

Electoral incentives for territorial representation in the European Parliament

Mihail Chiru¹
University of Oxford

Abstract

While many citizens are indifferent about the EU, most MEPs are invisible in national politics and European Parliament elections are not fought based on parliamentary activity records, some legislators still pursue territorial interests or foster constituency linkages. What explains such behavior? Drawing on written questions data from the 6th and the 7th terms of the European Parliament (EP) this article shows that despite the virtual absence of an electoral connection in EP elections, electoral system features, and electoral marginality influence the MEPs' engagement in geographical representation. Electorally marginal MEPs ask more questions on regional and national topics as do MEPs elected from STV systems. There is no evidence for a differential effect of district magnitude depending on ballot structure.

¹ E-mail: chiru.mihail@gmail.com, phone: +447518407676; postal address: Russian and East European Studies, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, 11 Bevington Road, OX2 6LH, Oxford. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0811-5457.

Introduction

While many citizens are indifferent about the EU (Van Ingelgom 2014), most Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are rather invisible in national politics (Gattermann and Vasilopoulou 2015) and European Parliament elections are not fought based on parliamentary activity records, some legislators still pursue territorial interests or attempt to build constituency linkages. This article argues that electoral marginality and electoral system features are part of the explanation for this behavior.

MEPs submit frequently parliamentary questions to engage in oversight of their national executives: legislators from opposition parties ask parliamentary questions to obtain information on the actions of the national government (Proksch and Slapin 2011), or they use questions as a form of fire alarm oversight when the issue at stake concerns their Member State - alerting the Commission about violations of EU law or failures to implement EU policies (Jensen et al. 2013). Written parliamentary questions are also used for the oversight of EU agencies (Font and Pérez Durán 2016), especially by MEPs from national opposition parties.

But parliamentary questions can also serve the representation of territorial interests (Brack and Costa 2019). I argue that the MEPs' usage of parliamentary questions should also be conceived as a linkage mechanism to their constituents, comprising a broader variety of regional and national issues and going beyond their party's government - opposition status. The strength of this linkage could be shaped by the institutional and personal circumstances of their election. Thus, the research question this study addresses is: to what extent do electoral system formulas, district magnitude and electoral marginality influence the MEPs' likelihood of asking questions related to their national or regional constituency? Evidence of such a relationship would be puzzling given the weakness of the electoral connection at EU level.

The virtual absence of an electoral connection in the European Union (EU) elections, i.e. the fact that voters do not reward or punish Members of European Parliament (MEPs) for their legislative behavior is the standard view among EU scholars (Judge and Earnshaw 2008; Hobolt and Høyland 2011; Hix and Høyland 2013). Instead, as the second-order model (Reif and Schmitt 1980) argued, voters use European elections as an opportunity to punish domestic governments, to engage in protest voting, to vote sincerely for small parties or to experiment with new ones (Franklin 2006).

Nevertheless, previous studies have still found evidence that electoral system factors influence legislative behavior in the EP, although the direction of this relationship is not always straightforward. Høyland et al. (2019) illustrated that MEPs elected from candidate-centered systems participate less in parliamentary activities than their colleagues elected from party-centered systems. A finding which contradicts this claim is that MEPs elected under candidate-centered system seem more likely to ask written questions (Sozzi 2016b).

In this article I focus on how electoral system features and electoral vulnerability shape the engagement of MEPs in a type of legislative behavior that might increase their visibility and consequently help them, if not to win re-election at least to gain future regional or national office. The analyses of two samples of written questions from the 6th and the 7th term of the EP show that electoral system formulas, electoral marginality and to a smaller extent district magnitude shape the legislators' engagement in geographical representation, even after controlling for other potential relevant factors such the MEPs' seniority, experience in sub-national politics, affiliation to national opposition parties, socio-demographic profile, and some characteristics of their Member States.

The introduction is followed by a review of the state of the art on constituency orientation in the EP. Then, I introduce the main hypotheses of the study. The third section discusses the research design and the contents of the questions dealing with regional or constituency issues. The next section presents the results of the multivariate analyses. The conclusion discusses the main findings and points to further directions of research.

State of the art

The literature on the constituency orientation of MEPs emerged mostly as a byproduct of the study of their representational roles (Katz 1997; Wessels 1999; Farrell and Scully 2007; Gherghina and Chiru 2012; Navarro 2012; Brack and Costa 2013), which is not surprising given the fact that MEPs, more than other legislators, face competing principals (Hix 2002) and have to prioritize their allegiances when principals display preference heterogeneity. Other studies (Bowler and Farrell 1993; Farrell and Scully 2010; Tomkova 2014) used survey data to analyze the time spent by MEPs working in their home countries, on individual voters' requests, and their likelihood to organize surgeries or to do online constituency outreach. Ethnographic research, following MEPs in their districts to observe contacts with voters and local interest groups is all but absent, the exception being the study of Poyet (2018).

Similarly, scholarship on constituency orientation analyzing actual legislative behavior from the EP is scarce. Raunio (1996) was the first to illustrate that MEPs use parliamentary questions not only to inquire about European issues and policies salient for their parties, but also to advance regional and national interests.²

Since the publication of Raunio's article several other studies have confirmed that MEPs' written questions frequently address territorial issues (Navarro 2009; Chiru and Dimulescu 2011; Sozzi 2016a; Brack and Costa 2019). However, none of these studies

² Written questions are a suitable indicator for territorial representation efforts because they are less constrained by party leaders than other parliamentary activities and are not affected by the measurement problems of survey data: limited coverage, self-selection bias, rationalization. (Martin 2011; Sozzi 2016a).

has assessed comprehensively whether and how electoral system features, and electoral marginality influence the likelihood of MEPs asking questions on national and constituency issues.

Drawing on a sample of 120 MEPs from EP5, Navarro (2009) concluded that one quarter of their parliamentary questions dealt with local, regional or national issues from their countries. An interesting pattern revealed by his data was that dual mandate holders tend to ask more such questions.³

Chiru and Dimulescu (2011) analyzed the contents and determinants of all parliamentary questions asked by Romanian MEPs in their first year in Brussels and Strasbourg after the 2009 elections. While almost two thirds of these questions dealt with policy issues relevant for the MEPs' committee work, around 30% of them mentioned matters from their country. Their analyses indicated that MEPs elected from lower list positions devoted more time to territorial representation, as did more experienced legislators.

Sozzi (2016a) analyzed the determinants of MEPs' constituency orientation using the frequency of written parliamentary questions dealing with constituency⁴ topics focusing on two national delegations, French and Italian, in one term, the sixth. Sozzi found that having open ballot as opposed to closed list elections increases the number of constituency questions asked by MEPs, the same being true for election from lower district magnitude constituencies. Nonetheless, the former finding is based simply on a country dummy which could therefore conflate other relevant differences between the two electoral and partisan settings.

Brack and Costa (2019) published the most comprehensive analysis of the topic to date based on two random samples of questions from the last four terms of the EP. Their dataset included more than 8,500 questions that were coded extensively (using ten categories) to establish their level of territoriality and whether the territorial issue represented the main object of the question or was used just to illustrate a more general problem. They found that MEPs from fringe groups (especially Eurosceptics and Radical Left) are more likely to ask questions on national or sub-national matters, the same being true for MEPs from the periphery countries. With respect to electoral institutions, they only tested whether there is a difference between open lists, ordered lists and closed lists. They report that MEPs elected from ordered lists appear less likely to ask such questions compared to those elected under open list formulas (Costa and Brack 2019: 244-5) while no significant difference was identified for the other dichotomy (closed vs. open lists).

³ Following an EU Council decision (2002/772/EC) dual mandates were prohibited in the EP starting with the 2004 elections. Exceptions were allowed for Ireland until 2007 and UK until 2009. Only 6 MEPs benefited from the exception, all from Ireland.

⁴ Both Italy and France use sub-national multimember districts for the election of their EP representatives.

Before moving to this study's hypotheses, it is worth briefly discussing the rationales for which MEPs might engage in geographical representation. The literature analyzing whether the MEPs' engagement in various parliamentary activities and the levels of such engagement have positive effects on re-election is still in its infancy, but most of its empirical findings tend to suggest that levels of activism do not really matter (van Thomme et al. 2015, Frech 2016, Wilson et al. 2016). Instead, higher visibility, achieved as party group leader or inter-group chair, does seem to increase the probability of re-election (Wilson et al. 2016).

I argue that MEPs still engage in geographical representation even if the extent to which this engagement would help them gain re-election is unclear. Electoral vulnerability and an electoral system that allows voters to cast a personal vote are usually enough to motivate legislators to invest effort into increasing their visibility for future elections (André et al. 2015). The presence of the two elements, vulnerability and a candidate-centered electoral formula might also interact with strategic calculations of national parties or of the MEPs themselves. The former would target increases in the overall share of votes, while the latter would be based on the idea that such efforts can be a steppingstone for further national or regional careers (Poyet 2018; Høyland et al. 2019). Leaving aside the issue of electoral consequences, in the following paragraphs I present this study's main arguments regarding how electoral system incentives and electoral marginality might influence engagement in the representation of territorial interests in the EP.

Theoretical model

The academic jury is still out on the question regarding which electoral system creates the most incentives for cultivating a personal vote (Zittel 2017), including through constituency representation. Thus, while virtually all ordinal rankings of electoral institutions place closed list PR at the party-centered end of the scale, there is fundamental disagreement whether open lists should be considered more candidate-centered than the single transferable vote and on where on the scale should one place single member plurality and majority run-off systems (Carey and Shugart 1995; Mitchell 2000; Shugart 2001; Nielson 2003). In an innovative study analyzing national and regional legislators' perceptions of personal vote-seeking incentives of electoral systems in 15 countries and 69 parliaments, André et al. (2016) found an unambiguous hierarchy between electoral institutions. Thus, closed list PR came at the bottom, followed by flexible lists, with open lists somewhere in the middle of the continuum, while single member plurality and two round systems would offer more such incentives, and the single transferable vote (STV) was associated with the highest personal vote-seeking motivations.

The scholarship on the EP has also reviewed the personal vote-seeking incentives of the different electoral institutions used under the 'Uniform Electoral Procedures'. The most

common expectation is that MEPs elected from more candidate centered-electoral systems would value geographical representation more and consequently would spend more time on domestic and regional work (Farrell and Scully 2010: 48; Høyland et al. 2019). Indeed, Farrell and Scully (2010) found that MEPs elected with STV tend to spend more time on political work in their home country compared to those elected under closed list PR. Their other salient finding was that MEPs elected in open list systems and, to a smaller extent, those elected in flexible list systems, engage more in consultations with voters than their counterparts elected under closed list systems.

Nevertheless, a rather different set of expectations regarding this relationship was also advanced recently. Høyland et al. (2019: 492) argued that '[i]n a 'candidate-centered' electoral system, such as open-list proportional representation, legislators who want to be re-elected need to devote greater attention to their constituency regardless of which office they are seeking. Once a high profile has been established locally, this lowers the cost of transferring from one political arena to another.' In contrast, MEPs elected from closed list systems would have more incentives to concentrate on legislative work to achieve the policy goals or obtain the legislative positions valued by their party leaders.

This trade-off leads the abovementioned authors to expect differences in levels of legislative activities between MEPs based on their type of election and whether they want to continue their career in the EP or return to national politics. Analyzing data on MEPs who served in the 4th to 7th sessions of the EP they found that, indeed, the type of career ambition shapes levels of activism and that this difference is strengthened by electoral system factors: MEPs elected from open list systems participate in fewer votes and give fewer speeches in the EP than those elected from closed list PR.

However, an implication of the argument made by Høyland and colleagues that remained untested is whether the difference in legislative activism would be reversed for the legislators elected under the two sets of electoral rules when it comes to parliamentary activities directed towards the constituency, which could increase local or national visibility. Thus, the mechanism underpinning the hypothesized effect is the following: MEPs seeking re-election in candidate-centered systems need to catch the eye of voters and generate more personal publicity than their counterparts competing under closed list rules, whose continued EP career depends mostly on the will of party selectorates. For MEPs from candidate-centered systems developing a reputation of constituency servant or defender of national interests in Brussels via asking many questions with a territorial focus is an easy, relatively costless way to generate positive publicity. Such publicity is amplified also by asking questions on behalf of national and regional interest groups organizations from their countries. Ibenskas and Bunea (2020) have shown MEPs are more likely to recognize and interact with interest groups from their Member State, particularly under flexible- and open-list electoral institutions.

Furthermore, it is likely that in Member States that have opted for candidate centered electoral systems, the political culture is imbued with expectations from voters and a

role understanding from legislators that values territorial representation and constituency orientation. As mentioned, Brack and Costa (2019) found that MEPs elected from ordered lists tend to ask fewer questions on regional and national issues than those elected from open list systems. The present paper will test more comprehensively the impact of electoral formulas and hypothesizes that:

H.1: MEPs elected from candidate-centered electoral systems will ask more questions on regional or national issues.

Beyond ballot structure, district magnitude is probably the institutional feature most frequently thought to shape legislators' incentives for cultivating a personal vote (Carey and Shugart 1995), although it has also attracted criticisms and scholars have proposed alternative measures, such as the size of the electoral constituency (Grofman 2005) or party magnitude (Crisp et al. 2007). It has been argued that district magnitude influences directly individual accountability: the more MPs elected from the district, the harder it becomes for voters to monitor their behavior and to sanction or reward them. Instead, in such settings citizens' voting decisions would mostly rely on the party label. However, a second essential part of the theory is that district magnitude has a differential effect: negative in closed list systems and positive in open lists (Carey and Shugart 1995). Thus, legislators elected in electoral systems that allow to express candidate preference votes would feel the need to cultivate a personal following, to distinguish themselves from co-partisans, and this incentive would become stronger with the growth in district magnitude.

André and Depauw's (2013) comprehensive review of the scholarship indicated that so far, the empirical evidence for the differential effect of district magnitude is rather mixed. They argued that this result is explained by the fact that the differential impact of district magnitude does not apply to all personal vote earning strategies. Thus, the benefits of one-to-one interactions with individual voters decrease when district magnitude increases, irrespective of the ballot structure. Conversely, legislators elected from higher district magnitudes in open list systems would engage much more in constituency service actions that can reach many constituents at the same time, such as project work.

In the context of the European Parliament findings regarding the impact of district magnitude on the likelihood that MEPs display a constituency focus of representation or engage in geographical representation are also rather mixed. Thus, Wessels (1999) found that MEPs elected from higher district magnitude settings are less likely to embrace a constituency focus, irrespective of the ballot structure. On the contrary, Bowler and Farrell (1993) found a positive effect of magnitude on time spent on constituents' demands, although they did not distinguish between open and closed list systems. According to the analyses of Farrell and Scully (2010: 50) MEPs are more likely

to conduct consultations with voters when they are elected from small district magnitudes in open and flexible list systems.

Costa et al (2007) analyzed the effect of the introduction of sub-national constituencies, and implicitly lower district magnitudes, for the EP elections in France starting with the 2004 contest. They concluded that the reform has resulted in more localized campaigns, favored candidates with a local background and led to the French MEPs paying more attention to their constituencies and investing more in communication.

Finally, Sozzi's investigation (2016a) illustrated that Italian and French MEPs elected from lower district magnitudes ask more questions about their constituency, while the interaction of district magnitude with ballot structure did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

In line with André and Depauw's argument (2013), I argue that, when well-advertised, questions on regional and national issues have the potential to reach many voters at once. Therefore, we should observe a different impact of district magnitude on the likelihood of asking such parliamentary questions depending on the ballot structure:

H.2: MPs elected from higher district magnitudes in open list systems will ask more questions on regional or national issues than the rest.

Beyond the behavioral incentives that electoral institutions create for all legislators, the personal context of the election is also bound to shape legislative and non-legislative actions. Thus, legislators who have been elected comfortably can probably afford to pay less attention to their constituents, whereas electorally marginal MPs would probably look for all available means to increase their chance of re-election. Electoral marginality implies that a Member of Parliament would not have gained the seat if a relatively small number of (personal or party) votes would have been won by a competitor. This factor is thought to be a major determinant of parliamentary behavior and of constituency service (Strøm 1997; Dropp and Peskowitz 2012).

The European Parliament could be considered a least likely case for marginality to influence legislative behavior in general and constituency efforts in particular, given that the MEPs' re-election depends almost entirely on the will of the national parties and any electoral connection is virtually absent (Judge and Earnshaw 2008; Hix and Høyland 2013: 184).

Nevertheless, marginal MEPs could still devote more time to constituency service in the hope that these efforts might be acknowledged and rewarded by the party leadership with a better list position at the upcoming European elections or might increase their chance of obtaining a different office, at regional or national level. For marginal MEPs who are not interesting in seeking re-election but prefer to continue their careers in the national or sub-national arena, concentrating on building positive personal publicity via many territorially focused parliamentary questions is a rational option. Moreover, such questions are oftentimes the result of interactions with national and regional interest

groups and lobbies, and foster ties which can be instrumental in enhancing electoral prospects in their home Member States (Ibenskas and Bunea 2020).

Bowler and Farrell (1993) found, using survey data, that marginality does increase the time spent by MEPs on individual voters' requests (59-60). Similarly, electoral marginality was shown to influence MEPs' re-election campaigns: the MEPs who face the highest risk of losing their seat engage the most in social media campaigning (Obholzer and Daniel 2016).

Vulnerability to intra-party and inter-party electoral defeat was also revealed to mediate the effect of electoral institutions on the legislators' constituency efforts. In a comparative study of 14 countries, André et al. (2015) showed that in party centered electoral systems, the negative effect of increased district magnitude grows weaker among the most vulnerable MPs, whereas in candidate centered systems the effect of district magnitude is even stronger for those who are more vulnerable.

H.3 Electorally marginal MEPs will ask more questions on regional or national issues.

The models include several controls related to the MEPs' European Party Groups, the position of the MEP in the chamber, sub-national political experience, and socio-demographic profile, as well as some characteristics of their national parties and Member States.

European Party Groups play a key role in the ideological competition that structures EU politics, by offering differentiated policy positions to voters, ensuring internal coherence via their membership decisions, and controlling the access to offices that shape EU policies (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2014; Braun and Schmitt 2020; Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2018; Lefkofridi 2020). Their ideological outlook, including their EU integration preferences and their different ability to allow their MEPs to pursue policy-seeking goals, could influence the extent of MEPs' engagement in the representation of territorial interests. For instance, in the absence of real policy impact and because of their anti-integration preferences, Eurosceptic MEPs might ask many questions, including on regional or national topics, just to obstruct the Commission (Proksch and Slapin 2011).

Senior MEPs might have less time and probably also less need to develop a constituency orientation. MEPs who dropped out of the term are probably in the same position, but for different reasons. MEPs who serve in an oversight committee could be more informed given their committee work about problems regarding various national issues or the implementation of European legislation in Member States and therefore submit more questions on such topics.

Legislators' political socialization in offices at sub-national level can shape their representation role, making them perceive constituency work as a salient aspect of the job of a representative (Katz 1997; Blomgren and Rozenberg 2012; Navarro 2012).

MEPs from opposition parties could ask more questions on regional and national issues to get information about their national governments' actions or to alert the Commission of violations of EU law or failures to implement European policies in their country (Jensen et al. 2013). New Member State legislators would likely concentrate on getting to understand how the EP works, leaving little time to constituency efforts. In contrast, MEPs from federal states are more likely to care about regional issues and therefore ask more questions about them. I also control for the age, education and gender of the MEPs. While older MEPs are closer to retirement and should display lower overall levels of parliamentary activism, for education and gender the expectations in the constituency service literature are mixed (Richardson and Freeman 1995; Reingold 2000).

Research design

Variables' operationalization and data sources

Electoral marginality is computed by subtracting the number of seats won by the candidate's party (party magnitude) in the EP constituency from the MEP's list position or vote ranking in countries using preferential voting systems. Thus, the variable assumes negative values for all candidates who had a safe election, 0 for those who received the last seat won by their party and positive values for the MEPs who were elected because one or more of their colleagues did not take up the seat or resigned.

National Party in government is a dummy variable coded 1 if the MEP's party was part of the national executive at the end of the term. *Seniority* reports the number of terms served in the EP, while *Total Duration* indicates the number of days the politician was an MEP during the term analyzed. Oversight committee indicates that the MEP was a member of one of the committees with the highest oversight powers: Budgetary Control (CONT), Regional Development (REGI) or Petitions (PETI) (Ripoll Servent 2018). *New member state* indicates that the MEP's country joined the EU during the given term. *Federalism* is another dummy, which follows the classification of Norris (2008).

Sub-national political experience is a dummy variable coded 1 if the MEP held office at regional, county or local level prior to the respective term. It relies on data from Pemstein et al. (2015), Withaker (2011), Yordanova (2009) and Gherghina and Chiru (2010).

The MEPs' seniority, their party characteristics and their socio-demographic background come from Daniel (2015). The MEPs' list position or mode of election used to compute their electoral marginality and the district magnitude information come from Chiru et al (2019).

The data on parliamentary questions from the sixth term comes from Jensen et al. (2013), while I collected and coded myself the corresponding data from the 7th term. The two data sets are random samples of 1024 written parliamentary questions each, drawn from the entire population of written questions asked to the European

Commission in the complete years of the two terms (2005-2008 and 2010-2013, respectively). To ensure comparability, I followed the same coding strategy of Jensen et al. (2013), and coded whether the parliamentary question referred to the Member State of the MEP, to a region in her country or to her constituency - in the case of MEPs elected from regional constituencies. In a first step, all geographical locations mentioned in the question were identified and then I checked whether they are situated in the constituency that elected the MEP. General references, e.g. to island regions were not coded as regional questions.

Methods

All parliamentary questions were content analyzed to establish their regional or national orientation. Because the dependent variable uses count data and is over-dispersed the most appropriate method for statistical modeling is the negative binomial regression (Cameron and Trivedi 2013).

The dependent variable indicates the number of questions submitted by an MEP referring to regional issues or containing national references. I include national references in the count because such questions might follow citizens' requests or might be used to signal responsiveness to voters' concerns even if they do not have a specific sub-national reference point. The government - opposition control variable should account for those questions on national issues used for government oversight and not for casework or voter signaling purposes.

Frequency and contents of questions on territorial issues

While 346 MEPs are present in the first sample with at least one written question, 359 MEPs are present in the second sample. Inferring from the content of the questions in the sample, the overall share of MEPs who have asked at least one question mentioning a regional issue is around 10% in each of the two terms. If we also consider the questions on national issues, the shares of active MEPs reaches 23% for the 6th session and 19% for the 7th session.

On average, the MEPs asking most questions on regional and national topics in the 6th term were those from Greece, Ireland and Cyprus, while in the 7th term these were Greek, Portuguese and Spanish, followed closely by Italian and Irish MEPs.

Figure 1 below plots the means and standard deviations of the number of questions dealing with regional and national issues by European Political Group in the two terms. Eurosceptic and Radical Left MEPs seem to ask significantly more such questions than their colleagues, while overall there is more variance in the 6th term compared to the 7th EP.

Figure 1 about here

The questions analyzed revealed the many ways in which MEPs try to advance constituency and regional interests. MEPs used written parliamentary questions to ask about European funding available for public institutions (e.g. hospitals or research centers) or NGOs in their region or constituency; about availability of EU relief funds for natural disasters occurring in their states; about European infrastructure projects in their constituencies or regions; about problems of individual constituents, sometimes in dealing with authorities of other Member States; about the implementation of European regulations, and their impact on businesses in their constituencies.

Multivariate analyses

Table 1 below reports the results of the negative binomial regressions ran on the samples from the two terms and using as dependent variable the total number of questions dealing with regional (including constituency references) and national issues. I present two models for each term: the second model includes the interaction term for ballot type and district magnitude. I will first discuss the results of the regressions ran on the sixth term data.

Compared with their colleagues elected under closed list PR, MEPs elected from STV systems ask on average between 4 and 5 times more written questions which deal with issues from a particular region in their country or with national matters. Since only MEPs from Ireland, Northern Ireland and Malta are elected via STV, this finding should be interpreted with caution. It could be argued that parochial political cultures and traditions of constituency service are very strong in all three contexts and they could be driving the effect and not the electoral system features.

Overall, there does not seem to be a difference between the incentives created by open list systems and closed list systems, and this is also reflected in the non-finding regarding the expected differential effect of district magnitude in the two types of systems. Similarly, there is no difference between MEPs elected in flexible list systems and those elected from closed lists with respect to asking constituency and national questions.

MEPs elected from higher district magnitudes ask more regional and national questions, but the effect is small: running margins showed that the MEPs elected from the largest DM ask on average only 1.3 questions more than those elected from the smallest DM.

The hypothesized positive effect of electoral marginality is corroborated for the 6th term: more vulnerable MEPs ask more regional and constituency questions, but the effect is not very strong. The control variable capturing the MEPs' seniority does not influence the likelihood of engagement in territorial representation. On the contrary, MEPs who are members of an oversight committee ask twice as many regional and national questions than colleagues serving in other committees. There is no effect for

local and regional politics experience, while MEPs belonging to national government parties are 1.4 times less likely to ask constituency and national questions compared to opposition MEPs.

In the 6th term MEPs affiliated with Eurosceptic and Radical Left parties have asked significantly more questions related to regional and national issues than those affiliated with more mainstream party families. The effects range from three (Radical Left) to seven times (Eurosceptic MEPs) more written questions of this type.

Table 1: Determinants of regional and national PQs in the EP

	6th term		7th term	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
STV	3.779***	4.885***	4.142*	3.646
Open list	0.931	5.554	0.987	0.228
Flexible list	0.929	0.932	0.301***	0.299***
DM	1.359*	1.551*	1.153	1.090
DM * Open list		0.499		1.839
Marginality	1.086***	1.103***	1.132***	1.127***
Seniority	0.947	0.973	1.089	1.075
Oversight committee	2.107***	2.064***	1.317	1.328
Sub-national political experience	0.799	0.799	0.762	0.758
European Party Group				
Socialist	1.032	0.989	1.052	1.060
Liberal	1.306	1.222	0.813	0.779
Green	1.41	1.204	1.892*	1.821*
Radical Left	3.530***	3.162***	2.875***	2.752***
Eurosceptic	6.977***	7.058***	3.364**	2.890**
Conservative	1.089	0.915	1.218	1.336
Non-Inscrit	1.847	1.844	2.141*	2.078*
New Member State	0.222***	0.179***	0.000***	0.000***
National government	0.703*	0.703*	0.926	0.866
Federalism	1.333	1.429	1.737	1.598
Total duration	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***
Age	0.975**	0.974**	0.969**	0.969**
Education	1.571***	1.572***	1.08	1.104
Female	0.656	0.675	0.818	0.791
N	771	771	829	829
Log likelihood	-759.5	-758.2	-580	-578.6
AIC	1567.1	1566.3	1208	1207.3
BIC	1678.6	1682.5	1321.3	1325.3

Cell entries are incidence rate ratios; models ran with robust standard errors clustered by country.

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

As expected, MEPs from new Member States were less active: they ask approximately 5 times fewer such parliamentary questions than the rest of their colleagues. Another expectation that is confirmed is that MEPs who served for the entire duration of the term asked more constituency and national questions than those who resigned or died. Older MEPs were less likely to submit regional and national questions while MEPs with higher levels of education asked significantly more such questions.

The models ran on the data from the 7th term corroborate the previous positive findings regarding MEPs elected from STV systems and electoral marginality. Figure 2 below illustrates the effect of the latter variable based on the full models in Table 1.

Figure 2 about here

Similar to the models on the 6th term sample, there does not seem to be any difference in the constituency orientation of MEPs elected from closed and open list systems, and this again also applies to the differential impact of district magnitude.

A different finding is that in the 7th term MEPs elected from flexible lists seem less interested in geographical representation: they ask on average three times fewer questions on regional and national issues than those elected under closed list PR.

Like in the 6th term and similar to the findings of Brack and Costa (2019), Eurosceptic and Radical Left MEPs display an increased propensity of to submit questions on regional and national matters compared to the baseline category, the legislators affiliated to the EPP. Green MEPs and those non-affiliated were also significantly more active in this respect than the reference category.

Overall, fewer control variables matter for submitting constituency and national questions compared to the 6th term. One finding that is corroborated is that MEPs from new accession states (in this case, Croatian MEPs) asked significantly fewer questions on regional or national issues than their colleagues from older Member States. Once again, MEPs who dropped out of at some point of the legislative cycle asked fewer questions than those who served for the entire period. Similar to the 6th term, older MEPs asked fewer questions on regional and national topics in the 7th term.

Robustness checks

A first robustness check was to control for the post-term career trajectory of the MEPs (Høyland et al. 2019). This was done in two ways: first by introducing in the models a dummy for the MEPs that stood as candidates in the next EP elections (Table A1.1 in the appendix) and then by adding a series of dummies indicating more specifically whether they continued in the EP, returned to national politics, or left politics altogether (Table A1.2). These alternative models show that the career trajectory does not directly

influence our outcome of interest, while the magnitude and the direction of the main effects is not affected either.

An additional robustness check was to include measures of the MEPs' overall levels of activism. Two proxies were used for this: the MEPs' participation in roll-call votes (Table A2.1 in the Appendix) and the total number of parliamentary questions they asked on non-territorial matters (Table A2.2). The models ran on the sample from the 6th term indicate that the MEPs who attended more votes were also more likely to ask questions on regional and national issues, and that this effect was relatively strong. For the 7th term the variable pointed in the same direction but did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The main effects were not affected by the introduction of this additional control.

Asking a larger number of questions on non-territorial matters is positively associated with our DV in both terms, which implies that the usage of parliamentary questions in the EP does not indicate a specialization across representation roles between MEPs. The main effects are again robust to this alternative specification.

The last robustness check was to run the regression models in Table 1 on the samples of regional and constituency questions, excluding those items that were referring to national issues. The results, presented in Table A3, show that electorally marginal MEPs asked more such questions than their counterparts. The positive effect of being elected from STV as opposed to closed list PR is only present for the models corresponding to the 6th term. Interestingly, for the 7th term we do find evidence that MEPs elected from higher district magnitudes in open list systems ask more regional and constituency questions. Finally, MEPs elected from flexible lists tended to ask fewer regional and constituency questions in both terms than MEPs elected under closed list systems, a rather counterintuitive finding.

Conclusion

This article set out to test whether and how electoral system features, and electoral marginality influence the MEPs' engagement in geographical representation, despite the virtual absence of an electoral connection.

The fact that electoral marginality increases significantly the constituency efforts of MEPs calls for re-examining the widely held assumption that the electoral connection is very weak in the European Parliament. Thus, EU scholars should pay more attention to examining whether and how marginality influences other types of legislative behavior in the EP and whether this factor also enters the consideration of EP office gatekeepers when they assign institutional roles or opportunities to shape policies, such as rapporteurships to individual MEPs.

Except for the positive effect of STV compared to closed list systems, I find no evidence that a more candidate-centered electoral formula leads to more engagement in asking

questions on constituency and national issues in the EP. Nevertheless, before concluding that the variance in electoral institutions is of little importance for MEPs' commitment to geographical representation one should explore whether the same pattern applies to parliamentary speeches or the frequency of MEPs' trips to districts or regions. In general, a more comprehensive measurement of constituency orientation would be needed to avoid substitution effects⁵.

The analyses failed to corroborate the hypothesis that district magnitude would create different incentives for territorial representation efforts depending on the ballot structure. This raises the question whether scholars should focus instead on alternative measures of intra-party competition in European Parliament elections based on factors such as party magnitude, size of the electoral constituency or patterns of preference voting.

Future studies could also explore qualitatively the reasons for which Eurosceptic and radical left MEPs are more actively engaged in territorial representation, a finding also present in previous analyses. Is it mainly a function of limited access to reports or other policy shaping positions, or it follows naturally from a contestation of EU integration and its effects on national and regional interests?

Another avenue of further research would be to investigate whether MEPs that engage the most in geographical representation have career ambitions at sub-national level. Finally, the proximity to relevant selection and election cycles (national, sub-national or European) might also matter for the MEPs' territorial signaling efforts.

Acknowledgment

The author is grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and the participants at the Workshop 'Legislators as Linkage in European Democracies' (ECPR Joint Sessions, Nicosia, April 2018) and at the 5th Conference of the ECPR Standing Group on Parliaments (Leiden, June 2019) for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts.

Funding

This work was supported by UCLouvain through the 'MOVE-IN Louvain' Incoming Post-doctoral Fellowship, co-funded by the Marie Curie Actions of the European Commission.

⁵ The possibility that some legislators would concentrate on alternative constituency-oriented strategies.

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APPENDIX

Table A1.1: Determinants of regional and national PQs in the EP, controlling for whether the MEP ran in the next EP elections (negative binomial regressions)

	6th term		7th term	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
STV	4.009***	5.063***	4.134*	3.664
Open list	0.912	5.051	1.008	0.244
Flexible list	0.924	0.926	0.299***	0.297***
DM	1.360*	1.544*	1.128	1.071
DM * Open list		0.514		1.803
Marginality	1.087***	1.103***	1.129***	1.125***
Seniority	0.948	0.973	1.071	1.058
Oversight committee	2.129***	2.084***	1.316	1.33
Sub-national political experience	0.820	0.816	0.768	0.764
European Party Group				
Socialist	1.013	0.975	1.067	1.073
Liberal	1.305	1.226	0.858	0.822
Green	1.450	1.242	1.864*	1.793*
Radical Left	3.639***	3.261***	3.200***	3.042***
Eurosceptic	6.579***	6.713***	3.498**	3.005**
Conservative	1.101	0.934	1.257	1.373
Non-Inscrit	1.894	1.885	2.135*	2.072*
New Member State	0.230***	0.186***	0.000**	0.000***
National government	0.715*	0.714*	0.922	0.863
Federalism	1.373	1.461	1.814	1.67
Total duration	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***
Age	0.973**	0.973**	0.967***	0.967***
Education	1.569***	1.570***	1.078	1.101
Female	0.674	0.690	0.831	0.805
Ran again	0.809	0.836	0.718	0.727
N	771	771	829	829
Log likelihood	-759.1	-757.8	-578.9	-577.6
AIC	1568.1	1567.7	1207.8	1207.2
BIC	1684.3	1688.5	1325.8	1329.9

Cell entries are incidence rate ratios; models ran with robust standard errors clustered by country;
Significance levels at: * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table A1.2: Determinants of regional and national PQs in the EP, controlling for post-EP career (negative binomial regressions)

	6th term		7th term	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
STV	3.753***	4.814***	5.913**	5.280**
Open list	0.967	5.781	0.998	0.253
Flexible list	0.942	0.949	0.324***	0.324***
DM	1.379*	1.577*	1.103	1.047
DM * Open list		0.499		1.782
Marginality	1.088***	1.105***	1.114***	1.110***
Seniority	0.941	0.966	1.038	1.031
Oversight committee	2.089***	2.055***	1.300	1.328
Sub-national political experience	0.804	0.800	0.796	0.792
European Party Group				
Socialist	1.063	1.022	1.047	1.052
Liberal	1.320	1.241	0.856	0.821
Green	1.487	1.265	1.599	1.559
Radical Left	3.455***	3.096***	2.985***	2.880***
Eurosceptic	7.919***	8.060***	3.690**	3.179**
Conservative	1.013	0.870	1.309	1.404
Non-Inscrit	2.007	2.007*	1.920*	1.888*
New Member State	0.231***	0.186***	NA	NA
National government	0.718	0.716	0.901	0.847
Federalism	1.326	1.418	1.91	1.738
Total duration	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***
Age	0.979*	0.978*	0.964***	0.964***
Education	1.567***	1.567***	1.174*	1.202**
Female	0.642*	0.658	0.855	0.823
Post-EP career				
Re-elected MEP	1.210	1.247	0.653	0.685
National politics	1.334	1.342	0.439*	0.432*
N	767	767	747	747
Log likelihood	-752.1	-750.7	-550.8	-549.6
AIC	1556.1	1553.4	1151.5	1151.2
BIC	1676.8	1674.1	1266.9	1271.2

Cell entries are incidence rate ratios; models ran with robust standard errors clustered by country; the reference category for Post-EP career is 'Left politics'; Significance levels at: * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

The Post-EP career data comes from Høyland et al. (2019). Unfortunately, that study did not cover the Croatian MEPs elected after the 2013 enlargement, hence the lack of the New Member State variable in the corresponding models for the 7th term.

Table A2.1: Determinants of regional and national PQs in the EP, controlling for levels of roll-call vote attendance (negative binomial regressions)

	6th term		7th term	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
STV	4.384***	5.283***	5.137**	4.435
Open list	1.029	3.835	1.064	0.209
Flexible list	0.899	0.901	0.318***	0.315***
DM	1.442**	1.586*	1.127	1.054
DM * Open list		0.599		1.971
Marginality	1.098***	1.110***	1.126***	1.120***
Seniority	0.986	1.005	1.059	1.047
Oversight committee	1.998***	1.975***	1.366	1.399
Sub-national political experience	0.82	0.82	0.775	0.774
European Party Group				
Socialist	1.084	1.047	0.998	1.013
Liberal	1.203	1.156	0.82	0.788
Green	1.373	1.223	1.65	1.603
Radical Left	3.537***	3.258***	3.241***	3.135***
Eurosceptic	7.076***	7.086***	3.705***	3.201**
Conservative	1.223	1.09	1.282	1.421
Non-Inscrit	2.509**	2.453**	2.028*	1.996*
New Member State	0.212***	0.181***	NA	NA
National government	0.642**	0.644**	0.930	0.866
Federalism	1.424	1.496	1.762	1.592
Total duration	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***
Age	0.972**	0.971**	0.969***	0.968***
Education	1.529***	1.530***	1.175*	1.208**
Female	0.689	0.701	0.876	0.837
Roll-call vote attendance	9.471***	8.736***	2.215	2.687
N	767	767	747	747
Log likelihood	-746.3	-745.6	-553.2	-551.6
AIC	1542.6	1543.1	1154.5	1153.2
BIC	1658.7	1663.8	1265.3	1268.6

Cell entries are incidence rate ratios; models ran with robust standard errors clustered by country.

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

The roll-call vote attendance data comes from Høyland et al. (2019). Unfortunately, that study did not cover the Croatian MEPs elected after the 2013 enlargement, hence the lack of the New Member State variable in the corresponding models for the 7th term.

Table A2.2: Determinants of regional and national PQs in the EP, controlling for total number of non-territorial PQs (negative binomial regressions)

	6th term		7th term	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
STV	2.745*	3.635**	2.096	1.924
Open list	1.101	7.225*	0.962	0.278
Flexible list	1.142	1.147	0.391***	0.387***
DM	1.279*	1.440*	1.157	1.116
DM * Open list		0.484*		1.686
Marginality	1.060*	1.074*	1.083***	1.080***
Seniority	0.915	0.938	1.059	1.055
Oversight committee	1.990***	1.964***	1.537*	1.546*
Sub-national political experience	0.927	0.931	0.675*	0.669**
European Party Group				
Socialist	0.908	0.878	1.329	1.324
Liberal	1.037	0.99	0.973	0.926
Green	1.018	0.907	2.710***	2.607***
Radical Left	2.146*	1.946	2.742***	2.620***
Eurosceptic	2.092	1.986	0.941	0.828
Conservative	0.58	0.434*	1.885**	2.053***
Non-Inscrit	1.394	1.407	1.631	1.598
New Member State	0.277***	0.223***	0.000**	0.000***
National government	0.754*	0.754*	0.986	0.927
Federalism	1.354	1.423	1.041	0.97
Total duration	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***	1.001***
Age	0.977	0.976	0.982	0.982
Education	1.415***	1.423***	0.951	0.975
Female	0.861	0.872	0.742**	0.723**
Non-territorial PQs	1.804***	1.804***	1.373***	1.366***
N	771	771	829	829
Log likelihood	-717.1	-715.4	-540.2	-539
AIC	1484.3	1482.9	1130.5	1129.9
BIC	1600.5	1603.7	1248.5	1252.6

Cell entries are incidence rate ratios; models ran with robust standard errors clustered by country.

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table A3: Determinants of constituency and regional PQs in the EP (negative binomial regressions)

	6th term		7th term	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
STV	4.105***	5.257***	1.146	0.989
Open list	1.047	4.884	1.245	0.049
Flexible list	0.270***	0.272***	0.280**	0.274**
DM	1.592**	1.757**	1.015	0.936
DM * Open list		0.556		3.803*
Marginality	1.062**	1.074**	1.093***	1.082***
Seniority	1.071	1.087	1.297	1.277
Oversight committee	1.513	1.459	1.505	1.597
Sub-national political experience	1.010	1.009	0.788	0.788
European Party Group				
Socialist	0.556*	0.546*	1.038	0.992
Liberal	0.757	0.725	0.931	0.851
Green	2.785**	2.554**	3.106***	2.713**
Radical Left	4.518***	4.324***	4.162***	3.819***
Eurosceptic	6.875***	7.019***	1.151	0.900
Conservative	1.741	1.540	1.903	2.269*
Non-Inscrit	2.870*	2.907*	2.100	1.916
New Member State	0.551	0.447*	0.000***	0.000***
National government	0.520**	0.532**	0.764	0.637
Federalism	1.975	2.129	2.648**	2.262
Total duration	1.000	1.000	1.001***	1.001***
Age	1.005	1.003	0.961***	0.958***
Education	1.741***	1.772***	1.220*	1.267**
Female	0.659	0.670	0.729	0.681
N	771	771	829	829
Log likelihood	-332.1	-331.5	-287.2	-284.2
AIC	712.3	713	622.5	618.3
BIC	823.8	829.1	735.7	736.4

Cell entries are incidence rate ratios; models ran with robust standard errors clustered by country.

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01