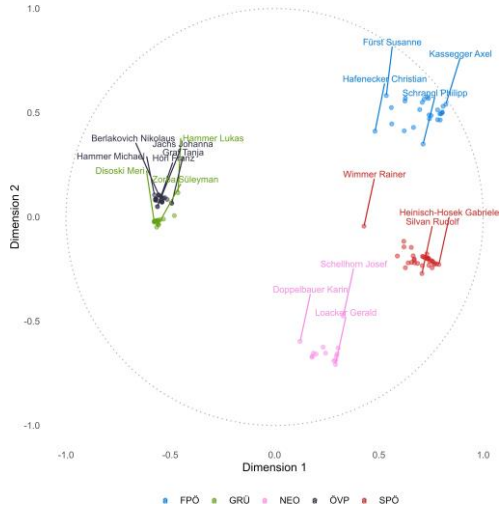
Ideological scaling OC: Absences as missing data



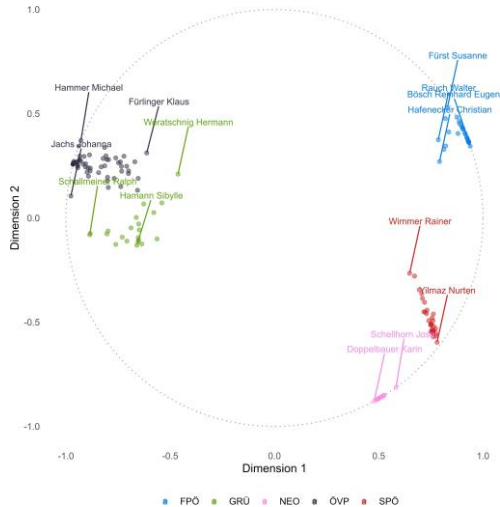
Ideological scaling W-Nominate: Absence as missing data



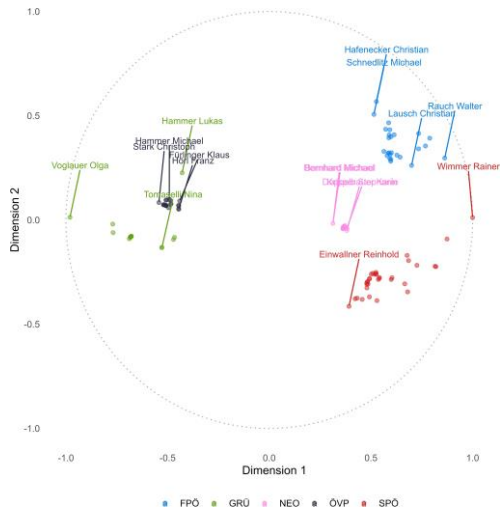
Ideological scaling OC: Absence as a yes vote



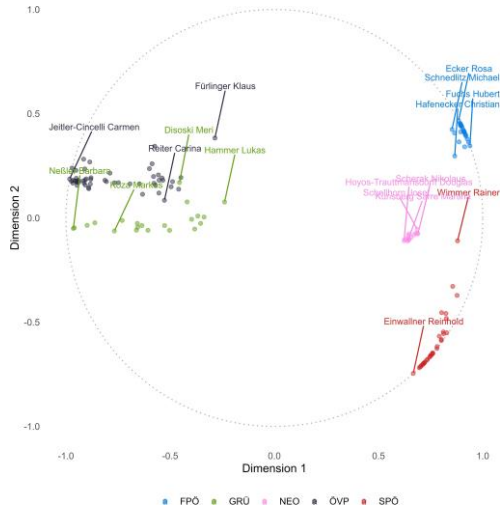
Ideological scaling W-Nominate: Absence as a yes vote



Ideological scaling OC: Absence as a no vote



Ideological scaling W-Nominate: Absence as a no vote



Preliminary conclusions

- ▶ absences exhibit interesting, non-trivial patterns
- ▶ identifying instances of absence as an expression of ideological divergence from the party line due to cross-pressure is difficult

Next steps:

- ▶ do validation case studies with media reports on vote, specifically on MPs with deviating positions in the ideological scalings