

WORKING AT HOME: INDIVIDUAL LEVEL DRIVERS OF MEPS' FOCUS ON CONSTITUENCY WORK

Summary

This paper investigates how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) allocate resources between their parliamentary and constituency work, focusing on their staffing decisions. Specifically, it examines the distribution of MEPs' staff between accredited assistants, based in the European Parliament, and local staff working in their constituency. The study seeks to explain why some MEPs allocate a larger share of their staff to constituency work compared to others by testing several hypotheses related to the individual characteristics of MEPs while controlling for variations across Member States. Using a newly developed database with data on MEP assistants at three points during the 9th EP, the analysis reveals that Member State differences do not solely explain the variation in staff distribution. While there is no evidence that staff allocation is driven by strategic considerations to secure re-election, it depends significantly on their ideology and past political experience.

Keywords: Constituency work, European Parliament, European Union, Member of Parliament, Parliamentary Staff.

1. Introduction

This article investigates how Members of the European Parliament (MEP) allocate their resources between work in Parliament and in their constituencies. It does so by examining the effect of personal characteristics on how they divide their staff between the two. The work of MEPs takes place not only inside the chamber, but also in the constituency that elected them (Norris 1997, Brouard et al, 2013; André et al, 2014). There is indeed evidence that MEPs can devote considerable attention and resources to their constituency work (Poyet, 2018; Sozzi, 2016). This means that, MEPs must make decisions about how to allocate their limited time and resources between work in the EP and in their constituency. Therefore, in Parliaments there is a tension between the two kinds of activities (Norris, 1997; Vivyan and Wagner, 2016), and MEPs likely face a trade-off between allocating resource to each. This raises the question of how to explain the balance they struck between the two places. In other words, why do some MEPs give priority to work on their constituency, as compared to work within the EP, while for other it is the opposite?

This article addresses this question and aims to explain MEPs' choice. More specifically, following the literature on national parliament, we expect it to be driven by MEPs individual characteristics. This literature suggests two reasons for that. On the one hand, some authors suggest that MPs' commitment to constituency work is motivated by normative reasons, linked for example to their ideology, background, and past socialization which cause both types of work to be more or less valued (Dockendorff and Lodato, 2023; Giger et al., 2020). On the other hand, another strand of this literature assumes that this choice is primarily the result of strategic calculations on the part of MPs with the aim of favoring their re-election (Tomkova 2014). This approach assumes that MPs become more involved in constituency work when they think it promotes their re-election odds (Norris, 1997; Papp, 2020). In the

EP's case, this means that MEPs determine their level of investment at either level on a cost-benefit basis, which depends in part on their personal characteristics. Those who see less personal benefit in engaging in constituency work will do so less, and vice versa. The article therefore investigates whether these factors also apply to the EP, and whether such strategic and normative reasons linked to their individual characteristics explain why MEPs give priority to one of those two types of work.

While in many respects the EP now functions as a "normal" parliament and can therefore be compared to national parliaments (Ripoll Servent 2018), there are nevertheless some specific features with regard to constituency work that can have an impact on MEPs' arbitration choices. Firstly, most constituencies are national. They are therefore both more numerous and more heterogeneous, which can lead to more diverse demands from their members (Tomkova 2014). Secondly, EP work is less politicized and, as European elections remain second-order, the electoral link is weaker (Lord 2018). Consequently, constituency work may be less useful for re-election (Tomkova 2014). Thirdly, the Eurosceptic minority within the EP means that some of its members object to its policies having any power, which may affect their work (Ripoll Servent 20). While this warrants caution in applying theories from the parliamentary literature, it also makes the EP interesting for testing hypotheses on legislative behavior (Poyet 2018). Furthermore, the fact that the varying importance of constituency work among MEPs is not yet fully explained justifies testing hypotheses based on literature studying national parliaments.

Empirically, we address this issue by focusing on the decision by MEPs to allocate staff resources on constituency work relatively to parliamentary work. Indeed, MEPs generally employ two types of staff (Michon, 2014): accredited assistants, working in the EP, and local assistants, working in their constituency. However, both types of assistants are funded from the same budget, which means that MEPs have to choose

how to allocate their budget between the two kinds of staff. This decision therefore indicates the priority they attach to work in each place (Fenno, 1977; Tomkova, 2014). Especially since local staff constitute one of the main MEPs resources at the disposal of MEPs for constituency work (Clarke, 1978; Rocca et al., 2023; Tomkova, 2014). Therefore, the proportion of staff MEPs allocate to constituency work as compared to parliamentary is used as a proxy to measure the priority they MEPs attach to their constituency work as compared to parliamentary work. Empirically, the analysis is based on an original dataset, which includes the composition of the teams of all MEPs in May 2023. This information has been retrieved from the European Parliament's official websites. On this basis, we test our hypothesis by means of regression analysis to assess different explanation of resource allocation in constituency work.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section introduces constituency work and parliamentary work in the EP. Section 3 then discusses local and accredited EP assistants and how the choice between the two reflects the priority that MEPs give to constituency work or parliamentary work. Section 4 develops our hypothesis based on the existing literature. Section 4 presents the data used for the analysis. This is followed by the analysis in Section 5, and the final section concludes.

2. The tension between constituency work and parliamentary work in the EP

MEPs, like MPs in general, engage in two types of work. On the one hand, MEPs work in the EP. This work is crucial for MEPs as it includes a number of tasks that are important both for the functioning of the EU, and therefore its citizens, and for the career prospects of MEPs (Ripoll Servant 2018). Foremost among these is the negotiation and development of EU policies and the EU budget. Secondly, they must

also scrutinize the Commission and other EU agencies. Thirdly, MEPs can initiate or participate in resolutions to express EP views on various topics. Finally, they can also take part in plenary debates, put oral or written questions to various actors and manage the internal workings of the Parliament.

On the other hand, MEPs' work also involves tasks that take place within the constituency that elected them. MEPs conduct two kinds of work within their constituency, broadly speaking (Gabriel et al., 2018; Tomkova, 2014): casework, *i.e.*, addressing constituents' complaints and communication (in various forms) with their constituencies. Both are part of what is commonly known in the general parliamentary literature as constituency work (Dockendorff and Lodato, 2023; Heitshusen et al., 2005), that is the "activities MPs pursue to cultivate relations with their constituencies between elections" (Tomkova 2014:19). Those activities constitute an important part of MPs work and are widely recognized as a key dimension of parliamentary mandates (Dropp and Peskowitz, 2012; Poyet, 2018), including by the constituents (Brack and Pilet, 2016; Campbell and Lovenduski, 2015).

The literature on national parliaments shows that not all MPs value the two types of work equally (Papp 2020, Vivyan and Wagner, 2016). Some give more emphasis than others to their constituency, and conversely. Moreover, however important, constituency work require MPs to expend resources, notably in working time and staffs (Heitshusen et al. 2005). Yet, as those resources are limited, this means that the resources invested in work their constituency cannot be invested in work in Parliaments (Norris 1997, Clarke 1978). Consequently, investing resources in their constituencies has a potential opportunity cost, in that it can reduce the possibility of playing a relevant role in parliaments, where MPs can influence public policy.

Existing research on the EP also suggests that MEPs devote different attention to these two works, with some giving more priority to their constituency than others (Chiru, 2022; Hermansen and Pegan, 2023; Sozzi, 2016). Yet, despite the relevance of constituency work for MEPs, the determinant of this choice is largely unknown for the EP. To date, little research has examined the activities of MEPs in their constituency as compared to their work in the EP, and even less has attempted to systematically explain differences (Brack and Costa, 2018; Poyet, 2018). Existing research on the MEPs' relation to their constituencies has largely focused on parliamentary activities, principally via analyses of the plenary questions they ask (*e.g.*, Brack and Costa, 2019, Chiru 2022). Yet, they did not focus on work carried out within their constituencies, and therefore the determinants of the balance between the two types of work remain largely unknown.

3. The allocation of staff allowances by MEPs as an indicator of their orientation between parliamentary work and constituency work.

To perform their tasks, MEPs receive allowances, *i.e.* public funds that enable them to carry out the duties arising from their mandate. In particular, these allowances enable them to hire personal assistants ("staff"). Personal assistants are recruited directly by MEPs under contracts linked to their parliamentary mandate (Michon, 2014). As with other legislators, the organisation of MEPs' staff reflects the division of labour between parliamentary work and constituency work (Tomkova 2014, Papp, 2020). MEPs can indeed hire two types of personal assistant: those who work in Parliament (accredited assistants) and those who work in the constituencies (local staff). The two types of assistants perform distinct tasks specific to each type of MEP work, leading MEPs to

hire assistants tailored to these specific roles (Michon 2014)¹. The size of each type of staff can therefore be seen as an indicator of the priority given by MPs to constituency service and legislative work, respectively (Hermanssen and Pegan 2023).

Accredited assistants work in the EP. They generally deal with the positioning of their MEPs in the European political arena and in the conduct of the EP's tasks, in particular policymaking (Busby and Belkacem, 2013; Pegan, 2017). In contrast, local staff carry out constituency work in their political territory (Hermansen and Pegan, 2023; Michon, 2014). They are a way for legislators to voice citizens' grievances, cultivate their trust and connect them with representative institutions (Kaslovsky, 2022; Tomkova, 2014). They can also act on behalf of MPs and are the bearers of symbolic representation, for example when they attend events or hold office hours (Hermansen and Pegan, 2023). Finally, they enable MEPs to communicate with their constituents on EU activities (Poyet 2018).

These two types of personnel differ not only in the activities they perform, but also in their condition of employment and labor costs. (Hermansen and Pegan, 2023; Michon, 2014). Accredited assistants have an established contract with the EP and therefore a relatively uniform and established salary. Constituency staff, on the other hand, are employed under a private law contract drawn up directly with the MEP and subject to their country's legislation; their remuneration - and therefore the number an MEP can hire - therefore varies between member states. On the whole, the EP's rules establish a malleable - but sticky - staffing system that leaves MEPs with considerable

¹ The rules do not specify which tasks staff members are responsible for, so theoretically, MEPs could give parliamentary work to local staff and vice-versa. However, in practice, the European Parliament (EP) has a high degree of specialization between staff in parliament and the constituency (Hermanssen and Pegan 2023, Michon 2014). This specialization exists because much of the work requires staff to be physically present. Hence EP assistants hardly perform the tasks of constituency assistants, and vice versa, leading MEPs to hire assistants suited to specific roles (Michon 2014). Consequently, local and parliamentary assistants perform different tasks and the size of each type of staff can be seen as an indicator of MEPs' prioritization between constituency service and legislative work, respectively (Hermanssen and Pegan 2023)

leeway to organize their team according to their own preferences (Hermansen and Pegan, 2023)². While MEPs have thus some leeway in adjusting the number of both types of staff, it should be noted that this leeway is much greater for local district assistants than for accredited assistants. While the total number of accredited assistants is capped at four (and MEPs must justify the fourth), this is not the case for local staff, for whom there are no numerical limits, although local expenses are capped. The parliamentary teams of MEPs thus form veritable political enterprises around their elected representatives (Michon 2014, see also Salisbury and Shepsle, 1981). In the EP, local and parliamentary staff are financed over the same budget. This means that MEPs must make choice as to where to allocate their assistant between their constituency and the EP.

MEPs shape their team according to their priorities, particularly between the different arenas (Mayhew, 1974, Fenno, 1973). As a result, the balance of teams between the European Parliament and the constituencies differs considerably from one MEP to another. (Michon, 2014, Hermansen and Pegan, 2023). While national difference in electoral rules and labor cost explain a great deal of this variation, the composition of the teams also reflects the priorities of the elected representatives (Fenno 1977, Tomkova. 2014). Elected representatives build their teams “in their own image, according to what they have been, what they are and what they aspire to be” (Michon, 2014). The allocation of MEPs resources between the two kind of staff illustrates therefore MEPs’ broader trade-offs between constituency and parliamentary work (Tomkova 2014). This makes the balance between local and accredited assistant among MEPs an opportunity to empirically assess MEPs’ behaviour in that regard³.

² This, despite several reforms were designed to regulate it more tightly (Hermansen and Pegan, 2023)

³ It should be noted that the number of staffers also differs across MEPs, even within member states. This is because MPEs do not always spend their entire staffing allowance. Thus, not only the proportion but also the number of staffers vary. we consider the two as measuring something different. On the one hand, the number of staffers reflects the intensity of the work MEPs want to conduct- the more staffers they hire, the higher their working ambition. Once they decide on this intensity, the proportion of the

Yet, little research has looked at the choice between local and accredited assistants. One exception is the doctoral work of Tomkova (2014). While her work was based on a survey and not on official data, she shows that MEPs claim to employ a variable number of assistants, but on average the same number in Brussels as in their constituency. Another notable work is the study by Hermansen and Pegan (2023), on the effect of electoral agendas on the number of MEPs' local staff. They found that the number of local staffers increases before elections, confirming that MEPs carry out constituency work in part to promote their re-election. However, they focused only on local staff and therefore missed half the puzzle at stake here. Given that MEPs do not have to spend all their budget, the number of local and accredited assistants is not necessarily correlated (as the data confirms). Therefore, examining the proportion is necessary to examine and explain MEPs' choices between parliamentary and constituency work.

4. Hypotheses

Broadly speaking, the existing literature on national parliaments developed at least three alternative reasons for differences in distribution between parliamentary and constituency work by elected officials (Farrell and Scully, 2010). The first one is that electoral systems create different incentives for MPs to invest in their constituency. (Cain et al. 1987; Bowler and Farrell 1993). Second, it may be due to general cultural differences across parliaments in the expectations and demands placed on elected representatives (Katz 1997, 1999). Third, scholars also explain this variation by the individual characteristics of the MPs (Brack and Costa, 2019; Brack and Pilet, 2016;

different types of staff measures the type of work that they want to prioritize in the work they aim at conducting.

Farrell and Scully, 2010), for example in the personal constraints they face in being re-elected, or in their sense of duty to different types of work. Regarding the PE, Michon (2014) suggests that these latter factors are crucial for the composition of the MEPs team

In this paper we focus on the latter reasons, the two others largely depending on their member states. More specifically, we distinguish four individual characteristics of MEPs that may explain the focus on one of the two types of work. The first two are more linked to the normative reasons- MEPs basing their choices on certain values rather than separable consequences⁴ (Dockendorff and Lodato, 2023; Giger et al., 2020). The last two are more linked to strategic incentives on the part of MEPs, depending on the functional constraints they face to be re-elected (Giger et al., 2020; Papp, 2020).

First, we expect the extent of MEPs Euroscepticism, *i.e.* their opposition or rejection of current and/or future European integration (Taggart 1998), to affect how they allocate resources between parliamentary and constituency work. In other words, we expect the degree of MEP's opposition to the EU to influence whether they will hire relatively more local staff or accredited assistants. The literature indeed argues that this choice between parliamentary and constituency work can also be the result of ideological motivations (Brouard et al., 2013). For Crosson et al. (2021), these motivations can be based either on symbolic or instrumental reasons. It can be a way for MEPs to signal their commitment to less (or more) European capacity or a way to reduce (or increase) the EU's capacity for action by devoting less (or) more resources to its operation.

⁴ This doesn't mean that investing in their constituency isn't also seen as improving their chances of re-election, but that, if it is, they prefer to focus on parliamentary work for normative reasons and not for the objective constraints they face. Thus, another MEP facing the same "strategic" constraints, but e.g., with a different ideology, will make a different choice.

More generally, Eurosceptic MEPs are often less interested in participating in the work of the European legislator. On the contrary, they see the EP as a source of income and publicity, helping them to promote their ideas in their country of origin (Ripoll Servent, 2018; Ripoll Servent and Panning, 2019). Instead, they focus on the local and national levels, which they regard as the only or most important for democracy (Brack and Costa, 2019). Hence our first hypothesis (h1): *the more Eurosceptic an MEP is, the higher the proportion of local staff.*

The second individual characteristic which we expect to affect the proportion of MEPs' local staff is their past local experience (Brack and Pilet, 2016). Such experience of local politics is likely to influence how MEPs perceive their job and politics in general (Chiru, 2022). MEPs with local responsibilities are more likely to develop an interest in local issues (Navarro, 2015; Norris, 1997), as well as local ties with and loyalty to that level (Binderkrantz et al., 2020). In turn, this drives them to keep investing resources in constituency work (Sanches et al. 2024, Borghetto and al. 2020). In addition, they are more likely to consider returning to this level during their career (Russo 2011), and therefore have a greater need to be known and to respond to - and therefore be aware of - voters' preferences. That is why in our second hypothesis (h2) we expect *MPs with local experience to have a higher proportion of local staff.*

The last two factors are linked to strategic considerations on the part of MPs to further their prospects of re-election. A great deal of the literature on parliaments assumes that MPs primarily seek re-election (Heitshusen et al., 2005; Papp, 2020). From this perspective, they act strategically to achieve this goal. This would mean that MEPs would devote resources to work in their constituency only to the extent that they see it as benefiting their re-election odds⁵ (Dropp and Peskowitz, 2012; Norris, 1997; Sozzi,

⁵ -However, it should be noted that, although it is recognized as an important motivator for MPs, the extent to which it actually contributes to their re-election is disputed in the literature (Papp, 2020; Studlar and McAllister, 1996)

2016). In addition to the electoral system, MEPs face other constraints which may explain why some believe that working in their constituency is more electorally profitable than working in parliament- while other do not and therefore have more incentive to hire relatively more local staff (Poyet, 2018). We identify two of such reasons.

On the one hand, the number of previous mandates held by MEPs is likely to affect the need to invest in their constituency to be re-elected. This is a classic explanation of the differences in constituency work (André et al., 2014). Incumbents are likely to have less need to work in their constituency since their position is more established there (Chiru, 2022; Papp, 2020). They have already had more opportunities to build a base of sympathy in their constituency and a reputation for listening at district level (Heitshusen et al., 2005). On the other hand, new MEPs are probably less established and known to voters. They must therefore spend more resources within their constituency to develop their positioning and personal reputation therein (Brack and Pilet, 2016; Tomkova, 2014) and widen their basis of supporters (Russo 2021). Hence the third hypothesis (h3) that *'the more terms an MEP has already spent in the EP, the lower the proportion of local staff.*

On the other hand, the proportion of local staff may also depend on whether an MEP holds a leadership position. MEPs who occupy a leadership position in the EP, such as (vice-) president or committee chair, or in its political group, such as group chair, are expected to devote fewer resources to constituency work than rank-and-file MEPs. These leading positions are indeed likely to bring greater visibility, recognition as political experts, and influence within their party (Russo 2021, Poyet 2018, Poyet and Costa 2016). As a result, MEPs who occupy them must worry less about being selected as candidates and being re-elected and will instead seek to defend their position in parliament or acquire a more prominent one (Russo 2021). Finally, fulfilling and retaining these positions requires devoting more resources to parliamentary work,

which tilts the balance more in favour of hiring accredited assistants (Gabriel et al., 2018; Heitshusen et al., 2005). Hence, MEPs with leadership positions have fewer career-related incentives to serve their constituency and are more likely to pay less attention to it.

On the contrary, as they seek to be re-elected MEPs who do not hold such positions must compensate for the absence of the benefits they provide. Strategically, one way of doing this is through constituency service, as having a strong local base and being recognized locally increases their chances of securing re-elected by their party and of being re-elected (Russo 2011, 2021). As a result, they have more incentive to prioritize constituency work by hiring local staff. Hence our fourth hypothesis h4: *MEPs with leadership positions within the EP hire a smaller proportion of local staff.*

Finally, we control for three additional variables. First, we add a fixed effect for MEPs' member states. MEPs' member states are indeed one of the main explanations for variations between staffing choices, for many reasons that we seek to control for. For example, one of the most obvious is the difference in labor costs, which makes it possible to hire more -or less- local staff. More generally, differences in electoral rules and calendars as well as the distance between constituencies and parliament are an important factor in explaining MEPs' constituency orientation. Secondly, we control for the size and extremism of their national party. These two factors are linked respectively to the voting power and coalition capacity of parties and thereby can affect parties' ability to achieve favorable outcomes in the policy-making process and, consequently, the need for their members to conduct constituency work (Costa and Brack 2019, Ripoll Servent, 2018).

5.Data and Method

Our dependent variable, that is, the balance in each MEP team between local and accredited assistants, is measured by the proportion of local staff in the MEPs' team. In other words, the number of local staff divided by the sum of the number of local staff and accredited assistants⁶. The identities and functions of MEPs' assistants are publicly accessible on the European Parliament website, and we retrieved all this information on MEPs' teams using web-scraping in November 2023⁷. Since 2009, MEPs have been able to share "grouped" assistants and staffers. When this is the case, we divide the value of the assistant by the number of MEPs employing it. We obtained information for 700 of the 705 MEPs, as 5 of them had no information available on their page of the EP website.

To check the robustness of the analysis, we also carried it out at two other points in time during the 9th EP, to ensure that the relationships we found were consistent and not explained by omitted contextual factors. We collected data for 1 November 2020

⁶ Since the number of assistants is capped at four at the largest, a risk of this measurement would be that (some) MEPs would spend their non-spent allowance on local staff when they would have hired more accredited assistants if they could, therefore resulting in a biased measure of MEPs' priorities and potentially in the models. However, we see two reasons why this situation should not be considered problematic. Firstly, it is based on the assumption that MPs would spend all their allowances regardless of their preferences, which is dubious (and not supported by the data, given that the number of local staff varies according to the number of accredited assistants per country). It arguably makes more sense to consider that MEPs who have less interest in constituency work will not hire more local assistants than they think necessary, especially given the clear separation of tasks between the two as described in the literature. Even if this were true, it would also be the case for those who decided to hire a smaller number of accredited assistants, which would not alter the significance of the ratio between the two types of assistants. On the other hand, MEPs know the rules before putting together their team and do so in accordance with them, which means that the ratio reflects the priority of the two types of work under the current rules, which we are aiming to model. Statistically speaking, although the number of assistants is indeed truncated, the proportion is not and, therefore, beta regression can be applied. Especially since we do not see more errors for MPs with 3 or 4 accredited assistants nor find any bias in the model that would put into question our modelling choices. Furthermore, it is important to note that the truncated value is methodological, in the sense that it does not come from our sampling or measurement, but from the rules of the 'game' at the EP, which MEPs know when they put together their team.

⁷ We used the `rvset` package from R (Wickham 2023). All the information was scrapped for the first time in May 2023, with little change in the distribution of staff and assistants between the two dates.

and 1 May 2022. The first November was chosen to correspond to our original data collection (the first November 2023), while not being too early in the mandate so that MEPs' teams had already been constituted and their operation in place. May 2022 falls just in the middle of the other two dates. We have identified the MEPs in office on these two dates using the European Parliament website.

As the EP does not provide information on changes in the teams of MEPs, we collected the information using "the wayback machine" website⁸. This website allows the user to go back consult older version of websites. In other words, it archives the different versions of a website. In our case, we selected the version of each MEP's webpage which was the closest to the dates we chosen and retrieved the information on their assistants. It should be noted that we were unable to find the information for all MEPs because some pages had not been archived. However, for both dates, we found information for around 90% of the MEPs and there is no substantial difference in the independent variables between the missing MEPs and the rest of the samples.

Regarding the independent variables, to measure MEPs Euroscepticism (h1) we rely on the 2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) dataset (Bakker et al., 2015). This dataset codifies the positions of national parties on several dimensions, including its positions vis-à-vis the EU. Although the use of party-level data carries the risk of ignoring possible internal heterogeneity within parties (Willumsen 2023, Carroll and Kubo 2019), national parties attitudes towards European integration are generally shared by their MEPs (Hermanssen and Pegan 2023) and existing research confirms that MPs' preferences tend to align with those of their parties (Hix et al. 2024, Kukec et al. 2018). Therefore, in the absence of exogenous individual data on MEPs' ideology,

⁸ For more information see <https://archive.org/about/> (last consulted 17 June 2024)

such as surveys, for this term, it is standard in EP studies to use party-level data (e.g. Basedow and Hoerner 2024, Hermanssen and Pegan 2023, Hage and Ringe 2020)⁹.

We measure local experience (h2) using the dataset of (Salvati, 2022), which includes whether MEPs hold a political position at the local level. We completed the database manually for the MEPs that entered the EP after the publication of the dataset. Regarding our third independent variables, MEPs' experience, we use the number of each MEP previous terms, which is available on the EP website.

Finally, for our fourth hypothesis, i.e. that MEPs with leadership positions hire a smaller proportion of local staff, we take into account two types of positions that are recognised in the literature on the EP as particularly relevant (Rippoll Servent 2018, see also Wilson et al., 2016): (1) positions that are important for the functioning of the EP, i.e. chair or vice-chair of a committee, or a member of the EP Bureau, which is composed of the EP president, vice-presidents and quaestors; or (2) leadership positions in political groups, that is, MEPs who are no rank and file members of their group.

Regarding the control variable, we use the number of seats of its national party as a proxy for its weight. To measure MEPs its extremisms, we also rely on the CHES dataset (Bakker et al., 2015). On this basis, we calculated the distance between MEPs' national party position and the weighted average of the position of all parties in the EP for the two main dimensions of conflict within the EP: pro-anti EU and left-right.

⁹ Furthermore, due to the large number of national parties and the small size of many delegations, these data provide sufficient variation in positions within European party groups while being less likely to be influenced by discipline and the threat of sanctions by political groups than measures by roll call vote (Ershova and Popa 2021, Hage and Ringe 2020).

6. Results

Figure 1 displays the distribution of the number of local and accredited assistants. It confirms that MEPs make different choices when it comes to allocating their staff. While the means are rather similar (2 for local staff and 2.6 for accredited assistants), both the number of local and accredited assistants varies, although the variation is smaller for the latter (standard deviation of, respectively, 1 and 2.1). This difference in variation, which is very probably due to the cap on the number of accredited assistants, confirms that MEPs have more leeway in hiring local staff, as the number can go up to 12. Moreover, it is noteworthy that a significant number of MEPs (around 25%) do not employ local staff. In contrast almost all MEPs have at least one accredited assistant.

Figure 1: Distribution of the number of local staff and accredited assistants

[Figure 1 near here]

More interestingly for us, figure 2 shows that the ratio between local and accredited assistants also largely varies. This confirms that the allocation of resources between the EP and their constitution differs from one MEP to another and that there is therefore a phenomenon to be investigated. On average, the proportion of local staff is 35%, but increases to 47% if we remove the case without local staff. This is in line with Tomkova's (2014) observation that, on average, the number of local staff and accredited assistants is similar in MEPs' teams. However, this is only true on average, as the proportions largely varies across MEPs, as indicated by the distribution (standard deviation of 0.26-0.19 without the 0). It is also noteworthy that the correlation between the number of both kinds of staffs is low, both at the aggregate levels (correlation of -0.07, -0.2 without the 0) nor within member states (average

correlation of -0.1 -0.17 without the 0, with exceptions obviously). This result confirms the relevance of examining the balance between both types of staff together.

Figure 2: Distribution of the proportion of local staff as compared to accredited assistants

[Figure 2 near here]

The left part of Figure 3 displays the distribution of the proportion of local staff by Member states. This enable to examine whether the variation observed is merely due to difference between member states, notably as regard labor cost or electoral rules. The figures confirm that there is great variation between member states, and thus that they likely explain a great deal of it. But member states do not explain all the variation as the proportion of local staff also largely varies within member states. This support the effect of individual factors and the hypotheses that will be tested.

The right part of Figures 2 shows the variation between political groups while controlling for the effect of Member States. This shows that members of different groups tend to make different choices in the way they allocate staff, and that these differences are not reducible to differences between Member States. In particular, members of the RENEW and Green/EFA groups tend to have a higher proportion of accredited assistants, while the non-aligned and members of the ECR and I&D and GUE/NGL groups tend to have a lower proportion of EP assistants. This is already a first thing in support for an ideological motive behind staff assignments, as the latter groups are more eurosceptic.

Figure 3: Distribution of the proportion of local staff by member states and political groups.

[Figure 3 near here]

In the remainder of this section, we test our hypotheses and attempt to explain the differences in the proportion of local staff between MEPs. To do this, we use zero-inflated beta regressions (Cook et al. 2008; Ospina & Ferrari 2012, Stasinopoulos et al. 2017). Beta regression models are specifically designed to model continuous proportional variables, *i.e.* limited between]0, 1[(Ferrari & Cribari-Neto 2004). The zero-inflated part is added to account for the presence of 0 in the data. Indeed, while beta regressions cannot model data that contains exactly 0 or 1, the zero inflated part enable to model distribution with a large share of 0 (which is the case in our data). Zero-inflated beta regressions model a mixture of data-generating processes¹⁰ first a logistic regression model that predicts if an outcome is 0 or not and second a beta regression model that predicts if an outcome is between 0 and 1 if it's not zero.

We could not obtain reliable confidence intervals and p-values using a frequentist framework with such a model. Therefore, we decided to fit the model in the Bayesian framework and derive credible intervals on the estimates. Conclusions would then be drawn on these 95% credible intervals as we would in the frequentist framework, considering as significant all effects for which the interval does not include 0. Figure 3 presents the estimate and the credibility interval for our independent variables¹¹.

¹⁰ We interpret the large number of zeros in the data as an indication that many MEPs are not interested in recruiting local staff for constituency work. This therefore suggests a two-stage decision-making process: firstly, MEPs decide whether or not to allocate staff resources to constituency work, and secondly, if they do decide to do so, they determine the number of staff to be assigned to each task, and thereby the distribution of their teams. This dual mechanism justifies the use of a zero-inflated model, which takes into account the initial decision leading to structural zeros and the subsequent allocation decisions affecting the proportion of each type of staff.

¹¹ The Bayesian model was fitted using 4 chains, each with 10000 iterations including a warmup of 5000 iterations. This led to a total of 20000 posterior draws for the analysis. Noninformative priors were used to fit the model. Convergence was checked by looking at the traceplots of posteriors (no divergent chains in any parameters) and ensuring the Rhat provided by brm is acceptable. In the brms documentation, the following is mentioned: "The Rhat value provides information on the convergence of the algorithm (cf., Gelman and Rubin, 1992). If Rhat is considerably greater than 1 (*i.e.*, > 1.1), the

Figure 4: Estimate and confidence interval of the effect of our independent variables on the likelihood of having no local staff (right-hand side) and on the proportion of local staff to accredited assistants when they have at least one local staff (left-hand side).

[Figure 4 near here]

Figure 4 shows the effect of the independent variable on the probability of not having any local staff on the right-hand side, and on the proportion of local staff to accredited assistants when they have at least one local staff on the left-hand side. It should be noted that none of our independent variables has a consistently significant effect on the probability of having at least one local staff as compared to none. This means that none of our hypotheses is confirmed when it comes to the decision to devote at least some staff resources to constituency work. In other words, we found no evidence of an effect for any of the personal characteristics we identified

We now turn to our hypotheses on the balance between the two types of staff. First, our two first hypotheses are significantly supported. On the one hand, the more eurosceptic an MEP is, the more local staff it will hire compared to accredited assistants. This positive effect is true for all periods, but it should be noted that it becomes more pronounced over time. While it is positive but not significant in November 2020, it is significant and increasing important for the following two periods. This suggests that MEPs that oppose European integration tend to invest less resource in its functioning but to do so in other levels, that they support more. It also suggests that this effect is increasingly pronounced during the parliamentary term, so that the most eurosceptic MEPs potentially tend to hire proportionately more local staff during their term.

chains have not yet converged, and it is necessary to run more iterations and/or set stronger priors". In our case, R_{hat} were all 1 or at worst 1.01.

On the other hand, MEPs with experience of local politics have on average, a significant higher proportion of local staff for all three periods, suggesting that their links with this level make them more inclined to devote resources to work therein. Those results confirm that the choice of MEPs to invest resources in constituency work versus parliamentary work is partly due to ideological considerations and political experience. Consequently, this also means that the emphasis that MPs place on work in their constituency or on work within the EP, also depends on normative reasons of their own.

As far as strategic incentives are concerned, our hypotheses do not receive the same support. Our third hypothesis is not confirmed: while the effect of the number of mandates held by MEPs is significant, it goes in the opposite direction to the hypothesis put forward: the greater the number of mandates held by an MEP, the greater the proportion of local staff in relation to accredited assistants. This is true for the three periods. It should be noted that this is also the case when we binarize the variable into either first term or not. One explanation could be that, as they have less knowledge of the EP's workings and politics, new MEPs are obliged to compensate by hiring a higher proportion of accredited assistants in order to be able to carry out their parliamentary tasks. More experienced MEPs, on the contrary, have no such need and can therefore devote more resources to constituency work.

Finally, our last hypothesis that the proportion of local staff is linked to the position held by MEPs is not supported either. Neither holding a large office within the EP nor within a political group has a significant effect on the proportion of local staff. Thus, the choice of MEPs to give higher priority to local staff than to accredited assistants (or vice versa) does not appear to be due to different strategic incentives linked to their positions in the EP and the benefits they bring -or the lack thereof.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this article is to examine and explain the orientation of MEPs' activity between work in the PE and in their constituency, by analysing their choices in allocating staff between these two types of work. More specifically, we examined how MEPs divide their staff between accredited assistants, working at the EP, and local staff, working in their constituencies. To do so, we developed a novel database containing all assistants for all MEPs in 2023. We then sought to explain why some MEPs give higher priority to constituency work than others by testing several hypotheses on individual factors, while controlling for differences due to MEPS countries.

As a result, we found that MEPs vary in how they allocate their staff between constituency and parliamentary work, and that this variation cannot be explained solely by differences between member states. Looking at individual determinants, we found no empirical evidence that strategic or normative incentives increase the likelihood that MEPs will choose to employ at least one local staff member. Regarding the proportion of local staff to accredited assistants, we also found no evidence for our strategic hypotheses. First, holding an important position is not associated with employing more proportionally less local staff. Second, less experienced MEPs do not tend to employ proportionately more local assistants. On the contrary, new MEPs tend to employ a higher proportion of accredited assistants. On the other hand, we find that their choice of allocation depends on their ideology and past experiences. Firstly, the degree of Euroscepticism of MEPs is significantly and positively related to the proportion of local staff. Secondly, MEPs with local political experience tend to have a significantly higher proportion of local staff than accredited assistants.

These results therefore suggest that MEPs' choice between parliamentary and constituency work is not only strategic, but also based on other considerations (André et al., 2014, Brack and Pilet, 2016). Some MEPs believe that investing resources at the local level is more worthwhile, while others prioritize the parliamentary level, not merely because they expect greater personal benefits. If one considers that both types of work constitute important parts of MEPs' function, these results may also give rise to normative questions. Indeed, if the fact that MEPs with local ties or a certain ideology invest less time in parliamentary work reduces their ability to play a significant role in the EP, this would pose a problem for parliamentary decision-making, as some kind of MEPs - and therefore of voters - would be less well represented in the EU decision-making (Hermanssen and Pegan 2023). Similarly, if some categories of MEPs tend to invest significantly less in constituency work, this could create inequality in the way citizens can rely on this work in the EU. This is especially true since constituency work is part of MEPs mandate and is seen as important by EU citizens.

Overall, those results mean that further research is needed on this issue. First, given that none of our variables were significantly related to the choice not to assign staff to their constituency, further work should be devoted to explaining this. Second, a limitation of this work is that we measure MEPs' Euroscepticism at the party level. At the aggregate level, more Eurosceptic MEPs tend to hire a higher proportion, but this result may thus also partly reflect shared norms, strategies, or rules within Eurosceptic or Europhile parties rather than just MEPs' personal ideologies (Raymond and Overby 2016). Future research could therefore disentangle to what degree decisions reflect each of dimensions. Third, one could study the reasons why politicians with local ties or eurosceptic MEPs make these choices, and what their rationales are. Similarly, to better assess the normative consequences of these choices, it is necessary to examine their consequences. In other words, how does the proportion of each type of staff affect the work of MEPs? And does it create differences in the way they can carry out

their tasks? Finally, it would also be useful to conduct research into the activities that MEPs' local staff actually carry out in their constituencies. While we know that this type of staff is important to MEPs, we know very little about how they organise it. This would provide a better understanding of MEPs' choices between constituency work and parliamentary work, and the differences between them.

References

- André A, Gallagher M and Sandri G (2014) Legislators' Constituency Orientation. In: *Representing the People: A Survey among Members of Statewide and Substate Parliaments*. Oxford University Press, pp. 166–187.
- Brack N and Costa O (2018) Introduction: the European Parliament at a crossroads. *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 24(1). Routledge: 1–10.
- Brack N and Costa O (2019) Parliamentary Questions and Representation of Territorial Interests in the EP. In: Costa O (ed.) *The European Parliament in Times of EU Crisis: Dynamics and Transformations*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 225–254. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97391-3_11.
- Brack N and Pilet J-B (2016) Explaining MPs' constituency service in multilevel systems: the case of Belgium. *French Politics* 14(4): 439–468.
- Brouard S, Costa O, Kerrouche E, et al. (2013) Why do French MPs Focus More on Constituency Work than on Parliamentary Work? *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 19(2). Routledge: 141–159.
- Campbell R and Lovenduski J (2015) What Should MPs Do? Public and Parliamentarians' Views Compared. *Parliamentary Affairs* 68(4): 690–708.
- Chiru M (2022) Electoral incentives for territorial representation in the European Parliament. *Journal of European Integration* 44(2). Routledge: 277–298.
- Clarke HD (1978) Determinants of Provincial Constituency Service Behaviour: A Multivariate Analysis. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 3(4). [Wiley, Comparative Legislative Research Center]: 601–628.
- Costa O and Poyet C (2016) Back to their roots: French MPs in their district. *French Politics* 14(4). Springer: 406–438.

- Dockendorff A and Lodato S (2023) Constituency Service and Representation: The Effects of Remoteness and Social Deprivation. *Representation*. Routledge: 1–13.
- Dropp K and Peskowitz Z (2012) Electoral Security and the Provision of Constituency Service. *The Journal of Politics* 74(1). The University of Chicago Press: 220–234.
- Farrell DM and Scully R (2010) The European Parliament: one parliament, several modes of political representation on the ground? *Journal of European Public Policy* 17(1). Routledge: 36–54.
- Fenno RF (1977) US House members in their constituencies: An exploration. *American Political Science Review* 71(3). Cambridge University Press: 883–917.
- Gabriel OW, Kerrouche É, Schüttemeyer SS, et al. (2018) Introduction: Political Representation in France and Germany. *Political representation in France and Germany: attitudes and activities of citizens and MPs*. Springer: 1–57.
- Giger N, Lanz S and de Vries C (2020) The motivational basis of constituency work: how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations interact. *Political Science Research and Methods* 8(3). 2019/05/14 ed. Cambridge University Press: 493–508.
- Heitshusen V, Young G and Wood DM (2005) Electoral Context and MP Constituency Focus in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. *American Journal of Political Science* 49(1). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd: 32–45.
- Hermansen SSL and Pegan A (2023) Blurred lines between electoral and parliamentary representation: The use of constituency staff among Members of the European Parliament. *European Union Politics* 24(2). SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England: 239–263.
- Michon S (2014) Assistants parlementaires (UE). Epub ahead of print 2014.
- Navarro J (2015) The cognitive rationality of role choices: Evidence from the European Parliament. In: *Parliamentary Roles in Modern Legislatures*. Routledge, pp. 184–210.
- Norris P (1997) The puzzle of constituency service. *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 3(2). Routledge: 29–49.
- Papp Z (2020) Constituency service: incentives and consequences. In: *Research Handbook on Political Representation*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 266–275.
- Poyet C (2018) Working at home: French MEPs' day-to-day practice of political representation in their district. *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 24(1). Routledge: 109–126.
- Raymond, C D, & Overby, LM (2016). What's in a (Party) name? Examining preferences, discipline, and social identity in a parliamentary free vote. *Party Politics*, 22(3), 313-324.
- Ripoll Servent A (2018) *The European Parliament*. London : Palgrave MacMillan.

- Rocca MS, Krebs TB and McArthur D (2023) The Consequences of Legislative Professionalism in U.S. State Legislatures: A Review. *State and Local Government Review*. SAGE Publications Inc: 0160323X231167614.
- Salvati E (2022) Members of the European Parliament's Political Careers across Different Levels: Presenting a New Dataset of Members of the European Parliament. *Political Studies Review*.
- Sorace M (2018) Legislative Participation in the EU: An analysis of questions, speeches, motions and declarations in the 7th European Parliament. *European Union Politics* 19(2): 299–320.
- Sozzi F (2016) Asking territories: the constituency orientation of Italian and French members of the European Parliament. *Italian Political Science Review / Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* 46(2). 2016/05/10 ed. Cambridge University Press: 199–217.
- Studlar DT and McAllister I (1996) Constituency Activity and Representational Roles among Australian Legislators. *The Journal of Politics* 58(1). The University of Chicago Press: 69–90.
- Tomkova J (2014) Towards a virtual constituency?: comparative dimensions of MEPs' offline-online constituency orientations. Epub ahead of print 2014.
- Vivyan N and Wagner M (2016) House or home? Constituent preferences over legislator effort allocation. *European Journal of Political Research* 55(1). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd: 81–99.
- Wilson SL, Ringe N and van Thomme J (2016) Policy leadership and re-election in the European Parliament. *Journal of European Public Policy* 23(8). Taylor & Francis: 1158–1179.