

3rd General Conference of the ECPR Standing
Group on Parliaments
Parliaments in Challenging Times
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Panel Proposal:
Electoral Institutions and the European Parliament

Panel Chairs:

Elena Frech (University of Mannheim) and
Eva-Maria Euchner (University of Munich)

Participants:

Sarah Dingler (University of Salzburg)
Jessica Fortin-Rittberger (University of Salzburg)
Steffen Hurka (University of Munich)
Silje Synnøve Lyder Hermansen (University of Oslo)
Corinna Kroeber (University of Salzburg)
Stephen Meserve (Texas Tech University)
Lukas Obholzer (London School of Economics and Political Science)

Panel Description:

Research has shown that “electoral institutions matter” (see Hix 2004, 194). The panel brings together papers investigating how exactly electoral institutions matter for the European Parliament. The focus lies on the assessment of electoral institutions on the country level (e.g., type of electoral system) and / or on the party level (e.g., gender quotas in candidate selection). We are particularly interested in papers tackling questions such as: To what extent do national electoral systems determine political representation? How do gender quotas on electoral lists affect legislative behavior? And how can a reform of electoral institutions increase legitimacy? Hence, the panel welcomes empirical contributions exploring the effects of electoral institutions from very different angles. In doing so, the panel contributes not only to the research on the European Parliament, but also adds to our findings on the effects of party organization and to our knowledge of determinants of parliamentary behavior gained at the national level.

Paper No. 1:

Title:

How gender bias and statutory quotas impact the democratic representation ensured by women - Evidence from three European Parliament elections

Author: Silje Synnøve Lyder Hermansen (University of Oslo)

Abstract:

How do statutory quotas and gender bias in political recruitment affect the quality of democratic representation ensured by women? I test the predictions of a two-stage accountability model in which the party selectorate has a gender bias when picking freshman candidates. Next election, incumbent candidates are reevaluated in light of their performance in office. Exogenously set gender quotas introduce additional uncertainty to female candidacies. This paper relies on 15 years of data (1999-2014) on the effort, performance and reselection of members of the European Parliament. Results indicate that women perform better than men for two, alternative reasons: Women who pass the initial hurdle of recruitment in systems without quotas, perform better at equal levels of effort than all other representatives. They are higher-type representatives. When quotas are imposed, the selectorate counters their additional uncertainty by relying more heavily on in-office performance. This induces women to exert greater effort so as to perform better. Their higher performance is thus due to harder work.

Paper No. 2:

Title:

Gender quotas in European Elections and their effect on political performance in the European Parliament

Authors: Eva-Maria Euchner (University of Munich) and Elena Frech (University of Mannheim)

Abstract:

This study explores the effects of gender quotas in European elections on the performance of Members of European Parliament (MEPs). Opponents argue that quotas deteriorate the quality of political institutions because under-qualified candidates enter politics at the expense of more qualified politicians. Supporters, by contrast, claim that diversity improves political decisions and increases legitimacy. We explore this relationship between gender quotas and political performance in more detail. More specifically, we examine whether MEPs elected in states or parties with a binding minimum representation of women on the electoral lists perform on par with their non-quota colleague on the floor of parliament. Few studies have explored how quotas affect legislators' behavior (but see Chaney 2006, Piscopo

2011, Murray 2012, Wang 2014), and hardly any of them shed light on its effect in the European Parliament. The European Parliament is at the same time especially interesting to study in this context because quotas vary not only on the national but also on the party level. Besides the focus on this new parliamentary arena, the study sticks out with a comprehensive dataset comprising electoral rules for all national parties in the 2009 and 2014 European elections as well as the parliamentary activities of all MEPs of the 7th legislative period.

Paper No. 3:

Title:

Women's Substantive Representation in Modern Democracies: Do Gender Quotas Enhance Policy Congruence between Women and Representatives?

Authors: Corinna Kroeber (University of Salzburg)

Sarah Dingler (University of Salzburg)

Jessica Fortin-Rittberger (University of Salzburg)

Abstract:

Equality and responsiveness are prerequisites for the legitimacy of democratic systems. Thus, parliaments in democracies should reflect the ideological orientation and interests of all societal groups: when policy preferences vary systematically by gender, parliaments should equally represent the beliefs of male and female citizens. This article aims to answer two questions in that research field: 1) Are women's policy preferences under-represented in modern democracies and 2) to what extent bear institutional factors such as gender quotas and electoral systems explanations for variation in the substantive (under-)representation of women. Comparative research on substantive representation remains underdeveloped with only a few cross-country studies that mainly focus on the left-right dimension of political conflict. Yet, previous research on policy congruence between citizens and parliaments clarified that, to understand unequal responsiveness, examining policy preferences rather than left-right positions leads to more adequate conclusions. This study attempts to close this research gap by analyzing the ideological congruence between women and representatives in the field of environmentalism, welfare state extent, liberal policies and social lifestyle. Through a comparison of individual survey data and Chapel Hill Expert Survey data, we examine whether variation of gender preferences in the four policy fields are equally reflected by parliaments in modern democracies. Second, we investigate whether the existence of gender quotas and the proportionality of the electoral system close the gap of male and female substantive representation.

Paper No. 4:

Title:

Voting at the Margins: Electoral Volatility, List Placement, and MEP Defection

Authors: Stephen Meserve (Texas Tech University), Joseph Robbins (Shepherd University), and Frank Thames (Texas Tech University)

Abstract:

In previous work, we found that Members of European Parliament (MEPs) from high electoral volatility political environments are, on aggregate, relatively more likely to toe the line with their national parties and side with their national party vs. their European group. One of the proposed theoretical foundations driving this finding, however, lies at the candidate level: marginal candidates ranked low on party lists, close to expected electoral cutoffs, should be more diligent about maintaining their relationship with their dominant collective principal, the national party, who determines their list position. Even small changes in their party's list ranking decisions could, potentially, lead to them losing a seat in the next European Parliament (EP). Flowing from this hypothesis, we argue that the expectations of candidates about the marginality of their position in the next election should determine MEP loyalty to their national party when voting in the EP. When electoral volatility in previous elections is high, more list positions should be considered "at risk" by MEPs holding them, leading to stricter vote loyalty to their national party. We use candidate party lists from the 2009 EP elections and subsequent MEP behavior in the 7th European parliament to investigate this relationship empirically, exploring the effect of list placement, electoral volatility, list type and other covariates on the probability of MEP defection.

Paper No. 5:

Title:

Constructive Tweets? Novel Signals from within the EP Legislative Process

Authors: William T Daniel (Francis Marion University), Lukas Obholzer (London School of Economics and Political Science), and Steffen Hurka (University of Munich)

Abstract:

The European Parliament (EP) is often referred to as a ‘working parliament’, as much of its legislative capacity is distilled within a highly developed committee structure. In such an environment, plenary debates and written questions are more about public appeals to constituents or credit-claiming and less about shaping the actual course of legislation. Therefore, if the committee system is the true locus of power for EP legislation, to what extent do committee members dialogue with the public during the ‘actual’ legislative process and how is this shaped by electoral institutions? Using a novel source of data collected from the official Twitter accounts of all current MEPs, we conduct a multivariate regression analysis to explore whether MEPs that are actively involved in the legislative process are more likely to engage publicly on legislative issues via social media than are MEPs who are not. We then examine the content of a selected subset of MEP policy-related tweets from current committee leaders and rapporteurs, in order to identify the extent to which Twitter has become an interactive and constructive part of the EU legislating process and a signal for the outward broadcasting of positions. In so doing, the paper contributes to the broader literature on internal legislative behavior, as well as to debates on the impact of electoral systems and social media on representation.