

## **Party Cohesion in the Lagting: An Exploratory Case Study of Budget Roll Call votes between 1980-2006**

### **Background and Context: The Lagting, the Budget and Party Cohesion**

The Lagting is the parliament of an autonomous region of Finland, the Åland Islands. Among the spheres which the Lagting enjoys legislative authority over on Åland are: education, health and medical services, municipal administration, the police service, the postal service, and radio and television. The state of Finland retains legislative authority over foreign affairs, most aspects of civil and penal law, and customs and monetary services.<sup>1</sup> The state of Finland also collects taxes on Åland, as in the rest of Finland, but in return a fixed sum of 0.45% of the Finnish state's budget is allocated to Åland, which the Lagting is free to apportion as it sees fit.<sup>2</sup> The Budget for the autonomous region of Åland is put before the Lagting by Åland's provincial government, which is formed based on negotiations between parties following elections to the Lagting. The most recent 2006 Budget in the Lagting approved 274,091,000 euros worth of spending.<sup>3</sup>

Before undertaking this research project a survey of the literature unearthed no published research on party cohesion or the budget process in Åland's Lagting. This research is therefore exploratory and, though it draws on budget roll call votes, seeks to place them within the broader context of party cohesion in the Lagting. Other information has also been gathered and systematized for the purpose of gaining an insight into party cohesion in the Lagting. Party cohesion as explored in this research is divided into two sub-concepts:

*Inter-party cohesion:* the extent to which different party groups act in a unified manner. That is, how often do parties A and B act in a unified manner?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lagtinget.aland.fi/> general information

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.lagtinget.aland.fi/> general information

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ls.aland.fi/budget.pbs> budget 2006

*Intra-party cohesion*: the extent to which particular party groups act in a unified manner. That is, how often do the members of party A act in a unified manner, and how often do the members of party B act in a unified manner?

## **Methodology**

### **Research question**

The Research question, which forms the title of this research report, has been slightly altered from the original research proposal to take account of realities on the ground during the data collection phase of the research project. It was estimated that the period 1987-2006 would provide sufficient budget roll call votes (200) for an analysis. This estimate was based on a preliminary sample of three recent budgets. However, recent budgets proved to contain a disproportionately large number of roll call votes, so it was necessary to include budgets before 1987 in order to obtain sufficient roll call votes. Another problem encountered, which prevented the collection of the desired 200 roll calls, was that before 1980 budget roll calls were not recorded in full in the *Lagting Protocol*. That is, while it does record that a roll call vote was taken, it does not record how individual Lagting Members (LLs) voted. The total population of 115 budget roll call votes was therefore significantly less than the target.

### **Sources and Data Collection**

The main source of data was, as anticipated, the *Lagting Protocol*. The 2001-2003 budget data were taken from the online *Lagting Protocol* at the Lagting's website<sup>4</sup>. The 1980-2002 and 2004-2006 budget data were taken from copies of the Lagting protocol in

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<sup>4</sup><http://dokument.lagtinget.aland.fi/sok/index.php?iVal=1>

the Lagting's library. The *Lagting Protocol*, a near-verbatim account of proceedings on the floor of the Lagting, provided details of how each member voted in Lagting budget roll calls as those roll calls occurred within proceedings in plenary session.

The *Lagting Protocol* did not indicate in any way the party membership of LLs. In the case of Lagting members of the current parliament (2003-2007), this information was easily available online from the Lagting's website. For information about earlier parliaments, those between 1979 and 2003, the source for this research was *Landstingsvalet* (also taken from the Lagting's library), later renamed *Lagtings- och kommunalvalet*, which provided lists of those elected to Lagting and their party membership, as well as lists of all party candidates in elections to the Lagting. Unfortunately, it did not provide a list of replacement LLs before the 1995 edition. Members of Landskapsregering (Åland's "provincial government") who are drawn from the Lagting give up their seats there and are replaced by other members of their party. In order to ascertain the party membership of replacement LLs from *Landstingsvalet* (this ranged between 3 and 7 such LLs at anytime) before 1995, it was necessary to laboriously read through the lists of all party candidates in elections to the Lagting searching for names matching those of replacement LLs, with the commonness of some names resulting in more than one match. Nonetheless, it was possible by this method to obtain details of all LLs' party membership.

The *Lagting Protocol* was also used as a source to ascertain which parties belonged to the governing coalition. That is, the coalition of parties in the Lagting which support the provincial government of Åland. This information facilitates a greater understanding of the budget roll call votes, particularly those of recent years where coalitions have been less stable. It is the provincial government which places the budget before the Lagting. Following elections to the Lagting, or a vote of no confidence in the existing provincial government, the leader of the party gaining the most votes in the election undertakes to form a coalition of parties in the Lagting that will form and support the provincial government. At the end of each year the provincial government publishes its accounts, and in this document, the *Landskapsregerings berättelse* (previously named

*Landskapsregerings berättelse*), ministers in the provincial government are listed along with any changes in office that have taken place during the year.<sup>5</sup> It is possible to infer from this document which parties in the Lagting supported the provisional government, and when changes occurred in the governing coalition.

## Variables and Data Inputing

The LLs were the initial units of analysis in this research. The initial variables in this research were the LLs party membership and the individual budget roll call votes. The numerical coding used in SPSS is recorded in the table below.

Table 1: Variables used in the research

Variables	Categories
Party	1 = Liberal; 2 = Centre; 3 = Social Democrat; 4 = Moderate; 5 = Independent Party Group; 6 = Åland's Progress Group; 7 = Åland's Future; 8 = Green Party
Vote	-1 = No; 0 = Abstain; 1 = Yes; 2 = Absent / Missing value

The coding used for budget vote variables was altered slightly from that suggested in the research proposal, but retained the principle that an abstention should be regarded as being less of a breach of party cohesion than voting in direct opposition to other members of the same party, for example, voting “no” when the party votes “yes”. Preliminary research of the Lagting Protocol revealed that LLs were expected to give reasons if they

<sup>5</sup> This researcher was unable to find any official document which explicitly stated which parties ministers in the governing coalition belonged to. Ministers can also be drawn from party members inside and outside the Lagting and on occasion individuals changed their party allegiance, making the process of identifying the parties included in the provincial government quite time-consuming.

are absent from the Lagting when it is in session. The reasons given were of a non-party political nature (eg sickness), it was therefore assumed that absences were not of significance in regard to party cohesion and they were therefore recorded as missing values in the database constructed. However, on a couple of occasions it seemed probable from statements made by LLs in the Lagting Protocol, or because of their recorded absence from a vote on which their party was split, followed directly after by their presence at a vote on which it was not split, that they deliberately absented themselves because of disagreements with the party line. These suspicions could not be confirmed, so, on these relatively rare occasions, they were still coded as absences, which may not capture the reality.

Few mistakes were made in the recording of roll call votes in the *Lagting Protocol*, all of those which did occur were in the 1989 Budget. On three occasions no record was made of an LL's roll call vote. On these occasions the data has been coded in the same way as absences (i.e. missing values). On one occasion LL Lindeman was recorded as voting "yes" twice on the same roll call, while LL Lindbom was not recorded as voting at all. It has been assumed that one of the "yes" votes belonged to LL Lindbom.

It was originally intended that a database would initially be created in SPSS for each parliament. However, this was decided against because the membership of the Lagting was not always stable through a whole parliament. In 2005, for example, the fall of Åland's provincial government in the middle of a parliament meant that there were 5 "new" LLs in the Lagting- ministers rejoined the Lagting following the change in the governing coalition and a new group of LLs became ministers in the provincial government. Instead, a separate SPSS database was created for each budget, and these were later merged for analysis.

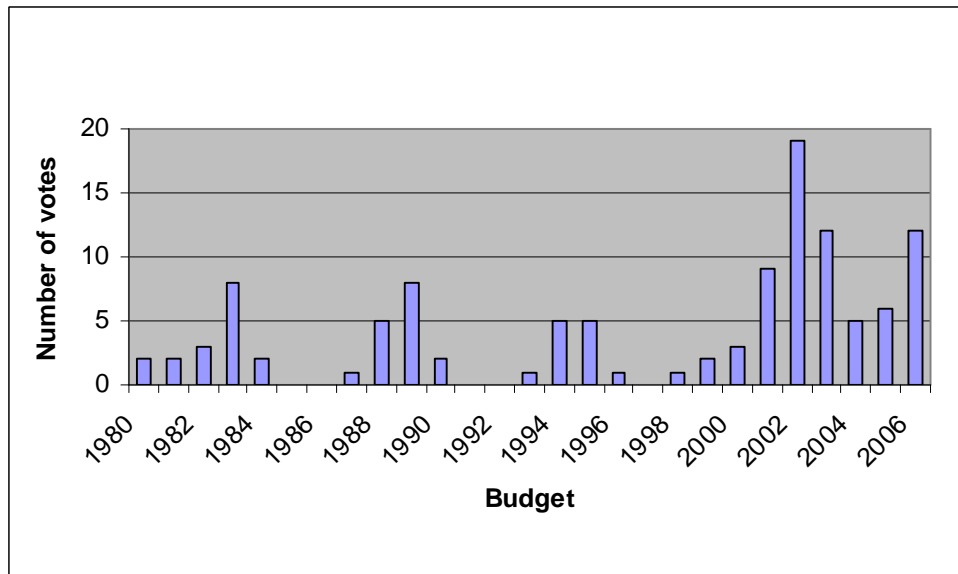
## **Results and Analysis**

The budget roll call data was initially analysed in SPSS. Some of the results produced in the analysis in SPSS were then transferred to Microsoft excel for further analysis and the construction of tables and graphs. The analysis of the data has been divided into two parts, taking all the budget votes together first, and then comparing the results from current parliament and the one before it with the 5 parliaments between 1979 and 1999. Likewise, the budget vote variables were examined first as a whole, and thereafter by splitting them according to the party membership of LLs, in order to examine party cohesion in more detail. The first technique employed was to measure the frequency with which division (represented by anything other than a standard deviation of 0) of any kind occurred. The second technique employed was measuring the standard variation within each vote variable. The greater the standard variation measured, the greater the divisions in the voting behaviour of LLs on that vote. Thus, if 30 LLs voted the same way (total cohesion) on a particular budget vote it would produce a standard deviation of 0. This process was then repeated for an analysis by party.

## **Overview**

As has already been noted, the number of roll calls held on recent budget votes was not a good guide to how many roll call votes were held on earlier budgets. The scarcity of budget roll call votes in earlier years makes the comparison of roll call votes in different parliaments problematic.

Figure 1: Roll Call Frequency by Budget



However, these figures are suggestive of changes in party cohesion in the Lagting. A change in the behaviour of LLs in calling for roll call votes has occurred. Any budget motion coming before the Lagting is accepted, assuming there is a quorum, if an amendment has not been tabled and a vote is not requested by at least two LLs.<sup>6</sup> The very act of calling for a roll call vote suggests a degree of division. An analysis of the standard deviation of roll call votes confirms that they all display division. An increased occurrence of roll call votes therefore provides some evidence that there is less consensus among Lagting Members. The last six budgets (the 2001-2006 budgets) have seen an average of 10.5 roll calls per budget, compared with an average of 2 roll call votes for the six budgets (1995-2000) before that, 2.6 for the 6 budgets (1989-1994) before that and 2.6 for the six budgets (1982-1988) before that. The 4 budgets with the largest number of roll call votes - 2002 (19), 2003 (12), 2006 (12) and 2001 (9) - have also all been within the last 6 years, that is, within the current and preceding parliament. There would seem to be three probable explanations for this change. Either more votes are being held on the budget, with this being reflected in the increased number of roll-call votes, or the proportion of all budget votes which are roll call votes has increased, or both have

<sup>6</sup> Ålands Lagsamling B2 Arbetsordning (1972: 10) 40 and 43

occurred. If the first or third explanations are correct then cohesion in the Lagting has clearly declined. If the second is correct, and budget votes in Lagting are merely becoming more open rather than more frequent, then the question of why Lagting members are requesting that more budget votes should be roll call votes needs to be answered. In order to know which explanations are correct it will necessary for future research to record the number of non-roll call votes taken on earlier budgets and, assuming the proportion of roll call votes has increased, to ascertain from LLs why they request roll call votes.<sup>7</sup>

Another point worth making is that the increase in the number of roll call votes taken in the Lagting means there is now more evidence about party cohesion in the Lagting than in earlier parliaments. Non-roll votes in the Lagting make no reference to party, merely stating the number of LLs voting “Yes”, “No” or “Abstain”, so it is impossible to draw any conclusions about intra-party cohesion from them, and only rudimentary conclusions about inter-party cohesion. An increase in roll call votes makes the voting behaviour of LLs in Lagting more open and therefore more useful for examining party cohesion. With the scarcity of roll call votes in earlier parliaments, they become a limited tool by which party cohesion can be assessed during those periods.

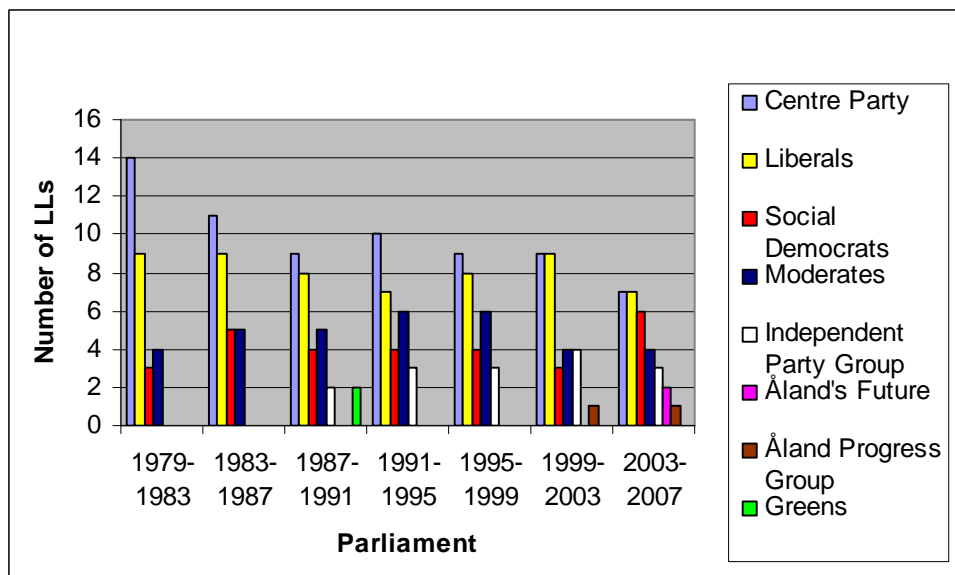
Some support for the idea that inter-party cohesion is decreasing comes from the changing makeup of the parties belonging to the governing coalition in the Lagting and the longevity of governing coalitions in the Lagting. In the current 2003-2007 and previous 1999-2003 parliaments there have been 4 different governing party coalitions. In the 5 parliaments prior to this (1979-83, 1983-87, 1987-91, 1991-95 and 1995-99), there have only been 5 different governing party coalitions. That is an average of a change in the governing coalition every 4 years between 1979 and 1999 (one per parliament), compared with a change every 2 years assuming the current governing coalition manages to last the full parliament. This appears indicative of a breakdown in inter-party cohesion in recent years.

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<sup>7</sup> Preliminary research suggests that a greater proportion of budget votes are roll call votes, and that the overall number of budget votes has also increased.

Another noticeable trend in the data gathered has been the increase in the number of parties within the Lagting. In the 1979-83 parliament there were four parties in the Lagting - the Centre Party, the Social Democrats, the Moderates (conservatives) and the Liberals. With the addition since then of the Independent party group, Åland's Future and the Åland Progressive Group, the current 2003-2007 parliament has 7 parties. The increase in smaller parties' representation in the Lagting has largely been at the expense of the Centre Party, which had 14 LLs in the 1979-83 parliament, but which has only 7 LLs in the current parliament. This is also reflected in the LLs representing the new parties in the Lagting. For example: Anderson Eriksson now an LL for Åland's Future was previously a Centre Party LL (1987-91) and minister (1991-1999) in the provincial government. In theory the creation of new parties should lead to stronger intra-party cohesion, as parties become ideologically narrower. For example: Åland's Future share many of the same views as the Centre Party, but differ quite sharply over questions concerning the autonomy of Åland and the protection of the Swedish Language. Before the arrival of Åland's Future in the most recent parliament there was no party committed full autonomy for Åland, and the issue had the potential to cause intra-party division.

Figure 2: Party Membership of LLs by Parliament



## **Inter- or Intra-Party Division?**

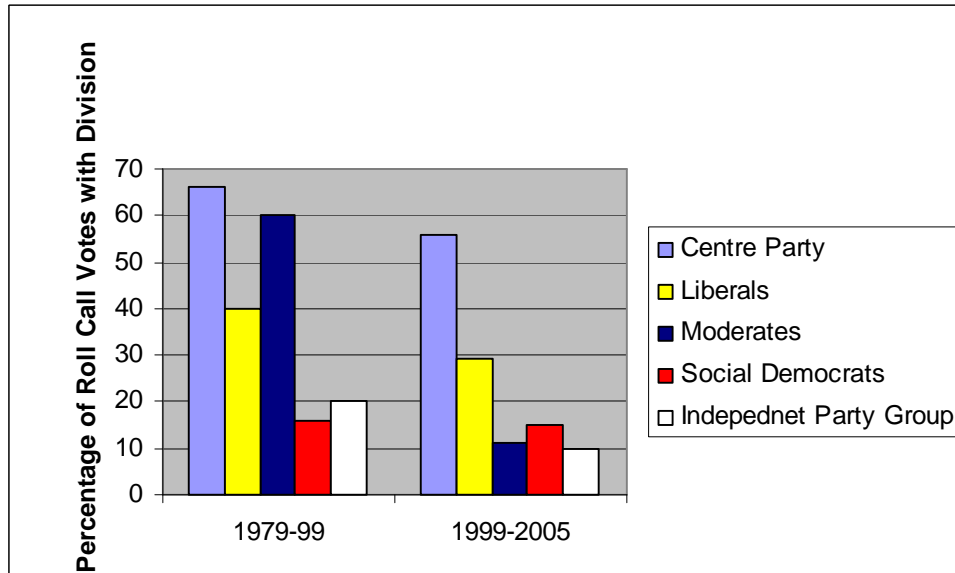
Lagting budget roll call votes display a large amount of division across the entire research period from 1979-2005. The average standard deviation per roll call vote, calculate by dividing the sum of all standard deviations divided by the number of roll call votes, is 0.92. A comparison of the standard deviation of Lagting votes between 1979 and 1999 and 1999 and 2005, without taking account of party, shows that Lagting roll call votes actually display less division. The sum of the standard deviation in all Lagting votes between 1979 and 1999 divided by the total number of votes taken gives an average standard deviation of 0.947, compared with 0.895 for the period between 1999 and 2005. At the same time as roll call votes are becoming more common they are also displaying less division. Is this is a result of more agreement between the parties (inter-party cohesion) in roll call votes, or more agreement within the parties (intra-party cohesion) in roll call votes?

Some evidence for the theory that the increase in cohesion among all LLs in budget roll call votes is accounted for by stronger intra-party cohesion is provided by a comparison of roll call votes with no intra-party division (total cohesion). In the 5 parliaments from 1979-1999 there were 50 roll call votes of which only 5 (10%) witnessed no intra-party division. In the current and previous parliament (1999-2005) there have been 66 roll call votes on the budget of which 15 (23%) witnessed no intra-party division at all.

Breaking these figures down by party shows a general increase in the number of roll call votes with total intra-party cohesion, with the exception of the Independent party group.<sup>8</sup> The number of roll call votes in which each party displayed division was divided by the total number of roll calls the party was involved in during the two periods, to give percentages for comparison. The most dramatic change has been in the case of the Moderates, with a fall from 60% of roll calls with division in the period 1979-99 to only 11% in the period 1999-2005. The Liberals have displayed less division, down from in

40% of roll calls to 29%, as have the Centre Party, down from in 66% of roll calls to 56%. There has been little change in the Social Democrats, down from 16% to 15%, while the Independent party group has increased displays of division, up from in 10% of roll calls to 20%.

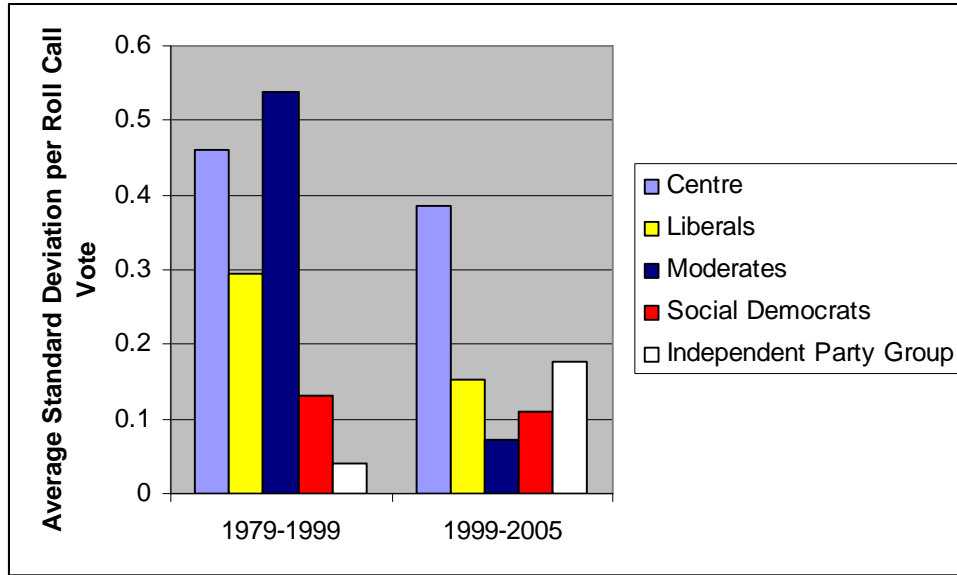
Figure 3: Intra-Party Division 1979-99 and 1999-2005



The picture provided by an analysis of standard deviation is a similar one. There has been a general trend towards more cohesion in the roll call votes with the exception of the Independent Party Group, with the Moderates showing dramatic increase in party cohesion, with an average standard deviation of 0.539 from 1979-1999 falling to 0.072 in the 1999-2005 period. Both the Liberal and Centre parties became slightly more cohesive, while the Social Democratic party showed little change.

<sup>8</sup> The Green Party, Åland's Future and Åland's Progressive Group have been excluded from this stage of the analysis because of their small size and because none of them were present between 1979-1999 and

Figure 4: Standard Deviation of Intra-Party Division 1979-99 and 1999-2005



However, the party sizes in the two periods were not uniform. It might be expected that variations in the size of the party groupings could explain some of the changes in intra-party cohesion. There have been only small changes in the average number of LLs each party has had in the two periods. While they could account for the differences in the Centre Party, they are not significant enough to account for the differences in the other party groups.

Table 2: Average LLs per Parliament between 1979-1999 and 1999-2005

Period	Party	Average Number of LLs
1979-1999	Liberal	8.2
	Centre	10.6
	Social Democrat	4
	Moderate	5.2
	Independent Party Group	2.6

1999 to 2005.

1999-2005	Liberal	8.5
	Centre	8
	Social Democrat	4.5
	Moderate	4
	Independent Party Group	3.5

Overall the levels of intra-party cohesion in the Lagting appear low by the standards of the Nordic Parliaments.<sup>9</sup> All the parties displayed intra-party division in more than 10% of the roll call votes they took part in, both between 1979-1999 and 1999-2005.

However, there is also considerable variation between the parties with the Centre Party, the Moderates (1979-1999) and the Liberals (1999-2005) appearing particularly divided.

## Conclusion

This research has been exploratory, and part of its worth has been in pointing out the direction that future research might fruitfully take. Perhaps the most important findings of this research project were how few roll call votes are taken in the Lagting on the budget, and how the number of budget roll call votes has increased in recent years. In order to fully understand why this has occurred future research could profitably take a more qualitative direction. In part, an explanation could be found by further research using the *Lagting Protocol* with a wider analysis of who is proposing budget roll call votes in the Lagting, the issues that roll call votes are being taken on and research into the non-roll call votes taken. However a broader understanding of party cohesion in the Lagting would most likely be achieved by interviews with Lagting members past and present.

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<sup>9</sup> Torben K. Jensen 'Party cohesion' in Peter Esaiasson and Knut Heidar eds. (2000) *Beyond Westminster and Congress the Nordic Experience* (Columus OH: Ohio State university Press)

The other findings of this research are tempered by the small size of the population of budget votes in the research period. However, the evidence there is suggests that intra-party cohesion has strengthened in recent times. In this much the Lagting appears to be following a general trend among Nordic Parliaments.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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## Appendix

Table 1: Roll Call votes by Budget

Year	Number of roll call votes
1980	2
1981	2
1982	3
1983	8
1984	2
1985	0
1986	0
1987	1
1988	5
1989	8
1990	2
1991	0
1992	0
1993	1
1994	5
1995	5
1996	1
1997	0
1998	1
1999	2
2000	3
2001	9
2002	19
2003	12
2004	5
2005	6
2006	12

Table 2: Party Membership by Parliament

	Centre	Liberals	Social Democrats	Moderates	Independent Party Group	Åland's Future	Åland Progress Group	Greens
1979-1983	14	9	3	4	0	0	0	0
1983-1987	11	9	5	5				
1987-1991	9	8	4	5	2	0	0	2
1991-1995	10	7	4	6	3	0	0	0
1995-1999	9	8	4	6	3	0	0	0
1999-2003	9	9	3	4	4	0	1	0
2003-2007	7	7	6	4	3	2	1	0

Table 3: Frequency of Intra-Party Division

	Centre Party	Liberals	Moderates	Social Democrats	Independent Party Group
1979-99	66	40	60	16	20
1999-2005	56	29	11	15	10

Table 4: Average Standard Deviation per roll call vote

	Centre	Liberals	Moderates	Social Democrats	Independent Party Group
1979-1999	0.46	0.295	0.539	0.131	0.039
1999-2005	0.385	0.154	0.072	0.11	0.177