The Most Unkindest Cuts:
Government Cohesion and Economic Crisis[*]

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Abstract

Economic crisis and the resulting need for austerity budgets has divided many governing parties in Europe, despite the strict party discipline exercised over the legislative votes to approve these harsh budgets. Our analysis attempts to measure divisions in governing coalitions by applying automated text analysis methods to scale the positions that MPs express in budget debates. Our test case is Ireland, a country that has experienced both periods of rapid economic growth as well as one deep financial and economic crisis. Our analysis includes all annual budget debates during the time period from 1983 to 2013. We demonstrate that government cohesion as expressed through legislative speeches has significantly decreased as the economic crisis deepened, the result of government backbenchers expressing speaking against the painful austerity budgets introduced by their own governments. While ministers are bounded by the doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility and hence always vote for the finance ministers' budget proposal, we find that party backbenchers' position-taking is systematically related to the economic vulnerability of their constituencies and to the safety of their electoral margins.

Key Words: Financial crisis, budgetary debates, party discipline, intra-party conflict, text analysis.

Government stability in parliamentary systems depends crucially on one overriding characteristic of legislative behavior: unity. Without party discipline in voting, especially on critical legislation, governments quickly come apart, formally or informally, leading to a new government or new elections. While scholars continue to debate the extent to which parties can be treated as unitary actors (e.g. Giannetti and Benoit, 2008; Laver and Schofield, 1998), there is little doubt that in order to stay in government, parties have to enforce sufficient discipline so that they act as unitary actors in important legislative votes Bowler, Farrell and Katz (1999). Despite the voting unity practiced in almost every parliamentary democracy, however, we also know that there is a large degree of intra-party heterogeneity. Legislators have different preferences, and often vote in spite of these, instead of because of them. Moreover, legislators often answer to more than one type of principal, and this may cause tensions when constituency representation clashes with party demands (e.g. Strøm and Müller, 2009; McElroy and Benoit, 2010). The more acute the tension between the personal interests of the legislator and the group interests of his or her party, the more we would expect the legislator's preferences to diverge.

Because of party unity, voting records tells us little about intra-party politics in legislatures where party discipline in strong. What legislators *say*, however, is typically less constrained. Legislative speeches are seldom, if ever, subject to formal sanction for those who speak out of turn. Indeed, party leaders may view floor debates as an opportunity for reluctantly faithful members to send messages to their constituents, as long as they follow party instructions when it comes to voting. For these reasons, the text analysis of parliamentary speeches has formed an important leg of the empirical study of intra-party preferences (e.g. Lindstädt, Slapin and Vander Wielen, 2011; Proksch and Slapin, 2008; Laver and Benoit, 2002). The words that legislators use can be scaled into positions providing a much more valid indicator of their sincere preferences than the votes they cast.

In this paper, we exploit this feature of parliamentary texts to measure the strain placed on party unity by austerity budgets: those splitting not only government and opposition, but also governing parties and coalitions by virtue of requiring deep and deeply painful

clawbacks of services, tax raises, and spending cuts.[1] Austerity budgets are an unfortunately familiar feature of European politics, since the onset of the euro zone crisis in banking and sovereign debt servicing. The challenge of passing these severe budgets, often necessitated by externally imposed conditions of emergency funding packages, have split and sometimes brought down governments. Yet even in the face of such conflict, it is seldom manifest in legislative voting, even on unpopular austerity budgets. To observe the stain on governing parties, we must look at what legislators say.

Austerity budgets provide a good context for testing the limits of observable behaviour as a measure of sincere preferences, because they are plausibly about a single dimension: taking responsibility for painful cuts sooner in order to get better later, versus short-term desires to avoid painful measures while refusing to accept responsibility.[2] Because austerity measures are neatly packaged in the form of annual budgets, are proposed by governing parties, and are subject to fairly constrained rules of parliamentary debate, we tend to observe text generation on a single topic within a fairly regulated format. The potential to estimate "ideal points" from text as latent traits to be estimated or scaled using text as data, in other words, has maximum potential in the arena of debates over austerity measures. Furthermore, understanding positioning in and ultimately the outcomes of these highly significant debates is crucial to understanding the means to implement successfully such difficult but necessary measures. Successful measurement of intra-party differences in this context thus serves as both an ideal methodological validation of the ability to scale underlying positions from texts using statistical methods, as well as helping to understand the dynamics of support and opposition to one of the most difficult political and economic challenges of the decade.

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[1] And often producing in electorates the same sense of disappointment and betrayal as in our title reference: "The most unkindest cut[s] of all; . . . O, what a fall was there, my countrymen! Then I, and you, and all of us fell down." William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* Act 3 scene 2.

[2] Parliamentary speech has been analysed previously with an aim to locating legislators' policy preferences but the dimensions of policy measured in these applications has been less than clear. In Monroe and Maeda (2004), the primary dimension that emerged from a two-dimensional scaling model of US Senate speeches was labelled the "workhorse/show-horse" dimension, for want of a better interpretation. Proksch and Slapin (2010) had to interpret their single estimated dimension from the European Parliament by resorting to correlations with roll-call vote analysis and independent expert surveys. Such problems point to a need for scaling models that take a different approach to dimensionality, namely one where plausible positioning on an *a priori* dimension is used to anchor the analysis. Alternatively, a careful selection of texts to limit speeches to a particular (one-dimensional) policy context where the primary axis of difference is known would make it much easier to interpret scales *ex post*.

In what follows, we measure government cohesion in the face of conflicting pressures from constituent and party demands, in response to unpopular austerity measures. Using the debates from 31 Irish budgets from 1983 to 2013, we estimate the positions of individual legislators in each debate, comparing the unity of governing coalitions to opposition and observing this process over time. Furthermore, we are able to explain divergences in individual versus party preferences expressed through legislative speech as a function of both party and constituency-level political variables. While ministers in the governing coalition are far less likely to speak against budgets than are government "backbenchers" (those without ministerial offices), this tendency erodes in response to the pressures of financial crisis. Those with more economically vulnerable constituencies, all other factors being held constant, are more likely to speak against budgets, as are MPs who are elected with safer margins.

Budgets and Politics of Economic Crisis

Our case study in austerity budgets is Ireland, one of the first European states to experience a deep banking crisis and receive a multi-billion euro bailout with austerity conditions attached. Since 2008, the country experienced a steep decline in economic output and a sharp rise in unemployment, and a massive debt problem caused by the financial load of recapitalising a failing banking system. This forced the government to implement a number of severe austerity measures against growing public resentment, ultimately leading to a record low in the popularity ratings for the government parties and a breakdown in January 2011 of the coalition led by Fianna Fáil, a party that had led Ireland continuously since 1997. Addressing the crisis required a €85 billion rescue package from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, a bailout that led to tax cutbacks in social spending equivalent to €20 billion, or 13 per cent of GDP (Bergin et al., 2011, 51), including highly controversial changes to taxes and wage agreements, while leaving the public perception that the bankers who had caused the crisis were getting rescued.

During the thirty year period that we examine, party competition took place between two principal groups of parties, competing across the divide of government versus oppo-

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sition. *Fianna Fáil* (FF), governing either alone (1987–1990) or with its junior coalition partners, the Progressive Democrats (PD) and the Green party, had presided over Ireland's unprecedented economic boom in the 1990s and early 2000s.[3] It alternated office with *Fine Gael* (FG), which was in office from 1983–1986 with its main coalition partner the Labour Party (LAB), and again in 2011 after the coalition between FF and the Green party collapsed over the financial crisis. Compared to main parties in other European countries, FG and FF are relatively similar in terms of their policy positions (Weeks, 2009; Benoit and Laver, 2005), with their primary differences based mainly on historical reasons and tradition. Table shows the party competition for all governments included in our analysis.

Party competition in Ireland therefore occurs mainly between the government bloc and the opposition bloc (Hansen, 2009). This divide is also clearly reflected in legislative debates over the budget, following the annual presentation of a budget by the Minister for Finance. During these debates, legislators are free to discuss the budget, with governing party members and ministers expressing support, and opposition parties invariably criticising the government and its budget. Given the strong party discipline in Ireland (Gallagher, 2009), votes tend to follow strict party lines. Voting against the government's financial bill or resigning from the party are extreme measures that only a few TDs are willing to face. Party discipline in Ireland, indeed, makes the two equivalent, since voting against the party on a budget would result in expulsion from the party. In parliamentary systems like Ireland, where budgets are written entirely by the party in government, votes on these national fiscal plans are very much votes for or against the government itself, and indeed were the government to lose such a vote, it would fall and a new coalition would have to be formed (Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2011).

Despite its very strong party discipline—or perhaps making it necessary—Ireland has an electoral system that gives TDs strong incentives to promote their constituency interests and to cultivate a personal vote (Gallagher and Komito, 2009; Marsh, 2007). The strong tie between legislators and their constituents therefore makes TDs vulnerable to public resent-

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[3]The Progressive Democrats essentially ceased to exist as a parliamentary party in 2009. The sole remaining PD cabinet member, Mary Harney, remained in office and continued to support the government as an independent.

Table 1: Government composition and reference speeches for Wordscores estimation

Budget year	Parties	Taoiseach	Finance minister	Opposition spokesperson
1983	FG, LAB	G. FitzGerald (FG)	A. Dukes (FG)	C. Haughey (FF)
1984	FG, LAB	G. FitzGerald (FG)	A. Dukes (FG)	M. O'Kennedy (FF)
1985	FG, LAB	G. FitzGerald (FG)	A. Dukes (FG)	M. O'Kennedy (FF)
1986	FG, LAB	G. FitzGerald (FG)	A. Dukes (FG)	M. O'Kennedy (FF)
1987	FF	C. Haughey (FF)	R. MacSharry (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
1988	FF	C. Haughey (FF)	R. MacSharry (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
1989	FF	C. Haughey (FF)	A. Reynolds (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
1990	FF, PD	C. Haughey (FF)	A. Reynolds (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
1991	FF, PD	C. Haughey (FF)	A. Reynolds (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
1992	FF, PD	C. Haughey (FF)	B. Ahern (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
1993	FF, LAB	A. Reynolds (FF)	B. Ahern (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
1994	FF, LAB	A. Reynolds (FF)	B. Ahern (FF)	I. Yates (FG)
1995	FG, LAB, DL	J. Bruton (FG)	R. Quinn (LAB)	C. McCreevy (FF)
1996	FG, LAB, DL	J. Bruton (FG)	R. Quinn (LAB)	C. McCreevy (FF)
1997	FG, LAB, DL	J. Bruton (FG)	R. Quinn (LAB)	C. McCreevy (FF)
1998	FF, PD	B. Ahern (FF)	C. McCreevy (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
1999	FF, PD	B. Ahern (FF)	C. McCreevy (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
2000	FF, PD	B. Ahern (FF)	C. McCreevy (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
2001	FF, PD	B. Ahern (FF)	C. McCreevy (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
2002	FF, PD	B. Ahern (FF)	C. McCreevy (FF)	J. Mitchell (FG)
2003	FF, PD	B. Ahern (FF)	C. McCreevy (FF)	R. Bruton (FG)
2004	FF, PD	B. Ahern (FF)	C. McCreevy (FF)	R. Bruton (FG)
2005	FF, PD	B. Ahern (FF)	B. Cowen (FF)	R. Bruton (FG)
2006	FF, PD	B. Ahern (FF)	B. Cowen (FF)	R. Bruton (FG)
2007	FF, PD, GRE	B. Ahern (FF)	B. Cowen (FF)	R. Bruton (FG)
2008	FF, PD, GRE	B. Ahern (FF)	B. Cowen (FF)	R. Bruton (FG)
2009	FF, GRE	B. Cowen (FF)	B. Lenihan (FF)	R. Bruton (FG)
2010	FF, GRE	B. Cowen (FF)	B. Lenihan (FF)	R. Bruton (FG)
2011	FF, GRE	B. Cowen (FF)	B. Lenihan (FF)	M. Noonan (FG)
2012	FG, LAB	E. Kenny (FG)	M. Noonan (FG)	M. McGrath (FF)
2013	FG, LAB	E. Kenny (FG)	M. Noonan (FG)	M. McGrath (FF)

ment resulting from unpopular policies. In their time allocated for speaking in the budget debates, legislators have both a motive and an opportunity to voice relative levels of support or disagreements, nuances, or other pertinent concerns, and have these views go on public record. Legislators signal these differences not only to constituents but also to fellow party members. Speeches offer the chance to cast a reluctant verbal vote, to display one's ministerial credentials, or to indicate the level of vociferousness of an opposition member's attitude against the government. For a variety of reasons, therefore, what legislators *say* has the potential to reveal important intra-party differences in budget debates whose votes follow strictly party lines.

Especially during the economic crisis that emerged following the crash of Ireland's property boom, the government that had presided throughout the "Celtic Tiger" period of approximately 1995–2005 was held responsible. Accepting the austerity budgets was therefore also very much a vote on the responsibility of the government for the crisis. Relative support for austerity measures in the budgets during the period we examine, therefore, combines support for government's ability to guide the Irish economy out of the crisis with the desire to move on to solving the problems rather than identifying blame. Relative opposition to the budgets, on the other hand, signals a rejection of the government's competence to resolve the crisis, as well as a rejection of the perceived injustice of having society bear the costs of hard-biting austerity plans necessitated by the government's irresponsible financial management during the economic boom. Our argument, in a nutshell, is that legislators, and particularly backbenchers, may engage in "blame avoidance" (Pierson, 1996) by distancing themselves from the proposed austerity measures, motivated by constituents that are more sensitive to losses than to gains (Weaver, 1986, 373). Because it involves imposing tangible losses on constituents in exchange for diffuse and uncertain gains, the politics of austerity are "treacherous" (Pierson, 1996, 145) and divisive. Speeches over austerity budgets offer opposition a "blood in the water" opportunity to apportion blame to the ruling coalition, and present chances for governing parties forced to support the budgets a chance to position themselves verbally to avoid blame.

Our argument is best illustrated by the events that surrounded the announcement of the

first emergency budget in 2008. Ireland officially entered recession in mid-2008, leading to the announcement of an early budget in October 2008 for the fiscal year 2009. The budget proposal, which was introduced by Finance Minister Brian Lenihan (FF), called for cuts in health spending, a reintroduction of university fees, and a one per cent levy on income. The *Irish Times* called it the "harshest budget in a generation".[4] Unexpected and widespread public outrage erupted over the government's decision to abolish the automatic entitlement to a medical card—the free and universal access to health care services—for those over 70 years. This led to increased tension between the coalition parties and between Fianna Fail backbenchers and their party leadership.

The Green party publicly criticised the government for the way it handled the medical card controversy, accusing it for causing "unnecessary distress and confusion amongst our older people and their families".[5] Fianna Fail backbenchers revolted against the proposed austerity measures and a small group of backbenchers even threatened to vote against the government in an upcoming motion put forward by the opposition parties. One TD resigned from the party and joined the opposite side as an independent. The authority of Brian Cowen, Taoiseach and FF party leader, and the stability of the government were called into doubt.[6] In the end, the government backed down and modified some of its measures.[7]

The medical card reversal presents but one example of legislators trying to avoid public resentment resulting from unpopular budget cuts. It illustrates the dilemma that each government TD faces: one the one hand, they must stick to the party line and defend the austerity measures. On the other hand, they are pressured by their constituents to act against the government's policies. Especially in systems combining strong party discipline with a strong personal vote, the politics of austerity create strong counter-pressures on individual members of ruling parties both to follow the party line and to engage in blame avoidance to

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[4]Irish Times, "Income levy to affect every taxpayer in tough Budget", October 15, 2008, retrieved online at http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/frontpage/2008/1015/1224020737770.html on October 13, 2011.

[5]Green party spokeswoman Deirdre de Búrca, quoted in the Irish Times, "Greens criticise way medical card issue was handled", October 21, 2008, retrieved online at http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2008/1021/1224454426027.html on October 13, 2011.

[6]Irish Times, "Chaos in FF calls Cowen's authority into question", October 20, 2008, retrieved online at http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2008/1020/1224279464929.html on October 13, 2011.

[7]Irish Times, "Government backs down on medical cards and 1% levy", October 22, 2008, retrieved online at http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/frontpage/2008/1022/1224625076839.html on October 13, 2011.

avoid punishment by local constituents.

Charlie O'Connor of FF—a true politician's politician—for example remarked the following in his speech on the austerity budget:

> I will not forget where I am from and will not forget the issues that are of concern to my community. [. . .] I spend all day, every day in my constituency. Over the past week, I certainly have not hidden away. I have been out on the streets and in the shopping centres, including the Square, as well as outside the schools in my constituency. [...] However, [...] those who voted for me were clear that I was a Fianna Fáil Deputy who was under the Fianna Fáil banner and that is my position. While I am not commenting on any other colleague, I strongly believe that one sticks to one's tasks and focuses on the issues. One should have the courage to bring matters to the attention of ones party leadership, both before the parliamentary party and in other conversations, and one tries to correct things that were done wrongly.

In a similar vein, Deputy Paul Gogarty from the Green Party, the small coalition partner of FF, expressed his opposition to the budget as follows:

> When my Green Party parliamentary colleagues and I signed up to the programme for Government, we pledged to vote as part of a three party coalition, barring exceptional circumstances, until the end of the Government's five year term of office. The Government has my vote but no Government will take away my conscience. In all conscience I cannot give the budget a ringing endorsement. It is like the proverbial curate's egg good in parts but with bits that would turn one's stomach, no more so than in the area of education.

Because one of a legislator's principals is a local constituency, and local constituencies vary, the acuteness of each TD's dilemma will also vary with the characteristics of his or her local supporters. A legislator's other principal, of course, is the party. Consequently, we expect that a legislator's counter-pressure to toe the party line—even verbally—will also vary with his or her position within the party or within government. Cabinet members are much more constrained than backbenchers to oppose the budget, as the doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility prevents ministers from publicly opposing government decisions.

For some deputies, local electoral pressures overwhelm loyalty to party, even at the cost of expulsion from the party. On budgetary matters, discipline is strictly enforced, such that opposition to the government's fiscal measures are punished by expulsion. In 2011, this happened to three government TDs, for instance. Patrick Nulty, TD from Dublin West, was

expelled from Labour for taking a stance against the budget. Tommy Broughan was also expelled after he opposed the Government's renewal of the bank guarantee scheme. They joined former Junior Minister Willie Penrose, who left over the closure of Columb Barracks in Mullingar, and Fine Gael's Denis Naughten who was expelled from Fine Gael for refusing to support cutbacks at the Roscommon hospital in his constituency.[8]

Data and Methods: Supervised Text Scaling of Irish Budget Speeches, 1983–2013

Our analysis includes 31 Irish budget debates taking place from 1983 to 2012.[9] We retrieved all speeches from *DPSI: Database of Parliamentary Speeches in Ireland* (Herzog and Mikhaylov, 2013), which is a complete collection of all speeches from the Irish parliament.

The speeches in each budget debate follow a set order. The first speaker is the Minister of Finance, who officially announces the budget and discusses its content. The second speech is made by the official spokesperson of the opposition, followed by the financial spokesperson from each party. Then, and usually on a separate day, the Taoiseach comments on the budget, followed by speeches from the leaders of all parties represented in the Dail. The remaining time is filled with speeches from other government and opposition members who are selected by their respective party whips.[10] The speeches of the Minister of Finance, the Taoiseach, and the official opposition speakers are limited to 45 minutes. All other speakers receive 40 minutes, though some speakers shared their time with other TDs. The average length of a speech is about 2,155 words.

To scale the budget speeches, we used the "Wordscores" method of Laver, Benoit and

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[8]"Six weeks in Dail Eireann and Patrick Nulty is a rebel," *Irish Independent*, December 7, 2011, http://www.independent.ie/national-news/budget/news/six-weeks-in-dail-eireann-and-patrick-nulty-is-a-rebel-2956226.html.

[9]Starting in 1997, budget debates take place in December for the budget of the following fiscal year. Throughout this paper, we refer to debates by their fiscal year.

[10]Given that participation in a debate is endogenous and determined by the party, there is likely a selection effect in the sense that those government TDs most opposed to the budget are not allowed to speak. This means that we potentially *underestimate* the actual degree of intra-party conflict over austerity measures.

Garry (2003), a method for scaling texts whose positions are unknown following a "training" step on archetypical texts whose positions are "known" to represent two contrasting positions, and which are used to train the system in a manner directly analogous to machine learning classification methods (see Benoit and Nulty, 2013; Beauchamp, 2012).[11] We scaled each debate separately, training each scaling using the speech of the finance minister to represent the "pro-budget" position, and the speech of the financial spokesperson of the opposition (equivalent to the "shadow finance minister") to represent the opposition position. Representing these positions as +1.0 and 0.0 respectively, we then transformed the "virgin" text scores using the rescaling proposed by Martin and Vanberg (2007), a procedure that ensures that the scaled positions of the reference texts are set to the scores used to train the system (1.0 and 0.0). While not always recommended, this transformation ensures that all other documents' scaled values are positioned relative to the reference documents (Benoit and Laver, 2007), an outcome we explicitly desired in our budget-by-budget comparison. Each position is then "fixed" relative to the positions of the government and opposition finance spokespersons, making the scores comparable across budgets according to a common benchmark.

Results

Government versus opposition unity

Relative to the fixed extremes of supporting and opposing the budget as set out in the speeches of the government and opposition spokespersons, we can compare the distribution of position-taking among government and opposition legislators over time. Figure 1 plots the distribution of estimated positions for government and opposition members, showing as expected that the typical government speakers was more supportive of the budget than the typical opposition speaker. The interesting result for party unity to emerge from Figure 1, however, is the result that governmental positions were always more heterogenous

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[11]The results we show operate on the entirety of the texts, without stemming, trimming, manicuring, polishing, or otherwise manipulating or selecting features.

than opposition positions. Apportioning blame is apparently far easier than taking it, when it comes to hardball distributive politics. Government cohesion in the later budgets (since 2005), furthermore, is more pronounced, a result we explore in more detail below.

In Figure 2, we further explore the distribution of policy positions by splitting the government group into cabinet members and government backbenchers. The former are bound by the doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility and hence we expect that they would be more supportive of the government budget than the backbenchers from their parties. The density plots clearly bear out this expectation, showing not only that government ministers are more pro-budget, but also more unified than their non-ministerial colleagues.

Figure 3 plots the mean position of each of these three groups—cabinet members, government backbenchers, and opposition speakers—over time, to highlight the group differences in a trend comparison. Very consistently, we see three groups whose ordering reinforces our expectations. Cabinet members are consistently the most pro-budget group, the opposition is the most anti-budget group, and government backbenchers' positions lay in the middle.

With respect to government unity, we can measure the dispersion of the text scaling estimates (after fixing the reference points) as measured by their variance within each budget year. Figure 4 measures this directly over time, plotting the standard deviations of the Wordscores estimates in each year. As from the density plots, we see that the government speakers were nearly always less cohesive on average than the opposition speakers. Since the onset of the economic crisis since 2005, furthermore, government cohesion decreased massively, at the same time that the opposition positions became more similar.

In an attempt to explain this patter, we plot the difference between the average positions of cabinet members and the average positions of backbenchers against govt debt as % of GDP, in Figure 5. The distance between the two groups appears to be a function of the economy: the gap is is relatively small in good economic times, but increases as the economy worsens. As a preliminary test, we estimate a regression model with the distance between cabinet members and government backbenchers as the dependent variable. As controls, we include government debt, a variable that indicates years in which an election occurred, and
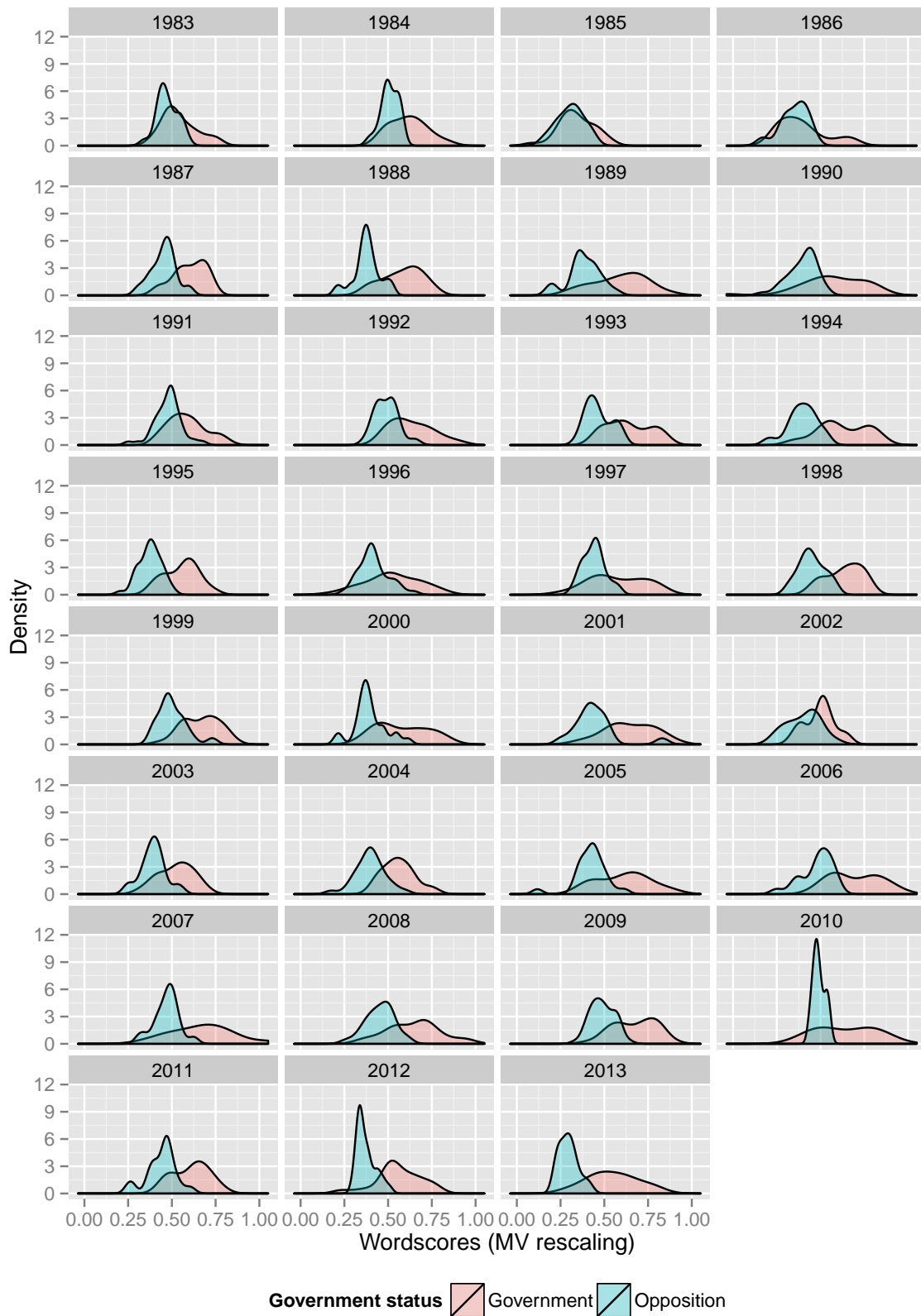
Figure 1: Density plots of estimated Wordscores positions for government and opposition members.
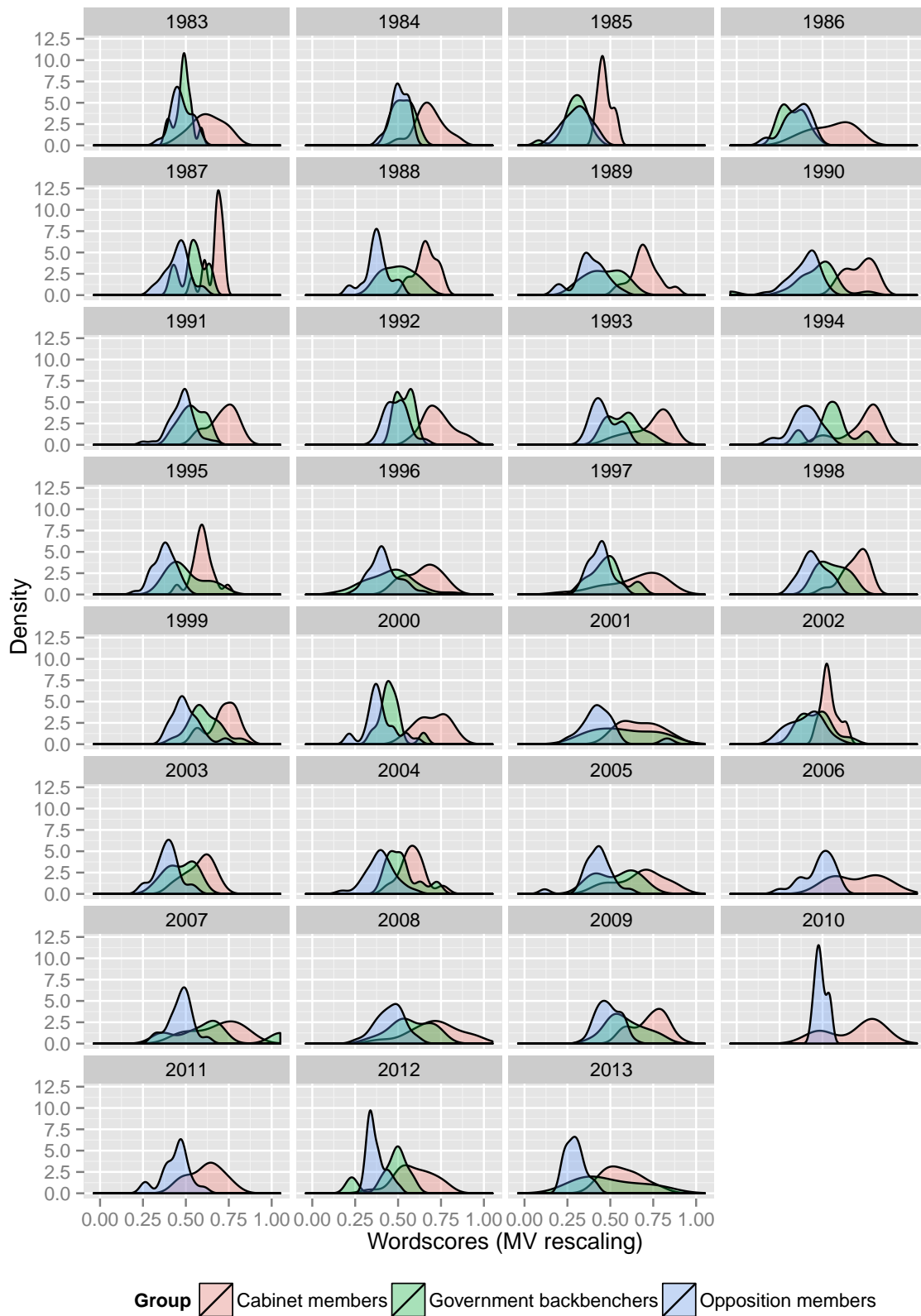
Figure 2: Density plots of estimated Wordscores positions for cabinet members, government backbenchers, and opposition members.
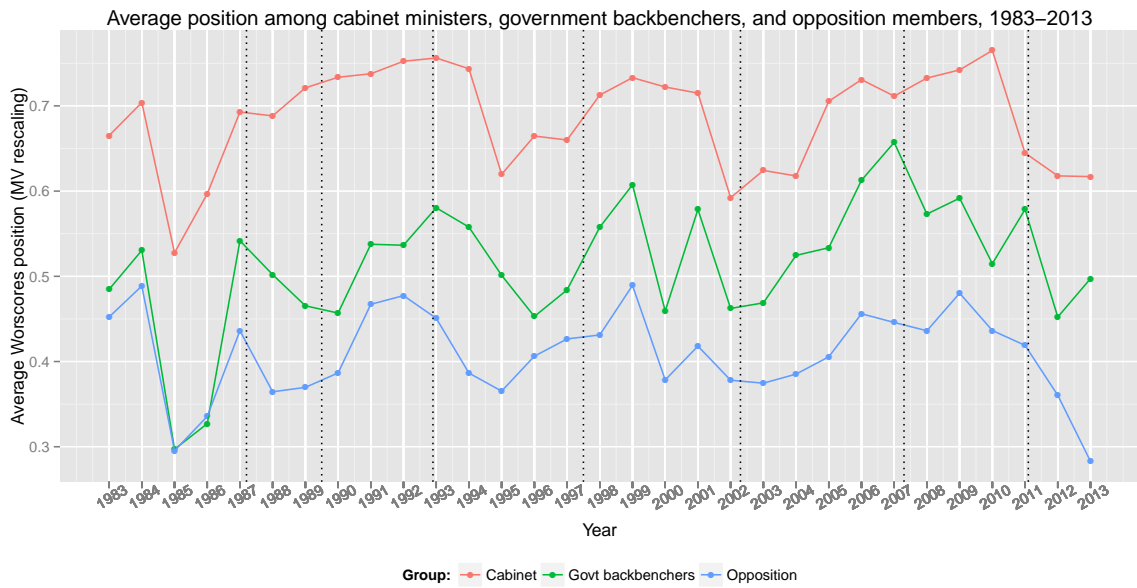
Figure 3: Average Wordscores estimates for cabinet members, government backbenchers, and opposition members. Vertical lines indicate election years.
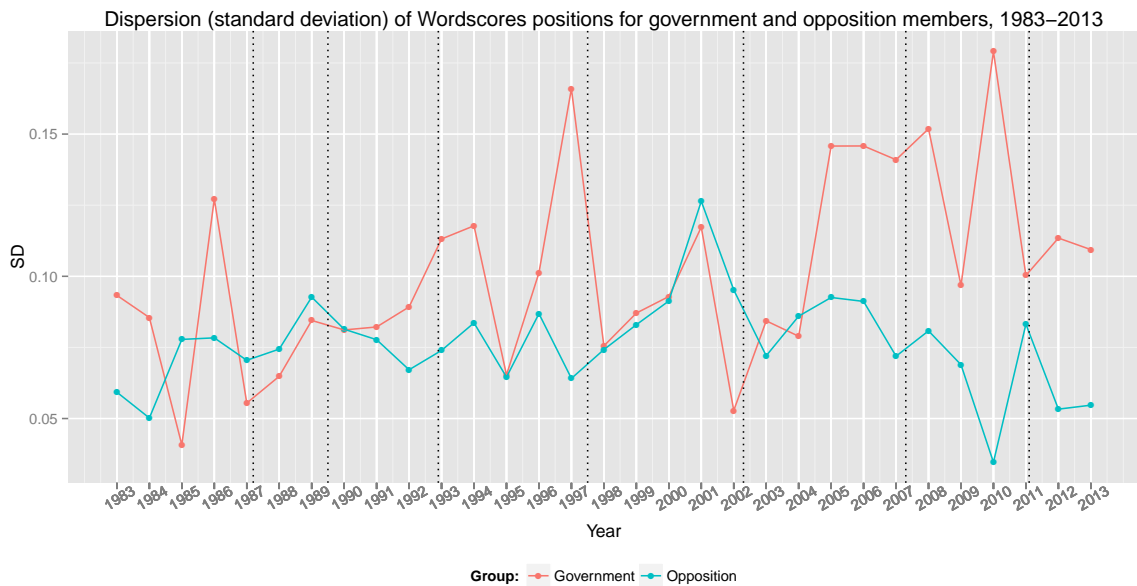

Figure 4: Standard deviation of Wordscores estimates for cabinet members, government backbenchers, and opposition members. Vertical lines indicate election years.

Table 2: Regression of the policy distance between cabinet members and government back-benchers on economic performance and changes in cabinet composition.

	Coefficient (s.e.)
Debt (proportion of GDP)	0.11**
	(0.00)
Election year	−0.05*
	(0.02)
Change in government	0.01
	(0.03)
Change of the Taoiseach (prime minister)	−0.09*
	(0.04)
Change of the finance minister	0.05
	(0.03)
(Intercept)	0.12***
	(0.02)
R^2	0.39
Adj. R^2	0.27
Num. obs.	30

$^{***}p < 0.001, ^{**}p < 0.01, ^{*}p < 0.05$

three dummy variables that indicate an alternation in government, a change of the prime minister, and a change of the finance minister, respectively.

Table 5 summarises the results of the regression. We find a significant effect for government debt that confirms the relationship displayed in Figure 5: the gap between cabinet members and backbenchers widens through economic bad times. The anticipation of an election, in contrast, decreases the gap, possibly because government members need to demonstrate a unified front when competing in the election. A change in the position of the prime minister too decreases the gap, which indicates that a change of the cabinet leadership can, at least temporarily, induce greater government cohesion.

To summarise, we find evidence that the financial crisis has torn cabinet ministers, who are constrained by the doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility, and government backbenchers apart. In the second part of the paper, we take a closer look at the source of this intra-party division by additionally taking the socio-economic composition of legislature's constituencies into account, and provide evidence that TDs from counties that are hit
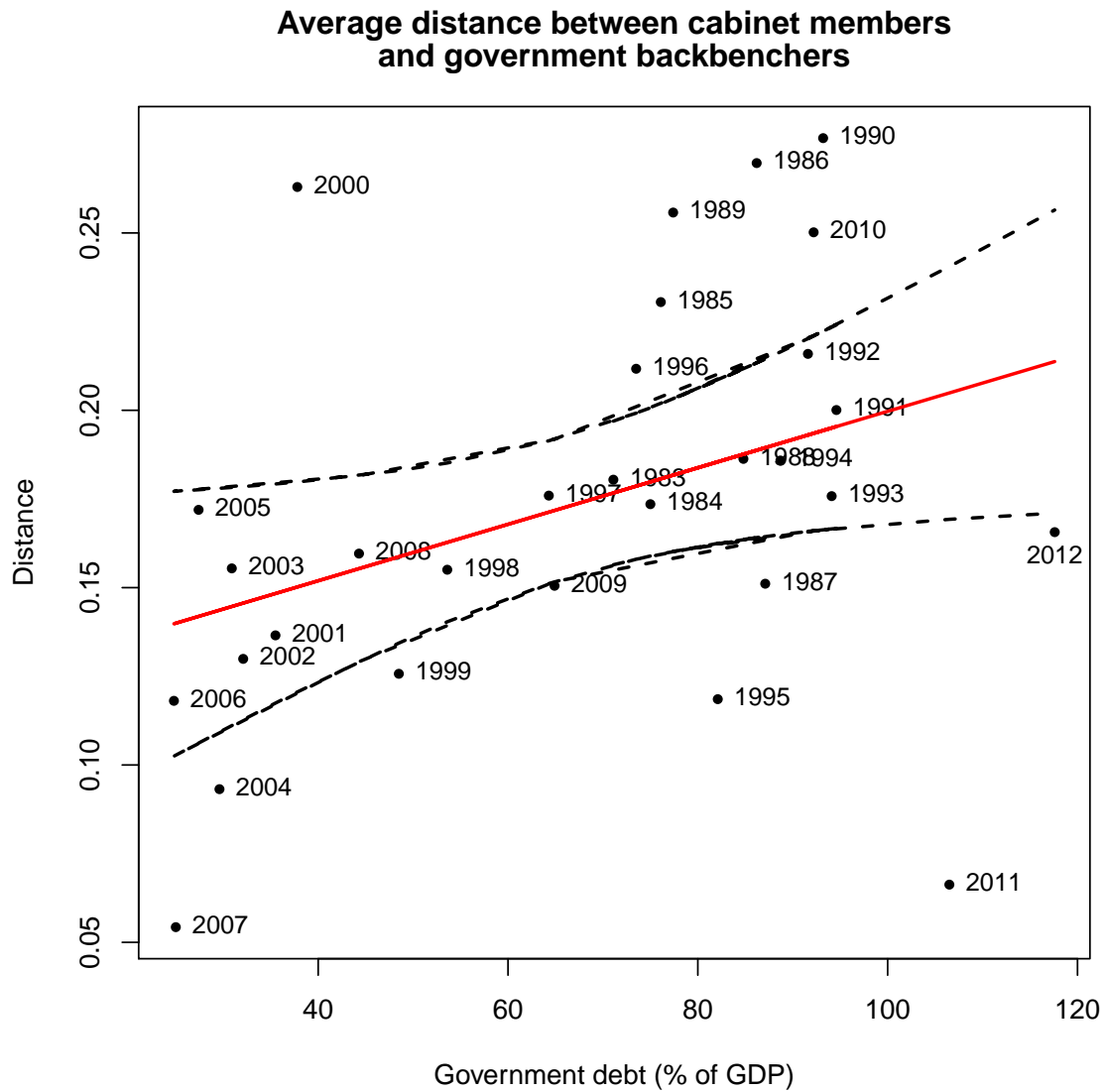
Figure 5: Distance between average Wordscores estimates for cabinet members and government backbenchers against government debt (% GDP) with OLS regression line and 95% confidence interval.

particularly hard by the crisis take more anti-government positions.

Explaining Intra-Party Differences

What explains differences in expressed positions among members from the same party? As discussed above, we conjecture that legislators are cross-pressured by their constituents to act against the government's policies and by the need to implement austerity measures and to stick to the official party line. The magnitude of this dilemma is different for each deputy. First, we expect that expressed positions to the government budget are a function of office positions, with cabinet members and junior ministers being the most supportive legislators. Second, we expect that legislators from safe districts are more immune to party pressure and hence more able to freely express their opposition to austerity measures. Third, we expect that legislators from districts that are more vulnerable to austerity, such as districts with high unemployment or a large proportion of welfare recipients, are more pressured to oppose the government's austerity measures.

To test these conjectures, we have supplemented our estimates with the following data:

- data on office positions (cabinet ministers, junior ministers, party leaders, etc.) for all legislators;

- official records from the 2007 and 2011 general Irish elections, which we use to calculate each legislator's proportion of first preference votes on the overall district quota. A larger personal quota indicates a larger margin between a candidate's first preference votes and the votes of all other candidates and hence is a good proxy for electoral safety;

- demographic information that might indicate the vulnerability of local constituencies to austerity. More precisely, we use annual data about the proportion of people on the Live Register in each district, which is a proxy for the level of unemployment.

Table 3 shows the results of an OLS regression with estimated policy positions as the dependent variable. The first column presents the baseline model. The models in columns 2

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Table 3: *Predicting Budget Positioning*. Dependent variable is predicted budget position. Models (1) and (2) use robust standard errors clustered by debate.

Variable	(1) No FE or RE	(2) Party FE	(3) Party RE
	No FE or RE	Party FE	Party RE
Cabinet minister	1.79	1.60	1.57
	(0.079)**	(0.204)**	***(0.117)
Junior minister	1.74	1.34	1.39
	(0.104)**	(0.228)**	***(0.132)
Electoral margin (quota)	-0.18	-0.46	-0.43
	-0.138	(0.137)*	***(0.163)
Constituency unemployment %	-0.02	-0.12	-0.02
	(0.013)	(0.038)*	(0.035)
Fine Gael		-0.96	
		(0.410)+	
Greens		-2.16	
		(0.593)*	
Labour		-1.77	
		(0.430)**	
Sinn Fein		-1.11	
		(0.809)	
Independents		-1.44	
		(3.147)	
FG * unemployed		0.09	
		(0.065)	
Greens * unemployed		0.48	
		(0.140)*	
Labour * unemployed		0.21	
		(0.098)+	
Sinn Fein * unemployed		0.14	
		(0.143)	
Indep * unemployed		0.25	
		(0.783)	
Constant	-0.28	0.89	0.00
	(0.136)+	(0.285)*	(0.231)
Variance(unemployment)			0.00
			(0.000)
Variance(party)			0.27
			(0.099)
Observations	262	262	262
R-squared	0.61	0.69	
Root MSE	0.59	0.64	

and 3 add fixed effects and random effects, respectively. All three models confirm our expectations about the determinants of intra-party differences. First, we find that cabinet ministers and junior ministers are generally more supportive of the government budget. While this result is not too surprising, it confirms that the doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility is an effective mechanism that prevents cabinet members from opposing decisions made by the government. Second, we find that an increase in the electoral margin (measured as a legislators personal quota) has a negative effect on a speaker's expressed position, which means that legislators from safe district express more opposition to the budget than those from more competitive districts. Finally, in one of the models (Model 2) we find that an increase in constituency unemployment leads to more opposition to anti-austerity measures, particularly among legislators from the Green party, which, during most of the time, was the small coalition partner of FF.

In Table 4, we use the distance of each speakers predicted budget position to the position of his or her party leader as the dependent variable. While we consider these results still exploratory, the negative coefficients on the constituency unemployment variable suggest that the higher the vulnerability of a legislator's constituency, the more anti-austerity was the position expressed in his or her budget speech, all other things being equal. The coefficient of -0.16 in the party fixed effects model, for instance, suggests that an increase of 10% in the constituency unemployment rate is associated with a speaker's expressed position being 1.6 points to the left (i.e. more anti-austerity) than his or her party leader's expressed position. Given that the response scale is scaled to the standard normal, 1.6 represents a sizeable shift leftward, suggesting that legislators with more vulnerable constituencies are more likely to express positions reflecting their constituents as principals rather than their parties as principals.

Conclusions

Our investigation of legislative positioning over austerity debates has explored the differences in preferences for austerity expressed by legislators whose votes on the budget fail to

Table 4: *Predicting Distance from Party Leader Position.* Dependent variable is speaker's predicted budget position less the position of the leader of the speaker's party. Models (1) and (2) use robust standard errors clustered by debate.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)
	No FE or RE	Party FE	Party RE
	No FE or RE	Party FE	Party RE
Cabinet minister	-0.01	0.39	0.34
	(0.065)	(0.423)	(0.135)
Junior minister	0.07	0.36	0.37
	(0.032)+	(0.421)	(0.152)
Electoral margin (quota)	0.01	-0.10	-0.03
	(0.066)	(0.101)	(0.056)
Constituency unemployment %	-0.04	-0.16	-0.05
	(0.033)	(0.019)**	(0.189)
Fine Gael		0.00	
		(0.000)	
Greens		-0.21	
		(0.791)	
Labour		-1.06	
		(0.813)	
Sinn Fein		-0.93	
		(0.674)	
Independents		-0.74	
		(0.221)*	
FG * unemployed		0.00	
		(0.000)	
Greens * unemployed		0.16	
		(0.085)	
Labour * unemployed		0.10	
		(0.227)	
Sinn Fein * unemployed		0.24	
		(0.090)*	
Indep * unemployed		0.28	
		(0.055)**	
Constant	-0.28	0.44	-0.02
	(0.136)+	(0.461)	(0.276)
Variance(unemployment)			0.08
			(0.051)
Variance(party)			0.29
			(0.250)
Observations	258	258	258
R-squared	0.01	0.16	
Root MSE	0.74	0.69	

reveal any differences in their preferences due to strict party discipline. From our results we draw several conclusions.

First, there is indeed positional information on a uni-dimensional latent scale of support for versus opposition to austerity measures, as expressed in the budget speeches. Our results have a high degree of face validity when compared to known legislative positions, with government ministers being most supportive of the budgets, opposition speakers most opposed, and government backbenchers in between. Text scaling as used here provides a valid method for measuring intra-party differences as expressed in speeches made during debates over annual budgets.

Second, by fixing the scales of legislative positions each year to the government and opposition finance spokespersons, we were able to measure the degree of cohesion of other speakers relative to these points. Our results show two strong patterns. First, opposition speakers were more united against budgets, while speakers from governing parties showed far more heterogeneity of expressed positions. In the effort to explain themselves or to avoid blame despite being forced by party duties to vote for a budget, government legislators tended to express less cohesive views, with non-ministerial speakers displaying the least amount of cohesion with the government's official position. Second, with the onset of painful austerity budgets around 2005, government cohesion declined further, indicating that incentives for blame avoidance rise when there is blame to avoid. Using regressions of the distance between the mean positions of backbenchers and cabinet members, we have shown that this distance increases as the economy worsens, but declines during an election year when the governing parties are able to marshal the greatest solidarity among their members in the legislature.

Third, looking at individual differences between expressed positions during some of the harshest austerity budgets, we have uncovered evidence that legislators use their speeches to express positions reflecting a balance between party and office demands on the one hand, and constituency interests on the other. Legislators who occupied ministerial posts spoke more in favour of the budgets than back-bench governing party legislators, a result that held quite consistently across the debates we examined. This relationship also

held for opposition parties, with party leaders tending to speak more in a median position of their parties rather than striking up more extreme positions, despite these extreme positions offering the greatest opposition to the government position.

On the side of constituency interests, we also found evidence that legislators who were elected from safer constituencies or from more vulnerable constituencies tended to express more anti-austerity positions than legislators whose reelection depended more on central party support. Legislators with stronger constituency-based reasons to avoid the pain of austerity tended to oppose these measures more. While our results require further investigation, we have uncovered systematic evidence that the degree of expressed support for austerity measures varies widely across party members in ways that can be explained using political and demographic variables specific to each speaker's constituency.

While our look at intra-party differences over austerity measures has focused on budget debates in Ireland, the logic applies much more broadly to the difficult legislative choices being faced by legislatures across Europe, in particular Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. Parties may demand and enforce a unified vote on budgets through strict party discipline, but these unified votes may mask significant tensions that arise from intra-party differences. Examining what legislators say, rather than simply how they vote, has the potential to reveal the extent and source of these differences.

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