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Assessing the Impact of Parliamentary Design. The Case of the Danish
Committee on Gender Equality

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Abstract

This article contributes to the literature on parliamentary design in general and the pioneer literature on parliamentary bodies specialized in gender equality in particular. It does so by establishing a frame for the critical assessment of the impacts of such an institutional design. Moreover, by using interviews and data on the behavior of committee members, it demonstrates the advantages of applying a mixed method within a field that has mostly relied on participant interviews. A systematic analysis of the impact of the Danish Committee on Gender Equality shows that although this particular committee has not succeeded in adding the perspective of gender equality to legislation, it has increased parliamentary control with the government. Furthermore, it has enabled more interaction between parliament and civil society organizations.

1. Introduction

To promote gender equality, states all over the world have established independent agencies with a gender mandate (the so-called Women Policy Agencies, “WPAs”). Today, systematic and comparative research has documented the effects of such state bodies (Lovenduski 2005; McBride and Mazur 1995, 2010; Outshoorn 2004). Based on the assumption that institutions in parliaments with analogous mandates will have a similar impact, organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) encourage parliaments to set up such bodies (Gonzalez & Sample, 2010). Yet, though more than 120 parliaments have set up such institutionsⁱ, their impact remains rather unexplored in the scholarly literature (Grace and Sawyer 2016). This is problematic: though WPAs and parliamentary bodies with a gender mandate share characteristics, as I will elaborate below, they are also very different. Building on this literature and legislative studies, this article tries to move the pioneering research on these parliamentary bodies into a second phase by setting up a three-step model for critically assessing the effect of parliamentary design. In turn, using a mixed method (qualitative interviews and quantitative data on committee behavior especially) instead of qualitative data only, as the pioneer literature tends to do, the article illustrates the importance of the particular method applied. The use of the three-step model and the mixed method is illustrated through the case of the Danish Parliament, in which a single portfolio committee on gender equality (“Ligestillingsudvalget,” LIU) replaced a multi-portfolio committee on political economy and gender equality in 2011 (“Politisk Økonomisk Udvalg”, PØU). The study explores whether the establishment of LIU (the independent variable) has raised the level of substantive representation of gender equality within parliament (the dependent variable).

The Danish case is chosen because of the circumstance that parties from the center-right were in opposition during the post-LIU period and in government during the pre-LIU period, which creates a hard case. I elaborate why this is so in section 3.1 below. Moreover, since Denmark is the only Scandinavian country that has established a single issue committee on gender equality, its status as frontrunner in this respect provides for an interesting example in the Scandinavian context.

The article proceeds as follows: After describing the theoretical perspectives of the article in section two, the Danish case as well as the data, method and operationalization of the dependent variable are put forward in section three. Then, section four formulates three hypotheses for how we may expect LIU to influence the substantive representation of gender equality. Section five sets up the basics of the three-step model, while section six analyzes the three hypotheses. It also applies the first step of the model, while section seven applies the second and third steps of this. Finally, section eight provides a conclusion.

2. Theoretical Perspectives and State of the Art

2.1 Substantive Representation of Gender Equality Like most research on gender and representation, this study applies the typologies for representation developed by Pitkin (Pitkin 1967 see also Taylor-Robinson 2014). For Pitkin, “substantively acting for” concerns “*what goes on during representing, the substance or content of acting for others*” (Pitkin 1967, 114). Yet, though I apply the same theoretical concept, the dependent variable applied in this study differs from the one that is normally used, since it concerns the representation of not *women’s interests* but *the interests of gender equality*. This modification is applied because it avoids making some of the constitutive assumptions of the first (e.g., that men may play only second fiddle in representing such interests). Moreover, it does a better job of describing the present Danish political discourse, which is concerned with gender equality, not women’s interests (please see XX, forthcoming). A major focus within research on women’s substantive representation (WSR) is whether female MPs are more inclined to act on women’s interests than men. The findings of these studies differ (Childs and Krook 2006, 21–25; Franceschet 2011, 58–61; Wängnerud 2009, 59–65). Nevertheless, today, it seems rather clear that a specific share of female representatives does not considerably affect the level of WSR (Dahlerup 1988, 2006). Instead, researchers point towards the importance of critical acts (Dahlerup 1988) and critical actors (Childs and Krook 2009). Likewise, scholars inspired by Feminist Institutionalism study the way in which institutions may influence WSR (e.g. Franceschet 2011; Mackay 2014; Rai 2010). Feminist

Institutionalism may be defined from a theoretical perspective, which adds the insights of gender to New Institutionalism (Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay 2011; Mackay and Waylen 2009). Most notably, the insights suggests that institutions are gendered and that they shape political behavior and outcomes in gendered ways (Gains and Lowndes 2014, 525). This study applies the definition of institutions that has been put forward by March and Olson. Accordingly, it assumes that *“An institution is a relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources...”* (March and Olsen 1989, 2006, 3). Within this definition, the concept of rules is exemplified very broadly as routines, procedures, roles, beliefs and culture, among others. Moreover, it is the presence of rules capable of influencing individual behavior that constitutes an institution. Although March and Olson are not particularly clear about the distinction between institutions and rules, they do use two distinct concepts: “formal political institutions”, such as committees and parliaments, and the “institutional rules” that they embody (March and Olsen 1989, 18, 21–24). This study applies the same distinction between political institutions (parliamentary committees, WPAs, etc.) on the one hand and institutional rules on the other (meaning, norms, procedures, etc.). I now turn to the part of the WSR literature that focuses on the effects of formal political institutions.

2.2 WPAs and Parliamentary Bodies with a Gender Equality Mandate

For decades, theoretically rich scholarship on state feminism has investigated how states may work as agents for gender equality (e.g. Hernes, 1987; Hirdman, 1990; Young, 2005). One branch of this literature is research on Women’s Policy Agencies, which were set up in many western democracies during the late twentieth century. WPAs are state organizations with a mandate to push for continuous state actions on gender equality, and owing to extensive and comparative research on these government bodies, we have well-established knowledge on the possible impact of such institutions within a broad range of settings and policy areas (Lovenduski 2005; McBride and Mazur 1995, 2010; Outshoorn 2004).

Inspired by literature on WPAs, studies are slowly starting to explore parliamentary bodies with a gender mandate. So far, such studies have generally been based on interviews with parliamentarians. They indicate that such bodies may add the perspective of gender equality to legislative bills (Ahrens, 2016; Green, 2016; Sawer, Palmieri, & Freidenvall, 2013; Sawer & Turner, 2016) and monitor government actions on gender equality (Holli & Harder, 2016; Sawer & Turner, 2016). Additionally, they describe how such bodies facilitate interaction between parliaments and women's movements (Grace, 2013; Green, 2016; Johnson & Josefsson, 2016) and encourage specialization in gender equality (Costa 2016). These early descriptions encourage feminist scholarship to devote more attention to these institutions. However, as noted by Holli and Harder, the theoretical frame for such studies cannot rest exclusively on findings of the literature on WPAs, as WPAs and the surroundings in which they operate are different from parliamentary committees (Holli and Harder 2016). Hence, such studies need to include legislative literature on the particularities of the parliamentary setting in question. I now turn to this.

2.3 Parliamentary Committees in the Danish Parliament

An important difference between WPAs and parliamentary bodies with a gender mandate is that it may not be readily assumed that the latter acts as *one* actor to the same extent as the former. This is at least the case within the Danish parliament, in which committees in relation to policy questions are best considered arenas for the political parties, not actors (Jensen, 1995, 2002a). Danish party groups, on the other hand, may be viewed as very unified actors (Damgaard 1997, 81–85). Accordingly, though LIU – as described in section 3.1 – has a feministⁱⁱ design, we would not expect LIU to make MPs from different parties work together in perfect harmony to pursue feminist ends. Still, the New Institutionalist perspective applied in this study leads us to expect that the establishment of LIU might have had some kind of impact. Accordingly, as noted by Cohen et al., committees are to be regarded as institutions to which a range of problems, solutions and choice opportunities are assigned (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972; Leknes and Rommetvet 1999). This also holds true for the Danish parliament, in which Jensen, for example, has shown how the parliamentary committee system gives rise to yet other institutions in Danish party groups (Jensen 1995, 2002). Therefore, due to the general

importance of committees and the particular mandate and focus of LIU, I assume that LIU has the potential to increase substantive representation of gender equality because it creates a new arena for problems, solutions and choice opportunities for actors devoted to this type of representation.

However, as also described by the New Institutional literature, it is by no means certain that the new committee will have this effect (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972).

3. Case, Data and Operationalization of the Dependent Variable

3.1 The Danish Case, LIU and PØU

The section above shows the important dynamics of the Danish Parliament. In turn, as far as the case goes, it should be noted that parliament (the Folketing) is a unicameral parliament with 179 members. It currently has 25 legislative committees, most of which have 29 members. Within the period studied, parliament had nine parties and changing minority coalition governments, which is the most common type of government in Denmark (for information on Danish government dynamics, please see Christiansen and Clemmesen 2015). Moving to the two committees in question, PØU was among the first committees which were set up in the parliament in 1972. Once a very prestigious committee, housing party group leaders, PØU had developed into what one interviewee referred to as *“a bucket of trash – of issues that did not fit into other committees”* (parliamentarian, LEFT) during the past decades. Another interviewee noted its prestige as *“rock bottom”* (parliamentary official). LIU was established on a feminist initiative in order to raise different types of parliamentary actions concerned with gender equality. Its establishment was originally opposed by center-right wing parties and debated three times in parliamentⁱⁱⁱ, before it was finally agreed upon in spring 2011 as part of a political compromise. The mandate of LIU states that the committee should adopt an overall and across-the board view of the area of gender equality within parliament (Parliament decision B 135, 2011-12). In general, we may therefore define the committee as feminist in the way in which this term is applied in this article (see note ii). Since the very beginning, LIU has had more female than male members as well as a larger share of female members than PØU (see Holli and Harder 2016, 799).

The impact of LIU on the substantive representation of gender equality is analyzed by comparing the level^{iv} of different actions, in the periods before and after LIU was set up. The period before LIU was set up runs from 2004 to 2011. I refer to this as “the pre-LIU period”. The period after LIU was set up runs from 2011 to the present. I refer to this as “the post-LIU” period.^v In the *pre*-LIU period, center-right parties formed the government; in the *post*-LIU period, center-left parties formed the government. This circumstance makes it possible to isolate the otherwise potential interfering variable of changing political majorities in parliament. Moreover, this enables a hard test of the impact of the new committee. This has to do with the circumstance where, all other things being equal, we would expect the level of substantive representation of gender equality to be higher during the pre- than post-LIU period. This follows from 1) that parties on the left are generally more active in promoting issues on gender equality than those on the right (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007, 560; Celis and Erzeel 2015; Feifer 2005) and 2) that the tools for parliamentary actions provided by Danish committees are normally applied by political parties in opposition (Jensen 1995, 2002). Therefore, the 0-hypothesis is that the level of the dependent variable is lower *post*- than *pre*-LIU, since center-right-wing parties were in opposition in the *post*-LIU period.

3.2 Method and Data

As mentioned, the article applies a mixed method. First of all, it uses quantitative data on different types of actions that are performed in parliamentary committees. These data have been retrieved through the parliament’s online database, which stores information on committee questions to ministers, legislative bills, parliamentary speeches, etc.^{vi} In addition, bibliographical data on MPs and data on the mentioning of different words within the Danish media are applied. The latter have been retrieved through Infomedia, which is an online database that stores articles from the Danish media from 1990 to the present day. Second, qualitative document analyses of parliamentary documents (notably bills and speeches concerning the establishment of a committee on gender equality) have been applied. Finally, 15 semi-structured interviews, with 14 interviewees, have been conducted in

spring 2013 and fall 2015 mainly. The interviewees include 11 parliamentarians and three committee officials. Of the 11 parliamentarians, all were specifically engaged in parliamentary work on gender equality, and ten were women. Half of the interviewees were from center-right wing parties, while the other half were from center-left wing parties.

3.3 Operationalization of the Dependent Variable

As pointed out by Franceschet, the way in which studies operationalize substantive representation may influence the findings of a study. Hence, studies which measure substantive representation in terms of process more often find indications on this type of representation than studies that apply output for such a measure (Franceschet 2011). In this study, I focus on process – specifically actions performed in relation to the committee responsible for gender equality.

Today, the question of how to decide which representative actions (or outputs, or outcomes for that matter) that represent the interests of women is a matter of much scholarly debate and innovation. Some scholars suggest that the decision on what actions count as WSR may be resolved empirically by applying the interests promoted by women's organizations (e.g. Dahlerup 2014). Others believe that the construction of women's interests, as they are formulated by actors themselves, should be used (Celis et al. 2014; Saward 2006; Squires 2008). In this study, if a representative action is an action on gender equality or not is defined by the *processual context* in which it is performed. Hence, when possible, I follow two processual rules for establishing whether an action concerns gender equality: 1) if the action is directed toward the minister of gender equality or 2) if the action is performed within the context of LIU, I count it as a representative action concerning gender equality^{vii}. This operationalization is based on the assumption that by conducting an action in regard to a particular minister or in a specific committee, the representative aims to frame it as an action concerning gender equality^{viii}. Accordingly, this operationalization strives to apply the perspective of the actors.

4. The Expected Effects of LIU

The study is concerned with the effect of LIU on three different types of actions that may be defined as substantive representation of gender equality: 1) committee actions that seek to control government actions of relevance to gender equality, 2) committee actions that seek to provide MPs with specialized knowledge on gender equality, and 3) actions through which civil society seeks to interact with the committee responsible for gender equality. These actions are chosen because of their centrality within parliamentary work. Since it has been established elsewhere that LIU does not try to gender mainstream legislative bills (Holli and Harder 2016), the committee's impact on this central activity will not be investigated here. Below, I propose three hypotheses concerning the impact of LIU on each type of action. These are deducted on the basis of other research (H1 and H 2 in particular) and the anticipation of relevant actors concerning the effect of LIU (H2 and H3). How each hypothesis is measured is explained within the analysis (section six).

4.1 Control

Comparative legislative studies show that Danish committees are especially powerful in terms of gathering information from the government (Holli and Harder 2016; Mattson and Strøm 1995, 293–94). Interviews have indicated that parliamentary bodies with a specific gender mandate elsewhere have effectively monitored government actions on gender equality (Gonzalez and Sample 2010; Sawyer and Turner 2016). It is therefore reasonable to expect parties in LIU, which are not in government, to do the same, especially since LIU explicitly lists this among its duties ("Parliament Decision B 135", 2011-11). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be put forward: ***H1) LIU controls the actions of gender equality performed by the executive branch to a higher degree than PØU.***

4.2 Specialization

According to the literature on Danish committees, committees are best considered arenas in which parliamentarians specialize in certain policy areas (Damgaard 1977; Jensen 1995, 2003). Since increased specialization in gender equality was a potential effect of LIU, which all party groups stressed during the debates on the formation of a committee on gender equality (Udvalget for

forretningsordenen, 2006, 2), the following may be expected: **H2) LIU allows its members to specialize in gender equality to a higher degree than PØU.**

4.3 Interaction with Civil Society

According to Sawyer et al., a close linkage between committees on gender equality on the one hand and women's NGOs on the other hand may have positive effects on MPs' commitment to representing gender-specific concerns in parliament (Sawyer, Palmieri, and Freidenvall 2013, 7). Since the minister of gender equality decided to abolish a parliamentary network consisting of parliamentarians and NGOs ("Udvalget vedrørende Internationalt Ligestillingsarbejde") when LIU was set up because he expected that such interaction would now occur within LIU (Ligestillingsudvalget 2011-12, LIU alm. del Bilag 18), the following hypothesis can be formulated: **H3) LIU has more contact to civil society on issues of gender equality than PØU.**

5. A Three-step Model for Assessing the Impact of Parliamentary Design

The three-step model is developed on the basis of the dynamics of the Danish parliament (step 1) as well as the literature, which holds that factors other than parliamentary design may influence substantive representation in various ways (steps 2 and 3). This literature is described in detail in section 7.

The model proceeds as follows:

If the analysis of a hypothesis indicates that LIU seems to have affected the level of one of the three representative actions in question, the model is applied to assess whether this effect may be ascribed to LIU. This is done by using three steps:

Step 1: Immediately after the analysis of the hypothesis in section 6, if relevant one or two of two questions are discussed: 1.A) *Is the change unique?* This question is considered by assessing whether the change occurs only in actions related to LIU. Furthermore, 1B) *is the change additional?* This question is considered by checking whether an observed increase within a particular activity related to

LIU is merely caused by activities being transferred to LIU from another committee. Generally, the questions concerning whether a change is unique and additional are considered on the basis on data on actions within the parliament as such as well as in other committees.

As noted by Leknes and Rommetvet, one needs to consider *alternative explanations* when addressing the impact of new parliamentary design (Leknes and Rommetvet 1999). Hence, in section 7, the model considers potential extraneous variables in a second and third step:

Step 2: This step checks for the existence of such variables *in parliament*. According to the literature on substantive representation and gender, especially the arrival of critical actors, e.g., MPs that are especially eager to act on gender equality should be considered as such variables (see Childs and Krook 2008 in particular). Therefore, as explained in greater detail in section 7.1, the second step concerns the arrival of such critical actors during the period in question. Information on this is found based on bibliographic data and data from the Infomedia database.

Step 3: The third step checks for the existence of such extraneous variables *outside parliament*. As I elaborate in section 7.2, in a Danish context, it seems particularly important to check for changes within government action and changes in attention regarding gender equality in spokespersons' constituencies and in society at large (e.g., Green-Pedersen 2011). The first of these potential variables is checked though data on government action, which is found within the parliament's database. The second and third are checked through data from Infomedia. Had the timespan of the study been longer, I would also have systematically looked into developments concerning mobilizations in civil society concerned with gender equality.

Figure 1 summarizes the three steps.

[Fig. 1 to be placed here]

6. Analysis

6.1 Has LIU Increased Parliamentary Control?

Parliamentary committees primarily monitor the government through questions to ministers for written or oral answer (Jensen 1995). Such committee questions may be posed at the so-called “legal part” or “general part”, of which the latter refers to the part of the committee’s work that does not concern bills. According to Jensen, it is reasonable to assume that questions posed at general part monitor the government (Jensen 1995, 48–49, 89). Hence, they may serve as an indicator of control with the government.

Committee actions aiming to oversee the government can be analyzed in three different ways, which test a) the general volume of such actions, b) actions concerned with overseeing the committees’ area of responsibility (the minister of gender equality) and c) actions concerned with horizontal oversight (ministers other than the minister of gender equality).

General Oversight: The general effort by which PØU/LIU tries to control the government may be measured by comparing the number of questions for written and oral answers posed by PØU and LIU, respectively, at “general part”. Figure 2 shows the development in these questions.

[Fig. 2 to be placed here]

As the figure illustrates, the annual number of both types of questions is a little higher in the *post*- than in the *pre*-LIU period. However, looking into the average annual increase, only the increase in questions for oral answer is significant (average of 4 per year *pre*-LIU and per year 9 *post*-LIU, $P < 0.05$). Since there is no general increase in questions posed in the parliament, as during this period, the increase does not seem to be a reflection of a general development in parliament (on average, 8222 of such questions are posed annually *pre*-LIU and 10039 are posed *post*-LIU, $P > 0.05$) (step 1A) However, the number of questions may easily be affected by government activity or the societal agenda. I discuss this below.

Oversight Concerning the Committees' Area of Responsibility: The effort of PØU/LIU concerning this particular type of control activity may be measured through the degree to which the committees posed questions to the minister of gender equality at "general part". Unfortunately, because of the way in which questions are stored in the parliamentary database, this effort may be measured in the period 2004-12 only. Although the average number of these questions actually increases after LIU was set up, the increase is not significant (average of 26 per year *pre*-LIU and 36 per year *post*-LIU, $P > 0.05$). Applying step 1B in the model shows that only in 2009-10 does the Committee on Employment pose most questions to the minister on gender equality. Accordingly, during the period (2004-2013), PØU/LIU is the committee that poses by far the most questions to this minister.

Horizontal Oversight: As noted by Jensen, the degree to which a committee asks questions for oral answers to other than its corresponding minister indicates the committee's effort to work across sectors (Jensen 2014, 73). Already, it has been shown elsewhere that compared with the Rural Districts and Islands Committee (ULØ), LIU does not do this to a very large extent (Holli and Harder 2016). However, the question has not been explored from a longitudinal perspective. Applying this perspective we see that in the period in question (2004 – 2011) PØU did not ask such questions at all. Consequently though LIU does only ask such questions to a very limited extent, it is nevertheless a new practice.

In sum, having analyzed H1 and applied step 1 of the three-step model, we are able to state that in general LIU controls the actions of gender equality performed by the executive branch to a higher degree than PØU.

6.2 Has LIU Increased Parliamentary Specialization?

Committees within the Folketing are considered places for specialization. Notably, they have three tools for gathering knowledge: public hearings, closed mini-hearings and committee trips (such as participation in a conference or field trips).

In general, all interviewees assign great importance to mini-hearings and committee trips. The quote below is a typical example of the importance assigned.

“The most important function of LIU is that it qualifies the work of its members through hearings and field trips ... especially the [mini-]hearings, which have been excellent ... when you organize these things you can make sure that no matter what people believe, they have knowledge. When they have been at the meeting, they know what the latest research states ... it qualifies the debate ... without the committee it would be impossible to gather all relevant MPs”, spokesperson (RIGHT).

Moving to the quantitative data, I look at the number of hearings, mini-hearings and committee trips in both PØU and LIU. Figure 3 illustrates the number of such activities per year.

[Fig. 3 to be placed here]

The figure shows that the number of hearings drops after LIU was established. Applying step 1A of the three-step model, we see that this is not a general trend, since the number of parliamentary hearings actually increases, though not significantly (on average, 17.6 such hearings are held every year *pre*-LIU and 23.8 are held *post*-LIU, $P > 0.05$). Moreover, LIU introduces mini-hearings, and contrary to the period, *pre*-LIU committee trips seem to have become something LIU engages in several times a year, every year.

Following step 1A in the three-step model, before ascribing the rise in mini-hearings and committee trips to LIU, one has to consider the development of such activities in the parliament as such. I first examine the development in the number of such activities in parliament, which shows a nonsignificant increase (in the Folketing an average of 64.9 committee trips were organized every year *pre*-LIU and 78.8 were organized *post*-LIU, $P > 0.05$). Consequently, the rise within the number of trips in LIU cannot be ascribed to a general trend in parliament. However, the increase in mini-hearings in LIU does also seem to be a new phenomenon in parliament (on average, 46.4 mini-hearings were held in parliament every year *pre*-LIU and 93.8 *post*-LIU, $P < 0.05$). Accordingly, although the interviewees often illustrate

the effects of LIU by reference to the importance of the mini-hearings, the increase in these activities cannot be ascribed to the formation of this committee.

Second, following step 1B in the model, I check whether the activities of specialization have merely been transferred from other committees to LIU. This is done by investigating whether the number of similar activities concerning gender equality decreased after LIU was established, in three committees whose policy areas overlap with those of LIU (the Committee on Employment (BEU), the Committee on Social Affairs (SOC) and the Committee on Legal Affairs (REU). This is not the case. Moreover, since LIU typically invites the other committees to hearings, mini-hearings, etc., one should not be too concerned that such activities in fact decreased in other parts of parliament after LIU was established.

In sum, applying the first step of the model illustrates that the establishment of LIU has not increased the number of mini-hearings or hearings. However, the analysis suggests that LIU has increased the number of committee trips within the committee responsible for gender equality.

6.3 Has LIU Increased Interaction with Civil Society?

In general, the interviewees' opinion on this topic seems to disagree regarding the effect of LIU on the parliament's contact with civil society concerning issues of gender equality. For example, a parliamentary official does not think that LIU has had any effect in this respect. However, a spokesperson (RIGHT) states that, *"When I was elected to the parliament, gender equality was in the Committee on Politics and Economics!! And no one knew where we were!! ... with the establishment of LIU, organizations in all parts of Denmark now know that there is in fact a committee on gender equality!"* Consequently, assessing the impact of LIU on this parameter does not seem to be a question that is best addressed by qualitative interviews. Fortunately, the quantitative data illustrate a differently strong tendency concerning this:

In Denmark, civil society and parliamentary committees may interact through the hearings, mini-hearings and field trips described above. However, all these activities are initiated by committees. In

contrast, civil society may also contact parliament by approaching a committee in writing or by applying to testify orally at a 15-minute meeting (see also Pedersen, Halpin, and Rasmussen 2015). The figure below shows the development in such approaches made to PØU and LIU on matters of gender equality.

[Fig. 4 to be placed here]

From the figure, it appears that written approaches are by far the most common. In addition, the figure shows a huge rise in the annual number of written approaches to the committee responsible for gender equality from the year LIU was set up and onwards (on average, PØU received 5.6 of such approaches per year; LIU received per 19, $p < 0.05$) (see also Holli and Harder 2016).

Moving to step 1A of the model, we should consider whether the increase is caused by a rise in the number of written approaches to parliament overall. This does not seem to be the case, since the annual number of such approaches to all parliamentary committees is rather stable (on average, 2976 per year *pre*-LIU compared to 2953 per year *post*-LIU period, $p > 0.05$).

Following step 1B, we may consider whether civil society actors merely approach LIU *instead* of other committees. A way to test this is to analyze whether the number of written approaches concerning gender equality to committees with policy areas that overlap or intervene with LIU has decreased during the period in which LIU has existed. Because of the large number of such approaches, I have chosen the Committee on Social Affairs (SOC) as sample case. I analyze written approaches made to SOC by NGOs to determine whether the number of actors who approached the committee on two issues that PØU/LIU and SOC share (prostitution and custody of children after parents' divorce) decreased *post*-LIU. In general, the number of such approaches is very low both *pre*- and *post*-LIU, and it did not increase *pre*-LIU (though not significantly) (on average, 1.4 per year *pre*-LIU period compared to 1.8 *post*-LIU, $p > 0.05$).

Since the analysis shows that one NGO in particular approaches LIU (Foreningen Far (The Organization Dad)), it is necessary to examine this particular NGO here. In doing so, I find that the NGO actually experiences considerable growth during 2012^{ix}. However, even when the written approaches made by this organization are excluded, the average number of written approaches to the committee responsible for gender equality is significantly higher *post*- than *pre*-LIU (the annual average number of approaches is 5 of 6 *pre*-LIU and 19 *post*-LIU, $P < 0, 01$). Therefore, the increase does not seem to be caused by changes in the number or the strength of this NGO.

Moving to the question of with whom LIU and PØU interact, the figure below illustrates the level of interaction with different types of actors.

[Fig. 5 to be placed here]

The figure indicates that the increase in written approaches comes from private persons and NGOs in particular. Most approaches from individuals are testimonies that describe episodes of perceived discrimination (mostly due to gender and sometimes other identity markers). In general, such testimonies are most often sent to individual MPs. However, in the new committee, private testimonies seem to have found a new gateway to simultaneously access MPs from all parties with a special interest in gender equality. Another trend is that, in general, a greater variety of organizations approach LIU than PØU. For instance, Foreningen Far did not approach PØU, but it has approached LIU to a considerable degree (see also Holli and Harder 2016). This organization is normally not in the inner circles of NGOs that are consulted on gender equality, for example, at the biannual coffee table talks between leading NGOs on gender equality and the Ministry on Gender Equality. Accordingly, with LIU, this organization has been provided with a way to communicate with relevant parliamentarians.

In sum, LIU has more contact to civil society on issues of gender equality than PØU.

7. Alternative Explanations

This section examines step two and three in the three-step model (figure 1). Hence, I discuss whether other factors inside or outside the parliament may explain increases in the three different types of substantive representation of gender equality.

7.1 STEP 2 in the Model: Alternative Explanations

Inside Parliament

As noted by Childs and Krook (2008), individual actors may play an important role affecting the level of substantive representation of women. Therefore, the arrival of individuals more eager or more capable of acting for gender equality *post*-LIU should be considered a potential interfering variable. Because of a very strict horizontal and vertical division of labor in party groups (Jensen 2002), the pool of such individuals may be reduced to spokespersons on gender equality and party leaders.

Spokespersons: This section checks whether higher skills or eagerness of spokespersons entering the scene *post* LIU may have interfered independently with the dependent variable. Because it is very difficult to identify spokespersons in the Danish parties, I compare only the profiles of the spokespersons before and after the election in 2011. In this comparison, a spokesperson's skills are operationalized as previous parliamentary experience (is the spokesperson incumbent or not?), and eagerness to act on gender equality is measured on the basis of their previous media profile (the number of times a spokesperson has been associated with the word "gender equality" in the media for a period of three years prior to their appointment as spokesperson). This test shows that although only three persons remain spokespersons after the election, the profiles of the group of spokespersons before and after the elections are almost identical in terms of previous experience and prior commitment to the issue of gender equality. Furthermore, considering that women may be slightly more eager to act on gender equality (Feifer 2005), it should be noted that there is no major shift in the gender of the relevant spokespersons; only one of eight spokespersons is a man *pre*- and *post*-LIU.

Party Leadership: Moving to the arrival of party leaders that may have been especially eager to push for an agenda on gender equality, a comparison of the individuals in the 22 most important party group leadership positions ("politisk leder", "gruppeformand" and "politisk ordfører" (Jensen, 2002,

pp. 68, 82–85)) *pre-* and *post*-LIU shows only one such potential relevant change of a leader (this concerns a change in which a former spokesperson on gender equality, MF Pernille Vigsø Bagge (LEFT) replaces a colleague who had no particular record on gender equality, MF Ole Sohn (LEFT)). Furthermore, there is no considerable change in the party group leaders' gender (the number of female leaders increased from nine to ten out of 22 leaders). Hence, the arrival of party leaders does not seem to explain the increases in the different types of substantive representation of gender equality.

7.2 STEP 3 in the Model: Alternative Explanations Outside Parliament

Moving to consider “the parliamentary context”, one should consider: 1) government activities, 2) the level of public attention to issues of gender equality, and 3) changes within constituencies' attention toward issues on gender equality. Below, I explain why these three issues are particularly important.

Government activities: It may be assumed that legislative activities of the government may influence some of the committee's activities, which the article has operationalized as substantive representation of gender equality. For example, a rise in government bills on gender equality may cause NGOs to contact LIU more frequently.

In general, the number of bills allocated to the committee responsible for gender equality increased slightly *post*-LIU. However, the committee still received very few bills (PØU received 2.4 bills on average per year; LIU receives 4.3. $P > 0.05$). The small increase cannot be assumed to have given rise to the increase in different activities.

However, one thing is what the government does; another is what it does not do. Danish feminists will most certainly remember the center-left government that took office after the 2011 election for the latter: The government was the first Danish government to be led by a woman, the Social Democrat Helle Thorning-Schmidt, however once in office, the government parties abandoned several of the

political proposals that they had previously put forward on gender equality^x. This gave rise to extensive criticism that might have manifested through a rise in the number of committee questions posed at “general part”.

A considerable number of such questions asked *post*-LIU concerned the initiatives that were dropped by the government: 38 of 70 questions asked in 2011-12 concerned women on boards; 29 of 102 questions asked in 2012-13 concerned parental leave. However, it is not unusual that one issue causes these many questions to be posed: In 2008-09, 38 of 94 questions asked by PØU concerned one issue only (the internal organization of the government administration involved with gender equality). Consequently, it cannot be concluded that the abandoned initiatives have affected the level of committee questions *post*-LIU in an unusual way. However, that single issues may affect the number of committee questions in such numbers shows the sensibility of these questions and stresses the importance of checking their content when they are used as indicator of a specific type of representation.

Attention to issues of gender equality in constituencies as well as society at large: Since spokespersons are expected to be responsive to the public debate in their area of responsibility (see Jensen 2002), the level of public attention to issues of gender equality should be considered. In addition, although Danish MPs are generally slightly more concerned with representing their party than their district (Damgaard 1997, 80–85), it seems reasonable to assume that MPs want to be reelected. Consequently, one may assume that considerable changes in the attention to gender equality in a member’s constituency will affect the member’s representative behavior on this issue.

I start by considering whether increased attention to issues of gender equality *within constituencies* may have caused the increase in different types of representation of gender equality. Since right parties were in opposition during the *post*-LIU period and since committee actions are normally taken by members of opposition parties, right-wing constituencies should have paid more attention to issues of gender equality than left-wing constituencies to confirm this alternative hypothesis. However, as

Danish right-wing parties traditionally focus less on gender equality than left-wing parties, this hypothesis is not likely to hold.

An indicator of society's attention to gender equality in society is the degree to which such issues appear in the media. Therefore, I compare occurrences of the words "gender equality" and "minister of gender equality" in the Danish media *pre-* and *post-LIU*^{xi}. The results are illustrated in figure 6.

[Fig. 6 to be placed here]

As the figure shows, gender equality may be a little higher on the media's agenda *post-* than *pre-LIU* (on average, 5075 yearly occurrences *pre-LIU* and 5938 *post-LIU*). The increase, however, is not significant ($P > 0.05$). Hence, the alternative hypothesis that the increases in the representative actions in question are primarily caused by an increase of attention to issues of gender equality in the media does not seem very plausible.

In sum, none of the three alternative explanations considered in step two or three of the model seems to have an influence the substantive representation of gender equality, as measured here.

7. Conclusion

By developing a systematic model for critically assessing the impact of parliamentary design, this article has contributed to the literature on parliamentary design in general and research on parliamentary bodies specialized in gender equality in particular. Applying the three-step model to the increases found in different actions characterized as substantive representation of gender equality, I was not able to disconfirm that LIU has increased the volume of parliament's interaction with civil society. In addition, I could not disconfirm that the Committee has increased parliament's control of the government on issues of gender equality. In contrast, LIU did not seem to have increased specialization in any considerable way.

Moving to the importance of the method and data, the study illustrates the importance of applying a mixed method. Accordingly, as noted in section 6.2, had I used only interviews, the conclusion would probably have stressed the importance of mini-hearings to a much greater degree than this study ends up doing. Moreover, the importance of applying quantitative data when trying to determine the impact of institutional design was further illustrated by the fact that the interviewees did not agree on the effect of LIU concerning parliament's contact with civil society. The quantitative data, however, illustrate very significant trends concerning this development. Therefore, though interviews with relevant MPs may certainly serve as a means for exploring new cases and determine what parameters to investigate, the findings of the study indicate that one should be careful if one tries to assess the impact of parliamentary design on the basis of such interviews alone.

Although studies such as the one described here, which measures the effect of an independent variable on substantive representation in terms of the process, tend to find a higher effect of this variable than studies that measure this in terms of output, the hard test provided by the Danish case seems rather optimistic concerning the potential effects of parliamentary bodies with a gender mandate. Accordingly, even during a period with right-wing parties being the primary actors in LIU, parliamentary control with the government on issues related to gender equality and interaction between parliament and civil society increased. Nevertheless, the study also illustrates that the establishment of such a parliamentary body is not "a magic button", which may be pushed to increase substantive representation in parliament. Accordingly, the rise in parliamentary specialization was not very impressive. Moreover, as shown elsewhere, the effect of LIU on parliament's ability to add the perspective of gender to legislation also did not arise (Holli and Harder 2016).

List of Tables and Figures:

Figure 1: Three-Step Model for Critically Considering the Impact of Parliamentary Design on Different Types of Representation

	Considerations	Operationalization	Step analyzed in the paper
Step one:	Critically assessing increases found:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are increases unique? • Are increases additional? 	Section 6
Step two:	Critically assessing potential extraneous variables <i>inside</i> parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the entrance of critical actors explain the increase? 	Section 7.1
Step three:	Critically assessing potential extraneous variables <i>outside</i> parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does change in government actions explain the increase? • Does change in the attention to issues of gender equality (in constituencies or society at large) explain the increase? 	Section 7.2

Figure 2: Questions Concerning Issues of Gender Equality Posed by PØU/LIU to Ministers for Oral and Written Answers at “General Part”

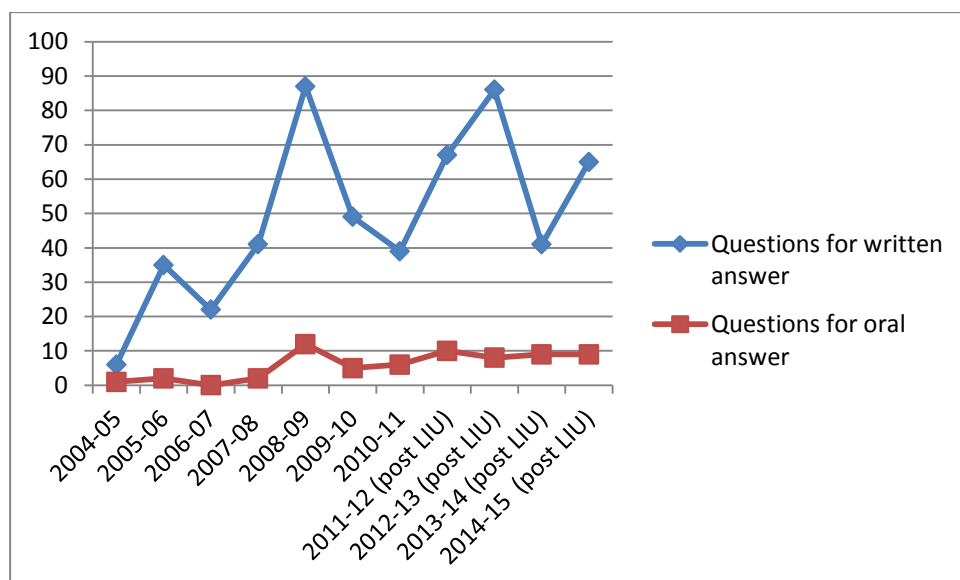


Figure 3: Number of Yearly Hearings, Mini-hearings and Committee Trips Concerning Gender

Equality in PØU/LIU

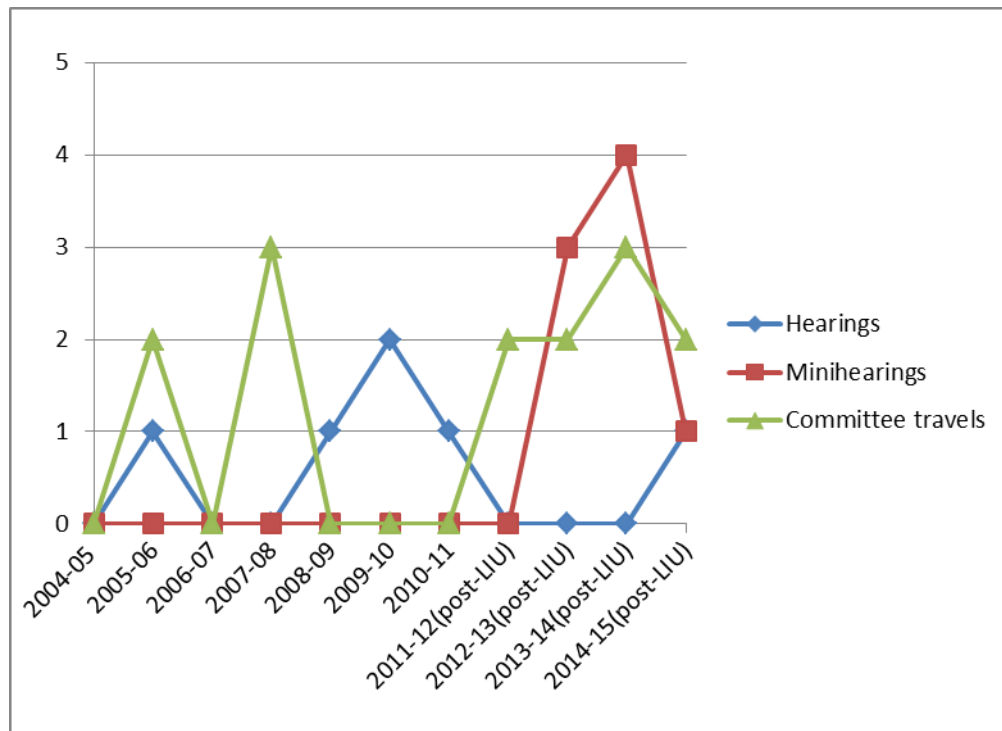


Figure 4: Written and Oral Approaches Concerning Gender Equality Made to PØU and LIU from NGOs

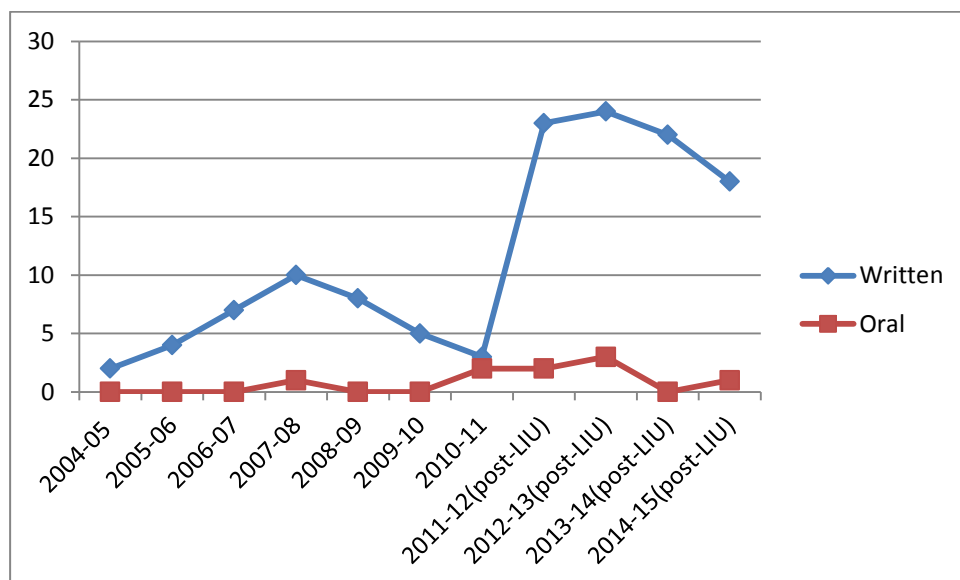


Figure 5: Written Approaches Concerning Gender Equality Made to PØU and LIU from Different Actors

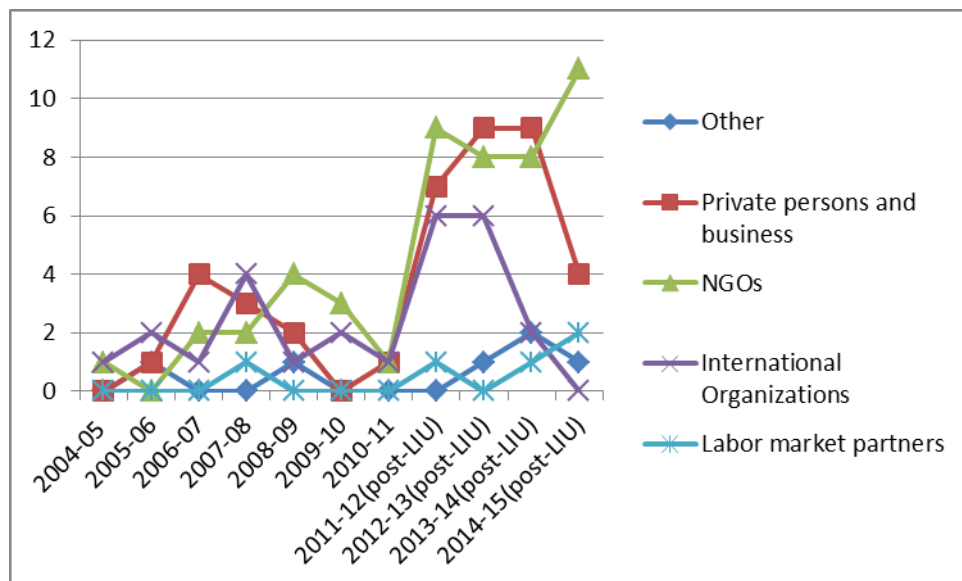
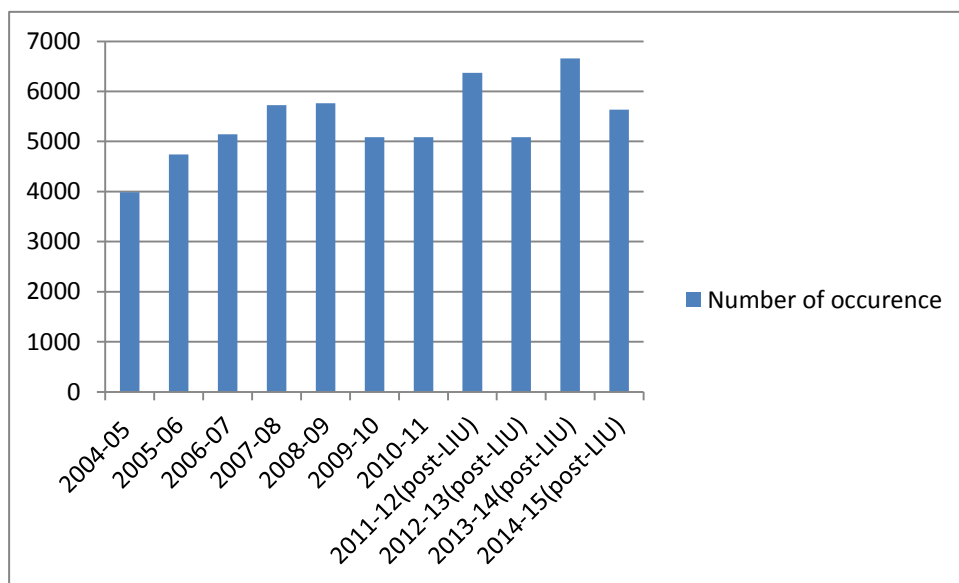


Figure 6: Occurrence of Words on Gender Equality in the Danish Media



Endnotes:

ⁱ The PARLINE Database 20th of November 2016 (IPU, 2016).

ⁱⁱ For the purpose of this study, I define feminism as being concerned with issues of gender equality, meaning situations in which one gender is systematically to be found in an inferior or disadvantageous position. See also XX and XX 2016, p. 794).

ⁱⁱⁱ B94 in plenary session 2004-05, B 83 in plenary session 2005-06, B 114 in plenary session 2008-09 and finally B 135 in plenary session 2010-11, which was passed.

^{iv} I apply the term “level” as one could also apply the terms “extent”, “scope” or “degree”.

^v The pre-LIU period runs from October 2004 to October 2011. The post-LIU period runs from October 2011 to July 2015. Accordingly, the latter period includes only the months during which center-left parties were in government.

^{vi} The database is available at: <http://www.ft.dk/Dokumenter.aspx>.

^{vii} Unfortunately, these rules are not applicable concerning the actions illustrated in Figures 2, 3, 4, 5 as well as Table 2. In these cases, I have made an individual assessment of whether the particular action is framed as an action concerning gender equality.

^{viii} Please note that this operationalization captures actions to promote and actions to prevent gender equality.

^{ix} According to e-mail correspondence with the president of this organization, it experiences a doubling of its webpage visitors at this point in time.

^x These suggestions concerned quotas for the number of women on boards (“women quotas”), parental leave for fathers (“daddy quotas”) and criminalization of customers who buy sex (“criminalization of prostitution”).

^{xi} This test was conducted in Infomedia, a database covering the Danish media. The number of hits was measured for each year (one hit equals one media report in which the word “gender equality” or “minister of gender equality” is mentioned).

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