Parliamentary Transparency: Would elected representatives behave the same way if they knew we were watching?

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Open Legislative Data in Paris: A Conference of the Third Kind with Hacktivists and Academics

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Transparency & Legislative Voting

• The critical role of votes in the legislative process. They are used to . . . .
  – Decide agenda
  – Choose procedures
  – Select policies

• The critical role of votes in accountability
  – Voters
  – Party Leaders
  – The Executive
  – Watchdog Groups / Media
For What Purposes Do Observers Use Legislative Vote Results?

• Identify position taken by individual members
• Identify position taken by a party
  – Discipline, cohesion, unity
• Identify the lines along which conflict takes place (dimensionality of the policy space)
• Identify the amount of disagreement or dissension within the chamber (polarization)
Votes: seen and unseen

• In many legislatures, a significant share of votes are unrecorded at the level of the individual member and/or unpublished.

• Rules vary as to how members of parliament select the procedure to be employed on any given vote.
Our Project

• Where they are not the universe of votes, what do recorded votes tell interested observers about legislative voting behavior?

• Recorded votes may provide a misleading picture of how elected representatives are acting (who they are representing)
  – Selection of voting procedures is in hands of legislators (and parties), meaning the votes put on record reflect strategic considerations
    • To help enforce party discipline
    • To signal a higher level of cohesion than observers would expect
    • To stake out position only when it is known to be popular
An example from Argentina

• In one year we identified 535 votes
  – On 20% a roll call was *mandatory*
  – On 80%, legislators could choose, but a simple, voice vote was the presumed default method

• Choosing to go on the record with a roll call?
  – Nearly 3 times greater when the item had its origins in the executive branch
  – More than 4 times greater when the vote was preceded by a lengthy debate

• The impact of choosing to roll call on party discipline
  – Increased dramatically if it was an attempt to amend the agenda
  – Increased dramatically if item had its origins in the executive branch
  – Decreased dramatically if item was preceded by lengthy debate
An example from the EP 7 I

- Requested RCV
- Automatic RCV (final)
An example from the EP 7 II

- Requested RCV
- Automatic RCV (final)
Summing up the Puzzle

• We don’t know much about many parliaments
  – Rules for selecting voting procedures
  – Proportion of votes conducted by each possible procedure

• What drives choice of voting procedures?

• Once we know what drives choice, can we correct inferences about . . . .
  – 1) positions of members, 2) positions of parties, 3) levels of party unity, 4) issue cleavage structure, 5) level of conflict
“Glitzy” Interfaces
# Yeas and Nays

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Members</th>
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SR. PRESIDENTE FELLNER.- Se va a votar en general en forma *nominal*.

- Se practica la votación *nominal*.

VER LISTADO DE LA VOTACIÓN

-- Conforme al tablero electrónico, sobre 172 señores diputados presentes, 165 han votado por la afirmativa y 1 por la negativa, registrándose además 5 abstenciones.

SR. SECRETARIO (HIDALGO).- Se han registrado 165 votos por la afirmativa y 1 por la negativa.

-AQUÍ VOTACIÓN *NOMINAL*
Our “Wish List”

• We need to identify and collect information available on-line for as many parliaments worldwide as possible:
  – Cameral rules regarding voting procedures
  – Results of votes taken by each method
  – Record (floor minutes) surrounding the choice of the voting procedure
  – Record (floor minutes) surrounding the substance of the issue being voted on

• Typically, this requires downloading legislative minutes and other parliamentary publications and then extracting from them (preferably by machine) large amounts of relevant information