

Patterned and Predictable?  
UK Parliamentary Political Careers, 1979-  
2010

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# Background and motivation

- Professionalisation of parliamentary careers
- King (1981)
  - Career politician ‘taken over top posts from those who have had career outside Parliament’
  - Politics facilitation occupation
- Rush (1994)
  - members serve longer
  - increasing proportion reach ministerial positions (> number of positions available)

# What we know

- Allen (2013) links pre-parliamentary experience and career trajectory
  - Occupation matter: pre-parliamentary Westminster experience associated with earlier age at election, reach higher office, faster
  - 1997 cohort (N= 242); chi-sq test
- Vannoni & John (2014)
  - Educational and occupational background matter ; gender does not
  - 1997-2010 cohorts (N= 764); social sequence analysis

# Research questions

- Are there observable patterns or types of parliamentary careers?
  - Yes
- Do patterns vary party?
  - A little
- What exogenous factors predict career trajectory?
  - Not occupation; female; age at first election

# Data

- Data sources
  - Parliamentary Candidates UK (PCUK)
  - British Constituency Electoral Results
    - Who's Who biography database (UK)
    - House of Commons Library
    - Butler's British Political Facts (2014)
- Observe MPs elected from 1979-2010
  - Yearly measure of career 'state'
- Configurations
  - 4 election cycles under Conservative govt; 3 under Labour and 1 Con/LD Coalition

# Measuring careers

- *Gay et al. (2010)*: 900+ roles MPs can occupy during their parliamentary career
- *Vannoni & John (2014)*
  - 3 point scale: Backbench, Frontbench, Great Offices of State
- *Allen (2013)*
  - 5 point scale: Backbench; PPS; Under-secretary; (Shadow) Ministers; (Shadow) Cabinet Minister/Chief Whips

# 11 point scale

Code	Office	Allen
PM	Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition	5
GO	Other Great Offices of State*	5
HD	Other Heads of Department*	5
CM	Ministers in Cabinet Office*	4
MP	Ministries of State in HO FO and Financial Secretary*	4
MO	Other Ministries of State*	3
UC	Under-Secretary of State in CO*	3
UP	Under-Secretary of State in HO, FO and HMT*	2
UO	Other Under-Secretaries of State*	2
PS	PPS to Under Secretary of State	2
BB	Backbenchers	1

(\* = includes shadow equivalents)

# Analytic approach

- 1. Social sequence analysis
  - Examines duration and order of careers; treats data as categorical time-series
- Optimal Matching (OM) techniques creates dyadic distance measures between sequences, by comparing the states they are in at each period
  - Each sequence is compared to each other sequence once, and their distance is measured by summing up all the state differences
  - K means clustering using the distance matrix sequence
- 2. Modelling the clusters
  - Multinomial logit model of clusters w/ exogenous predictors



- Anthony Steen: BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-PS-PS-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB
- Roy Galley: BB-BB-BB-BB-BB
- Brooks Newmark: BB-BB-MO-MO-MO-MO
- Andrew Smith: BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-HD-HD-HD-HD-MO-HD-HD-HD-HD-HD-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-BB
- Tony Blair : BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-HD-HD-HD-HD-GO-GO-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM
- Tessa Jowell: BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-MO-MO-MO-MO-HD-HD-HD-HD-HD-HD-CM-CM-CM

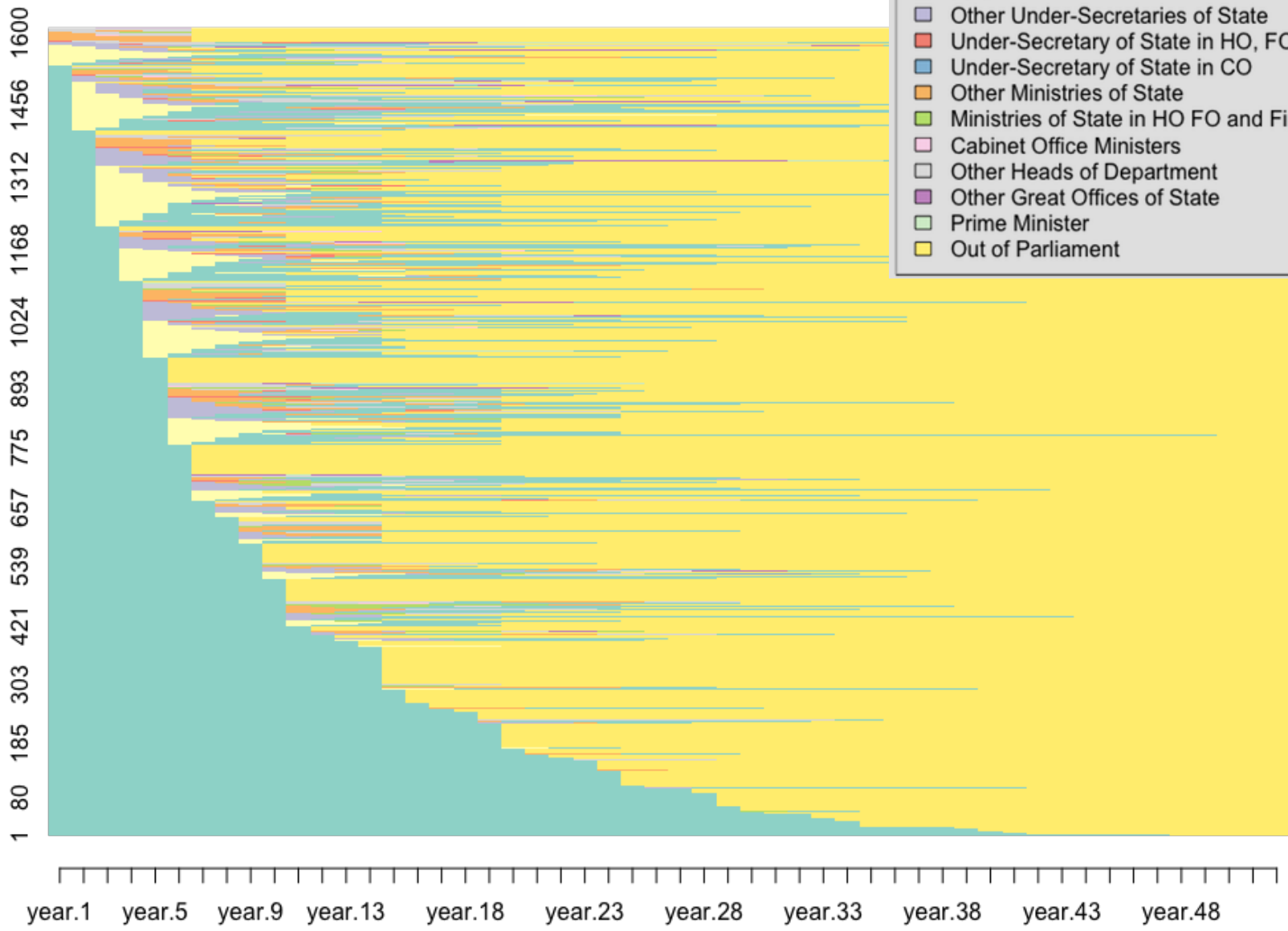
# How to treat careers of different lengths?

- Because SSA is interested in time in each state, different career lengths pose something of an issue
- Normalisation
  - Standardizing the sequence length: treat each stage as a fraction of the overall career, thus ending up with comparable sequences
  - Stretched sequences have lower state variation...
  - But variation is low anyway: most MPs spend life on BB and 75% of MPs < 3 states

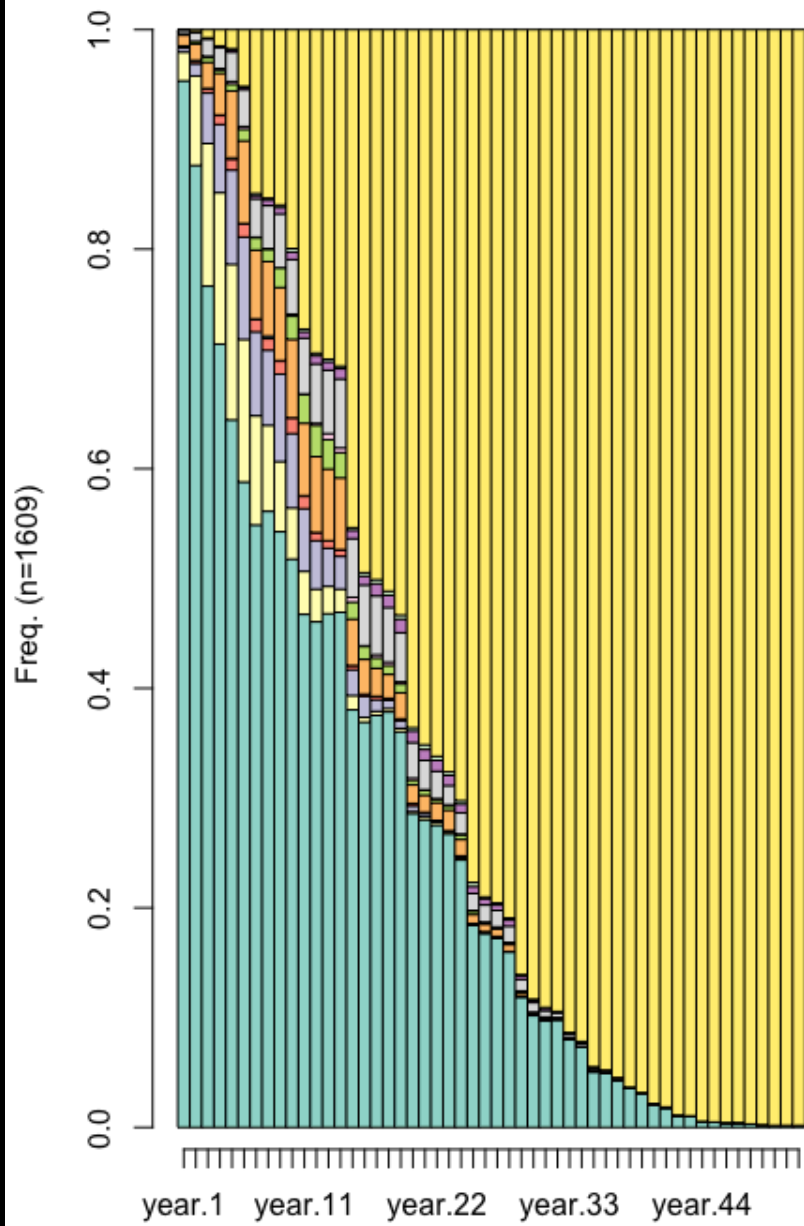
# Career / Years Plot

- Backbencher
- PPS
- Other Under-Secretaries of State
- Under-Secretary of State in HO, FO and HMT
- Under-Secretary of State in CO
- Other Ministries of State
- Ministries of State in HO FO and Financial Secretary
- Cabinet Office Ministers
- Other Heads of Department
- Other Great Offices of State
- Prime Minister
- Out of Parliament

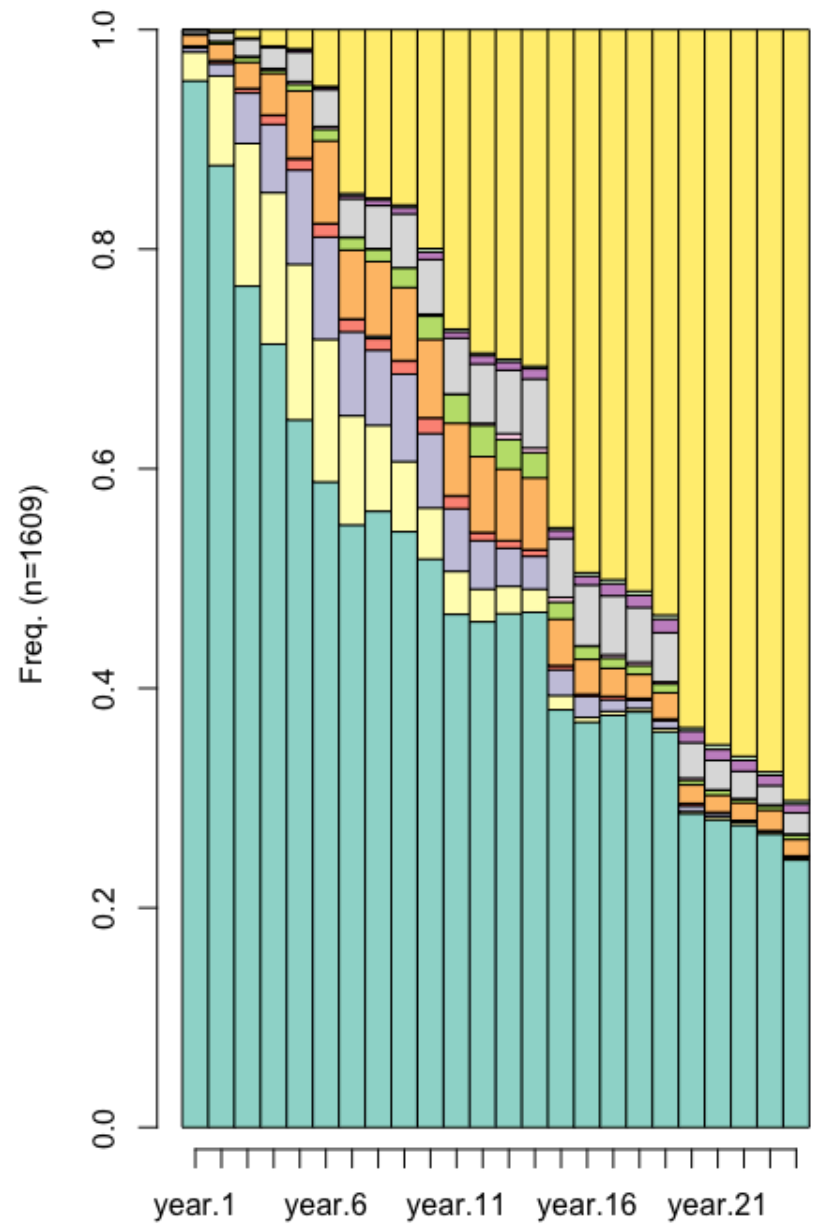
1609 seq. (n=1609), sorted



### 52 Year Sequence



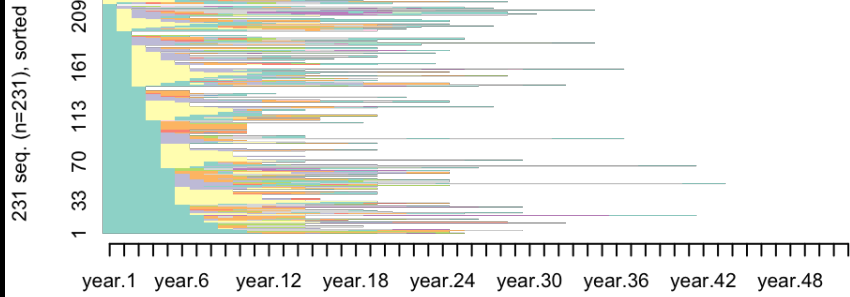
### 24 Year Sequence



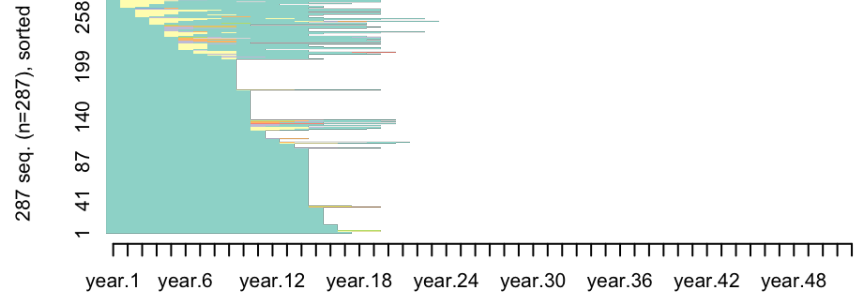
# Types of parliamentary careers

- 1. **Middle managers**: promoted early; steady progression; successful careers
- 2. **Two termers**: short career, almost exclusively backbench
- 3. **Atypicals**: late bloomers in terms of promotion; varied career lengths; career cut short by some event
- 4. **Steady as you go**: long career on the backbench
- 5. **High flyers**: promoted quickly; reach highest levels of office; shorter careers

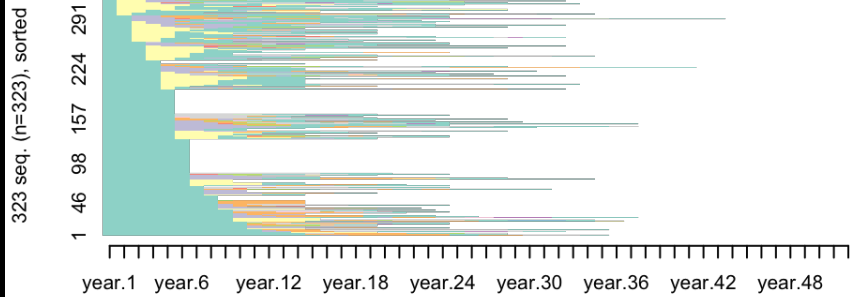
Sequences by Cluster - 1



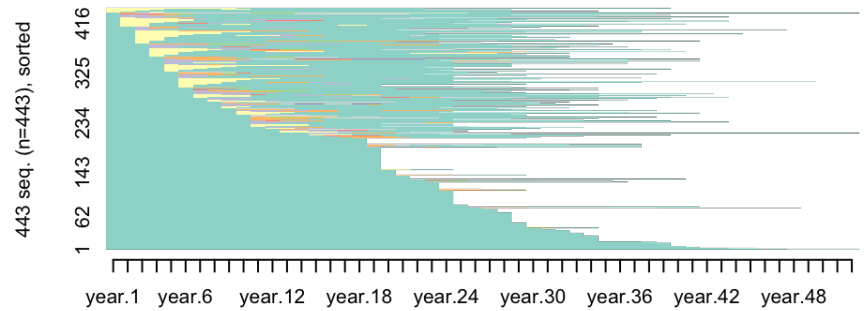
Sequences by Cluster - 2



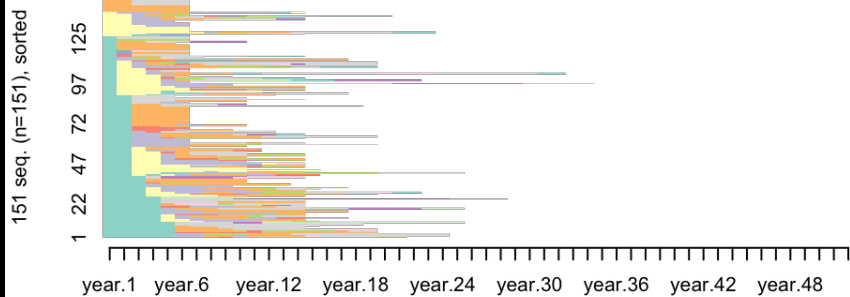
Sequences by Cluster - 3



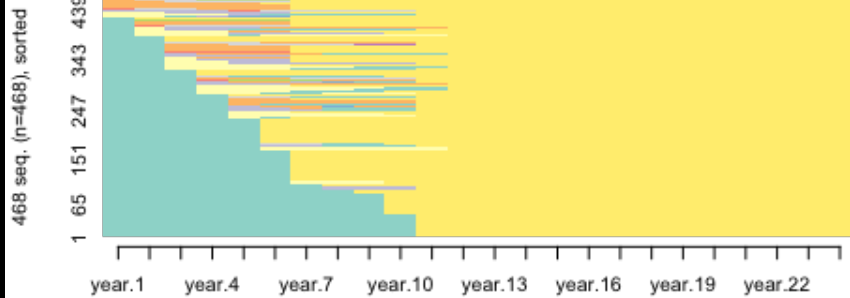
Sequences by Cluster - 4



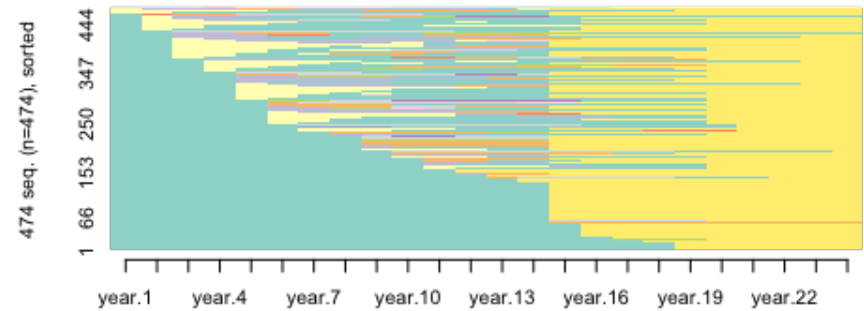
Sequences by Cluster - 5



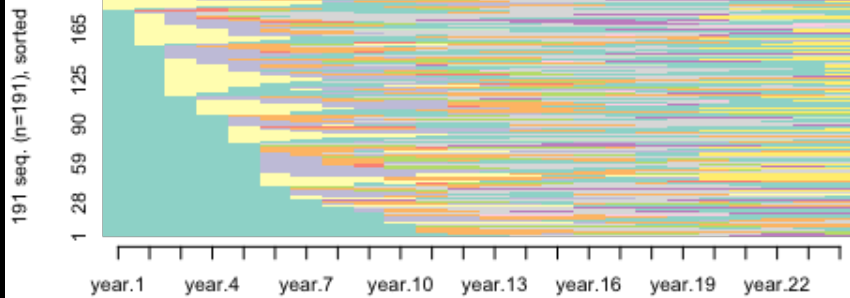
**k-Means Sequence Plot - 1**



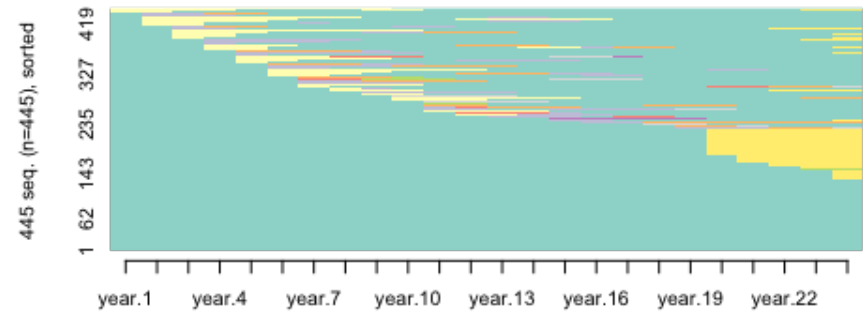
**k-Means Sequence Plot - 2**



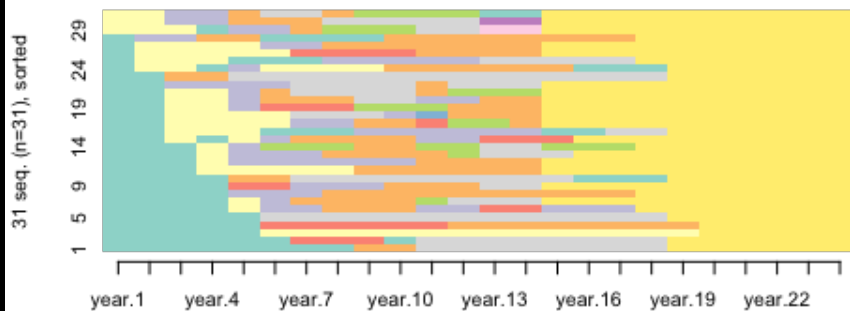
**k-Means Sequence Plot - 3**



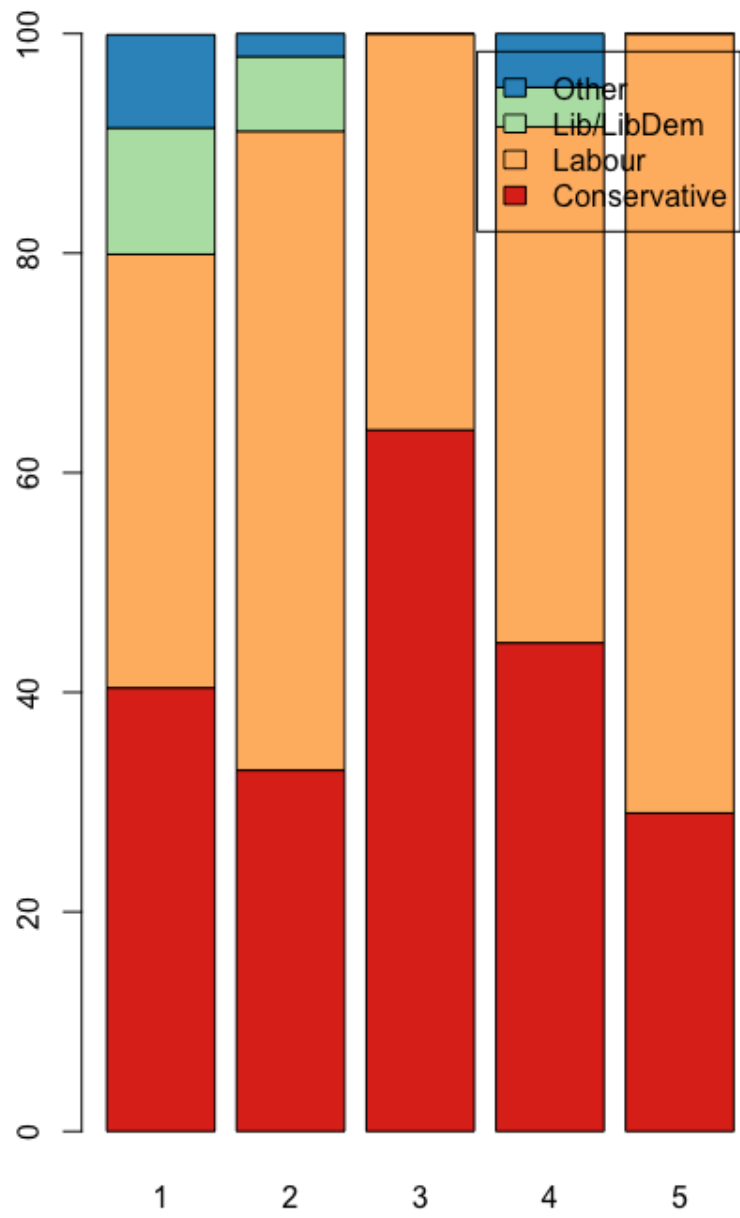
**k-Means Sequence Plot - 4**



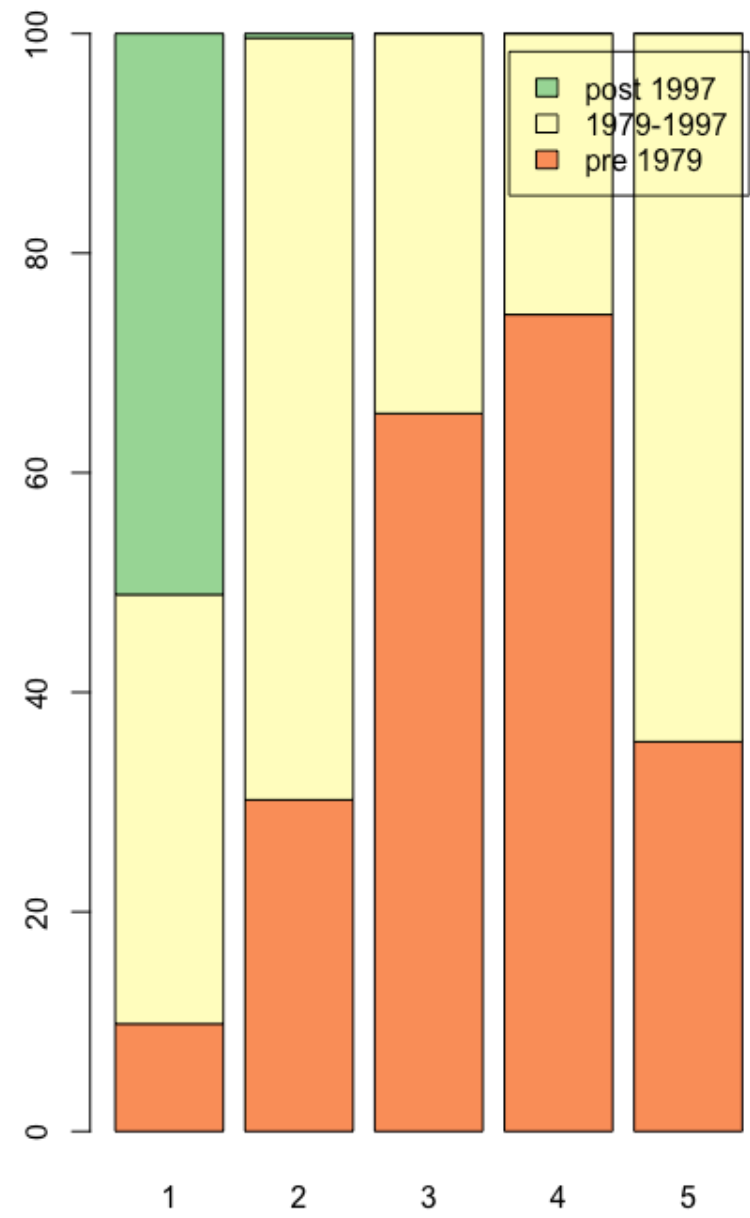
**k-Means Sequence Plot - 5**



Party

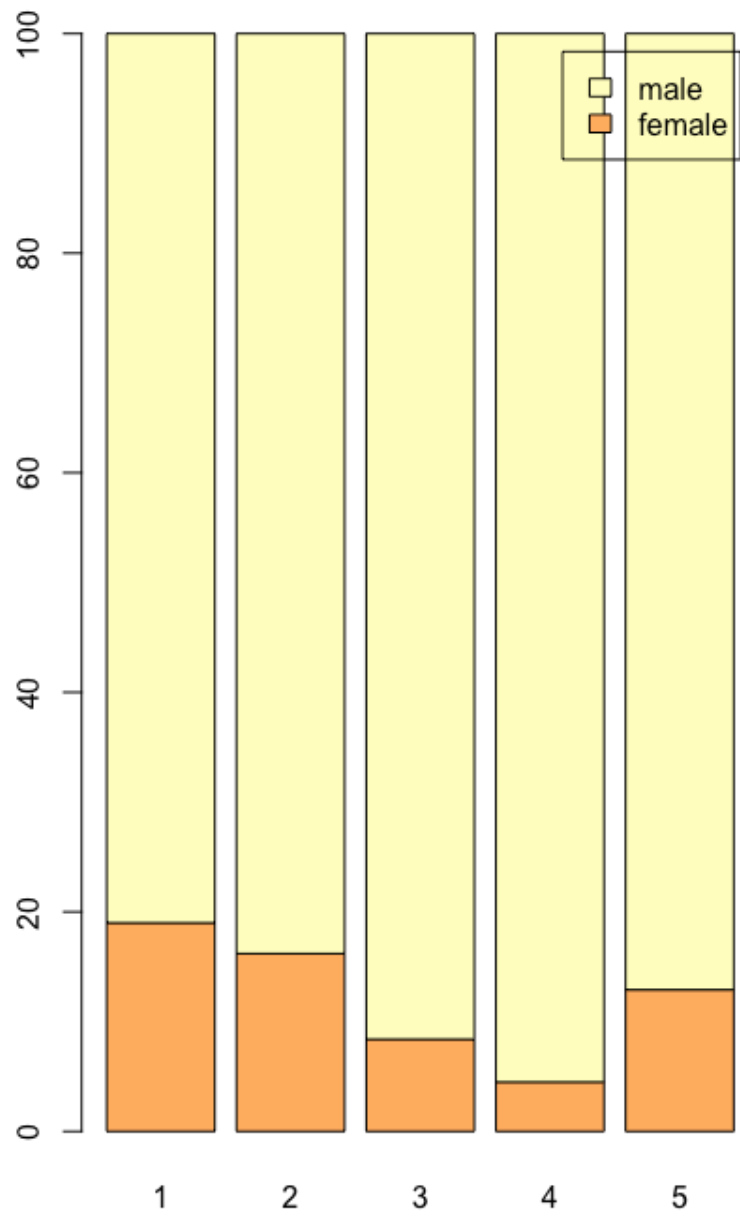


Cohort

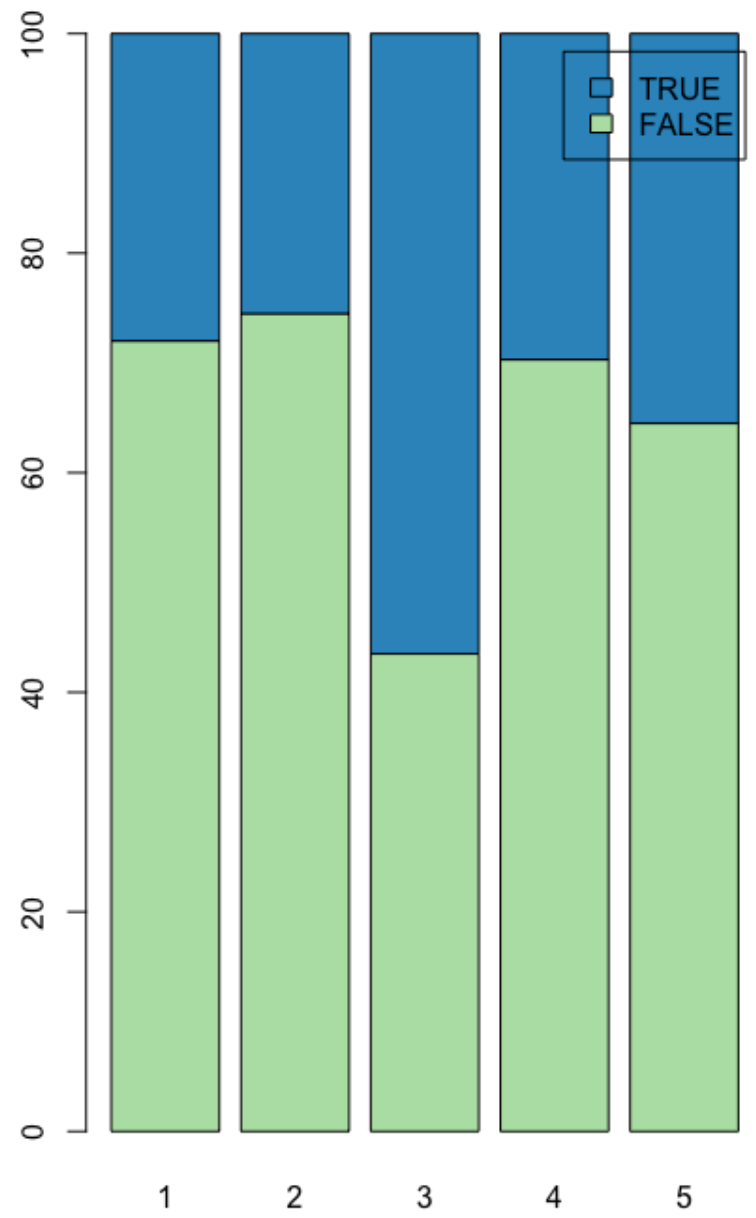




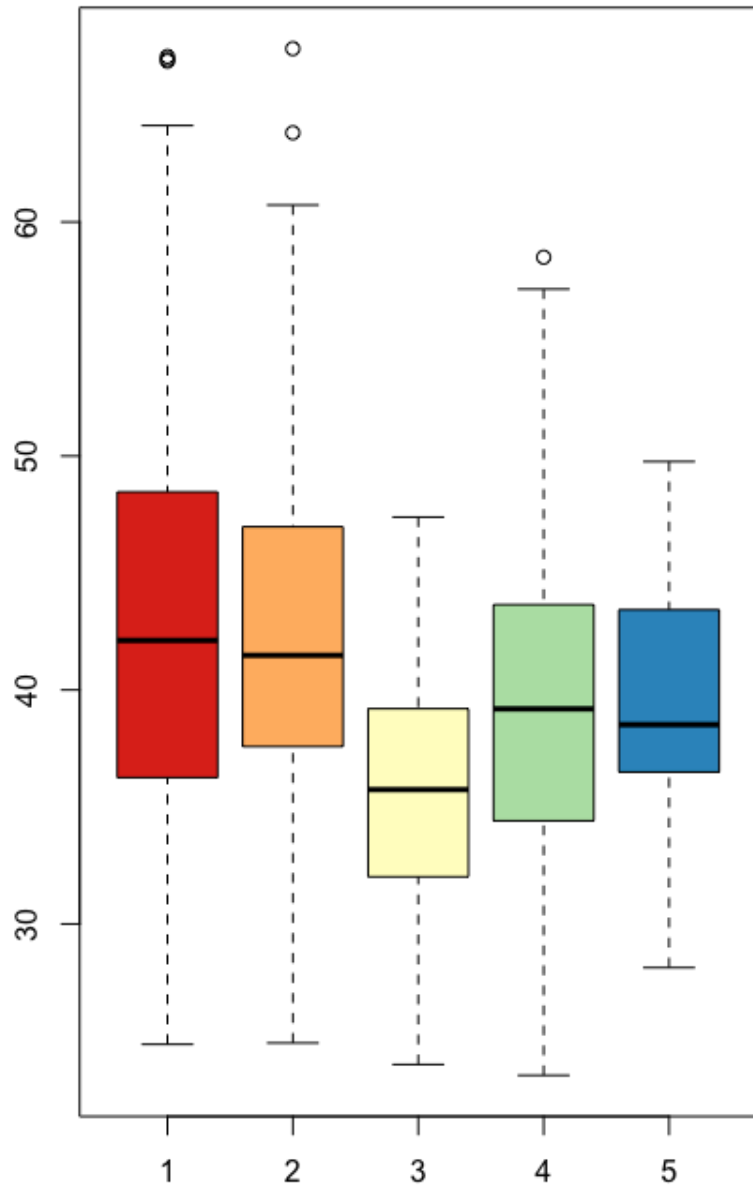
Gender



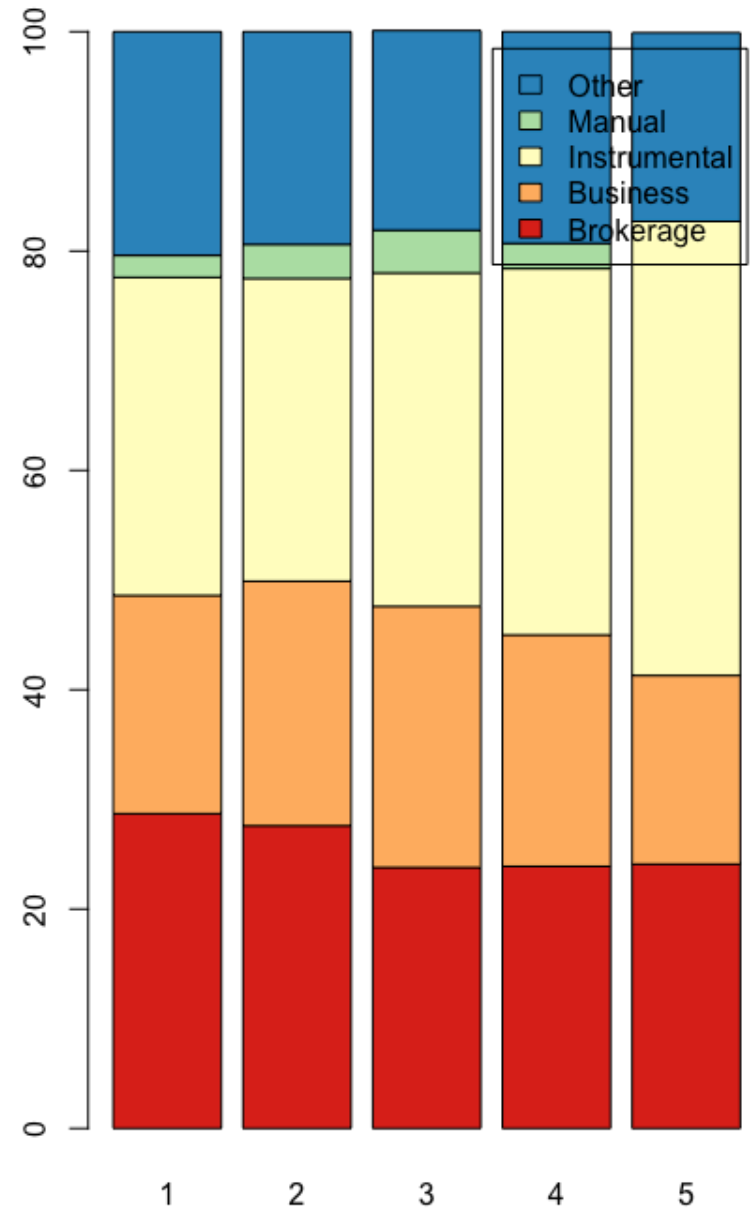
Oxbridge



### Age at first election



### Occupation



# Modelling the clusters

ref= short BB	All (mnl)	Lab (mnl)	Cons (mnl)
female	+		+ (1,2)
oxbridge	- (1,2,3)	- (1,2)	- (1,2)
age at first election (log)	+	+ (1,2)	+
yrs in local govt (log)	+ (1,2,3)	+	
marginality (log)	- (2)		
occ: business			
occ: instr			
occ: manual			
occ: other			
labour	+ (1,2,3)		
first year	+	+	+

# Next steps

- Differences between our findings and Allen; V&J
  - Our findings are robust using Allen's 5-pt scale
  - Is occupation a recent phenomenon?
- How best to deal with truncated cases?
  - Average career?
  - Early career?
- Towards a theory of parliamentary careers
  - Equivalent of 'ambition theory' for the UK?
  - Offices exist, but do 'structures'?