National policy for local reasons: How MPs represent party and geographical constituency through initiatives on social security

Thomas Däubler

Published in:
Acta Politica 55 (3), 472–491
https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-018-0125-x

Keywords: constituency representation, personal representation, private members' bills, issue attention, social security

Abstract

In parliamentary systems of government, dyadic representation between MP and geographical constituency is considered to be of secondary importance and is typically understood as work related to particularized issues (e.g., constituency service, "pork" allocation and local matters). This paper argues that personal representation need not be particularistic. It may also come in the form of attention to national policy for local reasons, when issue salience varies across geographical constituencies due to the number of affected people or problem severity. The specific focus of the study lies on private members' bills related to social security (pensions, unemployment, welfare). These three policies differ, among other things, in their alignment with class divisions and their link to the economic left–right dimension. They therefore allow for studying how both the party constituency and the geographical constituency shape MPs' legislative work. The article develops specific predictions regarding how left–right position, electoral support among the affected group, and district-level recipient numbers affect legislative activity in the three policy fields are developed. The empirical analysis uses data from Belgium (1999–2007). The results suggest that Belgian MPs represent party and geographical constituency in the case of pensions and unemployment benefits, but not in the same way as when it comes to social welfare.

In parliamentary systems of government, representation is strongly party-based, and the dyadic relationship between members of parliament (MPs) and their geographical constituency is considered less relevant (e.g., Thomassen and Andeweg, 2004; Colomer, 2011). It has been argued that in modern societies most interests cut across electoral districts (Thomassen, 1994),[1] so the demand for dyadic representation by voters should be small. On the other hand — in an era of direct communication through social media and with intra-party choice in list PR systems becoming more common (Renwick and Pilet, 2016) — MPs' incentives for personal forms of representation seem to grow.

Given the generally high levels of unity in parliamentary voting (e.g. Sieberer, 2006; Hug, 2013), scholars have recently paid considerable attention to other types of dyadic representation efforts. These include extra-parliamentary work in the form of constituency service (e.g. Cain et al., 1987; Brack and Pilet, 2016; Heitshusen et al., 2005), efforts to bring home "pork" (e.g. Gschwend and Zittel, 2016; Suiter and O'Malley, 2014), and parliamentary questions with references to local entities (e.g. Martin, 2011; Russo, 2012; Papp, 2016). All these activities have in common that they are particularized — i.e., they target the home district, but do not benefit citizens outside of the geographical constituency.[2] These forms of behaviour are also compatible with the compartmentalization perspective (Fenno, 1978; Norton and Wood, 1993), which sees national policy and constituency work as two isolated spheres of MP behaviour.

Legislative work by individual MPs, however, does not fit in well here. Private members' bills typically need to have content that is general enough to qualify them as legislative initiatives (Mattson, 1995).[3] As a first contribution, this paper therefore points out that dyadic representation in a parliamentary system need not be particularistic. MPs can work on *national* policy for *local* reasons. Existing work on private members' bills focuses on the mere extent of activity and co-operation patterns (Bowler, 2010; Bräuninger et al., 2012; Louwerse and Otjes, 2016) or local references (Marangoni and Tronconi, 2011). More similar to the approach in this paper are studies that examine whether MPs cover issues of particular importance to the geographic constituency in parliamentary questions (Soroka et al., 2009; Blidook and Kerby, 2012; Saalfeld and Bischof, 2013). Without coding the geographical scope in addition to the topic, however, it remains unclear to which extent these parliamentary questions refer to national issues.

[1] Throughout the paper, I use the terms geographical constituency and (electoral) district interchangeably.

[2] Another strand of the literature considers parliamentary questions as instrument of inter-party competition to set the agenda (e.g. Green-Pedersen, 2010; Vliegenthart et al., 2011). This perspective regards parties as the relevant (collective) actors, and does not give any special consideration to individual MPs.

[3] Another arena for dyadic representation of a non-local kind may be provided by speeches on the parliamentary floor (e.g. Baumann, 2016; Bäck et al., 2014).

This paper analyses MPs' legislative work on social security (pensions, unemployment benefits, and welfare). To begin with, the relative number of benefit recipients provides a hard measure of salience to the electoral district.[4] At the same time, the three policies differ, especially in their alignment with social class divisions and the economic left–right dimension. Therefore, they allow for studying how both the party constituency and the geographical constituency shape MPs' individual legislative work. As a second contribution, the paper adds to the literature on welfare state politics, which focuses on the impact of parties and governments on social spending, benefit generosity, and policy outcomes (e.g., Häusermann et al., 2013; van Kersbergen and Vis, 2014). Studying the behaviour of MPs provides an additional micro perspective on social policy-making and political representation in this important policy field.

Based on the two general hypotheses that MPs' legislative work is influenced by the salience of the policy to the party and the geographical constituency, I derive specific predictions for how left–right position, electoral support among the affected group, and district-level recipient numbers affect legislative activity in the three policy fields. The empirical analysis uses data from Belgium (1999–2007). The results show that the policy areas indeed differ: there is evidence that Belgian MPs represent party and geographical constituency through legislation on pensions and unemployment benefits, but not in the same way as when it comes to social welfare.

1 Representing party and geographic constituency

1.1 General arguments

This paper focuses on issue attention, more specifically on the extent to which MPs initiate private members' bills related to national policies that are of particular local interest. The notion of representation underlying bill initiation posited here is similar to what Bertelli and Dolan (2009: 219) refer to as "policy advocacy", i.e., when MPs "advocate on behalf of policies impacting their constituents." Covering such issues in parliamentary work constitutes one way of engaging in substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967). The actual passage of the bill is of secondary importance (Bowler, 2010); a proposal may simply be successful in terms of creating attention and putting a topic on the agenda (Vliegenthart et al., 2011). Bevan and Jennings (2014) argue that a correspondence between the issue priorities of the government and the public reflects political attention to problems citizens want to be solved. In a similar vein,

[4] My reasoning shares similarities with recent work by Jusko (2017), who argues and shows that (district-level) pivotality of low-income voters to electoral outcomes affects policies tackling poverty.

Soroka et al. (2009: 568) point out that individual parliamentary activities add importantly to representation as a *process*, even if they do not directly affect policy outcomes. Note that the issue attention arguments I put forward remain agnostic about whether the parliamentary work is in line with preferences (of a positional nature) or even interests of the represented. The empirical patterns that will be found, though, are hardly plausible if voters perceive MPs as frequently acting against their will.

Before developing the core theoretical arguments of this paper, let me first consider a hypothetical representation-free "baseline model" for explaining MPs' issue focus in their individual parliamentary work (here understood as work formally authored by one or a few MPs rather than the party group as a whole). Due to time constraints and requirements for expertise, both parliament and parties operate a division of labour. Parliamentary work is organized along committees (Strøm, 1995; Andeweg and Thomassen, 2011). In addition, MPs from the opposition have stronger incentives to resort to individual parliamentary activities, since they lack direct access to government members (who initiate most of the legislation), and since they can use these tools to criticize government policy (see, e.g., Bräuninger et al., 2012). Absent any motivation for representation, the extent to which MPs cover a policy issue would mainly be a function of their assigned portfolio (as reflected in committee membership), their expertise, and whether they are government or opposition MPs.

There are at least four mechanisms that can be at work on top of the baseline model. They can both affect how hard committee members work on issues within their portfolio and shape incentives of MPs from other committees to take up issues outside of their "regular" responsibilities. First, MPs may become active on a certain policy issue for intrinsic reasons, i.e., because they personally care about it. Second, politicians may vary in the extent to which they perceive a certain issue to be a problem worth addressing for its own sake. These perceptions are also a result of whom the policy-maker interacts with (Miler, 2007). In addition, there can be instrumental reasons related to a re-election motivation. A third mechanism is therefore how likely the people in charge of candidate selection are going to reward work on a certain issue. The same can be said about potential voters, which gives rise to a fourth mechanism. Here, MPs may have in mind citizens who potentially vote for the party (cp. Fenno, 1978). If the electoral rules permit candidate voting, MPs may also consider a group of potential personal supporters.

These four mechanisms suggest that the issue focus of individual MPs' work differs between parties. In line with classic approaches both from political sociology (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) and political economy (Hibbs, 1977), parties appeal to different segments of society. Each party

has its specific party constituency, here understood as the group of citizens who may vote for the party with a not-too-low probability.

MPs from different parties should therefore differ in their motivation to address certain topics, depending on how strongly their "party constituencies" differ. MPs may want to work especially on issues important to the party constituency because (1) they find these issues relevant *per se*, (2) they are in closer contact with party constituents than with other parts of the citizenry, (3) the candidate selectorate strongly cares about these matters, or (4) citizens may vote for the party or the candidate as a reward for tackling those issues. This yields a first straightforward hypothesis:

An MP will do more work on an issue that strongly affects the constituency of her party than on an issue that does not.

A second dimension of variation in issue salience is geography. In a PR system with several electoral districts, a policy issue can vary in salience across these units, even if the issue itself is of a general nature. For the purpose of this study, I distinguish between two types of salience, which may differ across geographical units. The first is problem pressure (Kingdon, 2003; Woon, 2009), i.e., the extent to which an issue is salient because it is seen as a problem. Kingdon (2003:109) argues that "[c]onditions become defined as problems when we come to believe that we should do something about them". Another type of salience is linked to the absolute number of people affected by the policy. We can think of issues for which problem pressure, or the need to do something, is comparatively low, but many people would benefit from even marginal improvements of the status quo. This "numerical" type of salience is immediately reflected in the number of people influenced by a decision. Please note that problem pressure and numerical salience were introduced as more *general concepts* above. The number of affected people as a *specific indicator* has a direct correspondence with numerical salience, but such variation may (for some policy fields) also reflect problem pressure, as discussed in more detail below.

The four mechanisms outlined above also suggest that local salience affects individual representation efforts. First, if an MP is an intrinsically motivated problem-solver, she has good reasons to give priority to the most pressing issues. Second, personal communication with residents of the electoral district provides a channel that draws MPs' attention to problems that are of particular urgency or affect many people. Third, under districted PR, lower district magnitudes are in practice associated with more decentralized selection procedures (Shomer, 2014). When actors from the geographical constituency prepare the list, they likely take into account MPs' efforts to tackle the locally salient issues. Finally, the pursuit of re-election should incentivize MPs to mobilize core supporters and to attract swing voters to the party. If electoral

rules allow citizens to vote for individual candidates, MPs may also aim at personal electoral gains from efforts to represent their district. It may pay off to demonstrate action against pressing problems, and those issues affecting many people imply a large pool of potential votes to harvest. The four mechanisms thus suggest the second general hypothesis:

Increasing salience of an issue in a geographic constituency is associated with more legislative activity by MPs representing it.

1.2 Specific expectations for social security legislation

When combined with additional information, the two general hypotheses make it possible to derive predictions for the specific cases of interest here, i.e., issue attention to different types of social security programmes. There are two main reasons for turning to social policy as a field. First, providing protection against various social risks is a central task of the state, and almost any citizen is affected by political decisions regarding social security programmes. Second, analyzing social security schemes provides variation on the key explanatory variables of interest: different degrees of alignment with the respective party constituency and variation in relevance across electoral districts.

In terms of party constituencies, traditional approaches in comparative welfare state research use a three-way classification of party families (cp. Häusermann et al., 2013; van Kersbergen and Vis, 2014). In line with classic arguments from political sociology (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) and political economy literature (Hibbs, 1977), left parties speak for lower social classes and favour higher levels of spending and inflation to achieve redistribution and tackle unemployment, whereas the opposite holds for rightist parties. Christian-Democratic parties form a distinct third group, emphasizing class compromise, not redistribution (van Kersbergen, 1995).

There are, however, two reasons for a complementary conceptualization of party constituencies. First, since not all social security policies focus on redistribution to the same extent, the left–right scheme is not supposed to explain party and MP behaviour equally well across different programmes. Second, and more generally, theoretical and empirical work suggests that the classic approach no longer describes party constituencies in a post-industrial world adequately (Häusermann et al., 2013), since, e.g., some left parties have turned towards a more middle-class-oriented electorate and right-wing parties have become more supportive of the welfare state (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Below, I therefore also consider an empirically-based definition of party constituencies: What matters may simply be whether members of a group

affected by a social security scheme have a higher tendency to support the party than non-members of the group.

Local salience varies across geographical constituencies and is comparatively easy to measure, by referring to the number of people receiving benefits. This indicator is directly linked to the two general concepts of salience introduced above. Obviously, there is a direct correspondence between recipient numbers and numerical salience. In addition, the number of recipients is also linked to two mechanisms through which policymakers define problems Kingdon (2003:90-103): Politicians may turn to quantitative indicators for inferring a need for action directly, or they may act on the feedback they receive, whose extent should be influenced by the number of persons affected. Under certain circumstances, variation in recipient numbers can therefore also reflect problem pressure.

The three social risks and related schemes considered — poverty/welfare (in a narrow sense), unemployment benefits, and old age/pensions — thus differ in important ways. It is well known that poverty is unevenly distributed across social classes (e.g., Armingeon, 2006; Cusack et al., 2006; Busemeyer et al., 2009). Poverty is an issue that puts pressure on political action to improve the situation of the affected citizens. The actual number of people receiving welfare benefits, on the other hand, may be comparatively low, but even variation around a low level can be indicative of problem severity. Pensions, on the other side of the spectrum, concern a very large part of the electorate, since old age is a life-course rather than a labour-market risk (Jensen, 2012). It is therefore no surprise that public support is both generally high and larger for social security measures targeted at elderly people as compared to schemes for the unemployed or welfare recipients (Van Oorschot, 2006: 24-25). At the same time, a large number of pensioners does not necessarily reflect problem pressure in the sense of a need for short-term political action (although it could be an indicator of long-term demographic challenges). Unemployment can be characterized as occupying a middle position between poverty and old age in terms of the alignment of the social risk with class divisions, the size of the directly affected or at-risk population, and the degree to which geographical variation in recipient numbers reflects urgency to act.

*** Table 1 about here ***

These considerations result in the specific predictions summarized in Table 1. Party positions on redistribution should explain legislative activity related to unemployment and in particular welfare, but there is not necessarily a programmatic link with pensions. If, empirically, recipients are particularly likely to support a party, one would expect MPs from the

party to attend to the policy schemes relevant for them. The district-level relative size of the group receiving benefits should increase legislative activity across all three fields, but by means of different mechanisms. Given the comparatively low absolute size of the group, a problem pressure mechanism is most plausible for poverty. In the case of pensions, on the other hand, numerical salience should be most relevant. For unemployment benefits, both mechanisms may be at work.

Note that the extent of legislative activity need not necessarily increase at a constant rate with relative district-level group size. Particularly when problem pressure is the underlying mechanism, the relationship may level off with larger group sizes, since further increases are no longer reflecting additional pressure. This suggests using a flexible functional form in the statistical model.

2 Empirical Analysis

2.1 Case selection

The empirical application in this paper centers on individual legislative work related to social security programmes by Belgian federal MPs. There are four reasons that make Belgium a particularly suitable case. First, as in many other countries, social security is one of the most important areas of state activity in Belgium. In the recent past, Belgium spent around half of its total general government expenditure on the welfare state.[5] In addition, a large number of people are concerned about social security, with 33% (1999) and even 74% (2004) of survey respondents mentioning social risks when asked about the most important problems in Belgium.[6]

Second, Belgium employs a PR system with several electoral districts (Deschouwer, 2009). In 1995 and 1999, the 150 MPs were elected from 20 districts at the sub-provincial level. Since 2003, eleven districts (mostly equal to the provinces) have been in place (Pilet, 2007).[7] Third, voting is compulsory in Belgium (Deschouwer, 2009), so potential effects from varying turnout rates across different socio-economic groups can largely be ruled out.

[5] In the period between 1999 and 2007, the observed range was between 47.9% and 52.0%, see http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/socx-data-en.

[6] Own analysis of European Election Studies data. Most mentioned problems refer to unemployment.

[7] It has been argued that the reorganization of districts has also changed the nature of constituency representation (de Winter and Baudewyns, 2015). The correlations between the measures of local salience calculated for the two different sets of districts is very high, though.

Fourth, institutional rules grant any individual Belgian MP the right to introduce a bill at any time (de Winter and Dumont, 2006). This provides Belgian MPs with an arena for addressing issues that are important to their constituents, a strategy which is frequently used.[8] Parties are generally strong in the Belgian "partitocracy" (de Winter and Dumont, 2006), so analyzing dyadic representation in a party-dominated context is a conservative choice.

Regarding MPs' re-election motivation, MPs could expect constituency-level actors to play a considerable role in candidate selection in the large majority of Belgian parties during the period of interest (Vandeleene et al., 2013; Maddens et al., 2014) . In addition, MPs may speak and act for district-level interests more readily also because doing so can improve their personal vote. Belgium uses a flexible-list system that allows voters to cast several preference votes (André et al., 2012; Wauters et al., 2016).

In the period under study, Belgium was led by the broad "rainbow coalition" (consisting of Liberals, Socialists, and Greens) from 1999 to 2003, which in parts (i.e., without the Green parties) continued to govern between 2003 and 2007. Belgium has traditionally had a generous welfare state, built around Bismarckian social insurance schemes, but the system came under increasing fiscal pressure in the 1980s also due to the high debt ratio of the Belgian state (Vandenbroucke, 2013; Hemerijck and Marx, 2010: 142).

2.2 Measurement, Data and Statistical Model

I assess the theoretical arguments with empirical data referring to parliamentary activity by Belgian federal MPs in the 50th (1999–2003) and 51st (2003–2007) legislative period. The phenomenon to be explained is the degree to which MPs respond to locally salient policy issues in their parliamentary work. The dependent variable is therefore the number of private members' bills referring to different social security programmes an MP (co-)authored. Further information on how the number of proposals related to pensions, unemployment benefits, and welfare is measured is given in Appendix D.

The empirical analysis will examine whether party constituency and geographical constituency variables *predict* legislative activity, while including other explanatory factors of bill initiation in the model (cp. Gelman and Hill, 2007:167). Results for these control variables are of secondary importance from a theoretical perspective. The model is thus correlational rather than causal, and it makes sense to add the key factors from the above-mentioned the-

[8]There are informal constraints to bill initiation, since MPs usually have to ask the party leadership for permission, and MPs from government parties also must not challenge the coalition agreement (de Winter and Dumont, 2006).

oretical "baseline model" as predictors. Note that this is a conservative approach: Controlling for committee membership biases *against* finding the hypothesized links with constituency representation if committee assignment of the MP already reflects considerations to represent. In addition, Appendix F shows that the results for the constituency variables hardly change when dropping the committee controls.

To measure party positions on the economic left–right dimension, I draw on expert survey data by Bakker et al. (2015), using the average of the 1999 and 2002 scores for the 50th and that of the 2002 and 2006 scores for the 51st legislature, in a linear (0-10 scale) and squared variant. Using a quadratic functional form in the model allows for a wide range of possible links between economic policy positions and legislative activity. This is warranted because the assumption of a linear relationship would be too restrictive (cp. Häusermann et al., 2013).

To capture empirically observed party constituencies, I make use of population surveys, the European Values Study 1999 and the second wave of the European Social Survey from 2004. These data allow for comparing the odds of voting for a certain party in the group of benefit recipients (pensioners, unemployed, people with low income as a proxy group for people on welfare) with the respective odds of the non-recipients. To arrive at a three-fold measure, it is coded whether this odds ratio is below 0.8 (weaker electoral support in group), above 1.2 (stronger electoral support in group), or in between. Since a simple categorical variable cannot incorporate the sampling error inherent in the survey, I use a bootstrapping approach to derive continuous versions of these variables (the proportion of samples in which the indicator is one; see Appendix C).

Data on the number of benefit recipients come from *Banque Carrefour de la Sécurité Sociale*. Aggregating from information at the level of municipalities, I calculated the size of the following groups relative to the voting age population: pensioners, unemployed and people on welfare. To allow for decreasing marginal effects, as discussed above, the variable is also used in squared form. Appendix A shows maps that summarize the spatial variation in recipient numbers by policy field and time period.

Legislative activity related to social security will also be influenced by other factors. First of all, members of potentially relevant parliamentary committees can be expected to initiate more proposals on social security policies. Information on the proportion of the legislative session in which an MP was a *full member* or a *substitute member* of committees that may work on social

policy–related issues is taken from official documents describing committee composition, which are available on the website of the Belgian parliament.[9]

MPs of government parties have a wider array of possibilities to influence policy-making, whereas opposition MPs are expected to initiate more bills. Since current government policy can differ across the two terms and may affect reactions from the parliamentary floor, I use interactions with legislative period, including variables for *Opposition, 50th parliament*; *Government, 51st parliament* and *Opposition, 51st parliament*.

Potential effects of seniority are modeled with indicator variables for MPs serving their *first term*, *second term*, and *third term* (reference category: fourth/higher term). *High-level party office* indicates party or parliamentary party group leaders who may be more active legislators. Less active, in contrast, may be MPs currently also holding a *local office* (mayor, alderman, or city councilor).[10] Different bill initiation behaviour may be shown by MPs who are the *sole representatives* of their party in their district.

Next, some MPs have been or still are members/presidents of the municipality-level institutions in charge of administering welfare (*Centres Public d'Action Sociale*). These *CPAS members* may have a special interest and/or expertise in social security. Parliamentary behaviour is also not independent of personal characteristics of the MP, so I include a dummy variable indicating whether an *MP is above 50* and one for *female MP*. In addition, introducing *Francophone party* as explanatory factor allows for differences in behaviour between Flemish and French-speaking MPs not captured by other variables. Finally, marginality measures, in the form of an indicator for remaining *Below Droop quota* (after redistribution of list votes) and for being a *Successor MP*, are also included. Descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Appendix E.

The dependent variables represent counts of bills related to the three policy sub-fields. For simplicity, a separate statistical model is run for each of the dependent variables. The data have a multi-level structure, since some politicians were MPs in both legislative periods and since the MPs are nested within party-in-a-district lists. To take into account these features, a multi-level Poisson regression with random effects for individual politicians is run, using cluster-robust standard errors for combinations of party–district combinations.[11] Due to inclusion of

[9]Considered are the "Committee for Social Affairs, the "Committee for Finances and the Budget", the "Committee for Economy, Science, Education, Scientific and Cultural National Institutions, Middle Classes and Agriculture", and the "Committee for Public Health, Environment and Societal Renewal".

[10]Respective information comes from the official biographies on the website of the Belgian parliament.

[11]The party–district combinations are based on the geographically larger electoral districts from the 51st legislative period, since legislature-specific party–district combinations would be crossed with the MP-level random effects. Such crossing is not possible for cluster-robust standard errors, and estimation proved difficult with a second set of party-district random effects. Note that standard errors tend to be smaller and all constituency-

the MP-level random effect, the model also handles overdispersion.[12] In order to account for variation in MPs' duration of mandate, an offset is used in the regression model.[13]

2.3 Results

*** Figure 1 about here ***

Before delving into the regression results, let us consider two summaries of descriptive information. Figure 1 plots log-odds ratios of party support by benefit recipients (vs. non-recipients) against left–right party positions. The graph illustrates that the match between the left–right dimension and the empirically observed party constituencies is not necessarily close and varies across issues, partly also over years. Unemployed persons tend to favour left parties, but there are exceptions. The 1999 election shows the remarkable pattern that low income citizens actually preferred economically rightist to leftist parties. Pensioners, in both years, particularly support centrist, especially the Christian Democratic parties.

*** Table 2 about here ***

Table 2 turns to the dependent variables and compares the number of social security–related initiatives made by MPs who were (full) members of the social affairs committee for the full term to that of initiatives made by MPs who were not members of that committee during the legislative term. While committee membership, as expected, accounts for a good deal of variation in legislative activity, it by no means explains all of it. There are some committee members who do not put forward any proposals. What is more, a considerable share of MPs who do not sit on the Committee for Social Affairs initiate at least one related proposal (the share ranges from 19+4=23% for unemployment to 21+15=36% for pensions). These figures are barely smaller if a stricter definition of a non-specialist is applied, as done in the rightmost column by excluding members from further relevant committees (those that are statistically significant predictors for work in the respective field in the models below). Hence, MPs must have some incentive to attend to issues that are unrelated to committee membership. Please see Appendix B for a graph that further illustrates the observed variation in bill initiation (by party and by electoral constituency).

*** Table 3 about here ***

related variables remain statistically significant when using standard errors clustered at the district-level, see Appendix G.

[12] Checks indicate that the expected share of zero counts under the model closely matches the observed rate.

[13] MPs with very short stays in parliament (less than 50 days) are not considered in the analysis.

Table 3 shows the results of the regression models for the three policy areas.

To start with, the overall results show that distinguishing between the three policy areas is warranted, since the factors explaining MPs' legislative activity differ across the fields. Consider first the economic policy position as one of the party constituency variables. It was argued that MPs from rightist parties initiate fewer bills linked to welfare and unemployment, while no clear pattern was expected for pension legislation. Surprisingly, these predictions are not supported by the data, as the positional variables are in fact statistically significant only in the case of bills related to old age, and not in the case of others. Figure 2 illustrates the relationships reflected by the linear and squared term. For welfare, there is a slight inverse U-shaped pattern, but the substantive size of the relationship is small. More in line with the expectations is the downward sloping curve for unemployment-related initiatives (p-value for the linear effect is only slightly larger than .05), with MPs from parties of the left spectrum being the most active, while centrist and rightist MPs being very similar. Most pronounced is the pattern for bills linked to pensions, with a clear inverse U-shape peaking near the center of the scale. This is remarkable, because the model controls for the tendency among recipients to support a party, so that it is unlikely that the inverse-U finding for the positions merely reflects the tendency of pensioners to vote for Centrist parties for *non-economic* reasons. Rather, pensions seem to be a policy area reflecting programmatically centrist ideas of cross-class support (cp. van Kersbergen, 1995:103).

*** Figure 2 about here ***

It can be seen that also the electoral support of parties predicts legislative activity regarding pensions. Interestingly, not only are more such bills put forward by MPs from parties that do better among the elderly (compared to MPs from parties doing about equally well among retired and non-retired citizens), but also by MPs from parties that perform worse in the group of pensioners. This finding suggests that, given the large pool of pensioners, MPs from parties with underwhelming performance in that demographic group have an incentive to do something against this state. In contrast, the electoral support variables do not reach standard levels of statistical significance for the other two policy fields. This may have to do with the rather small absolute number of directly affected persons.

*** Figure 3 about here ***

Also for salience to the local constituency, reflected in the relative number of benefit recipients in the electoral district, results differ across the three social risks. This is visible from the

coefficients of the group-size variables, in connection with simulated expected values shown in Figure 3. For welfare as a policy, the number of recipients in the geographical constituency does not predict legislative activity. The coefficients are insignificant and the line is practically flat across the range of the variable. Unemployment shows a non-linear association: For positive values, i.e., those above cross-district average, a larger number of unemployed persons goes along with MPs initiating more bills linked to unemployment benefits. In this case, the marginal effect becomes stronger the more jobless people there are. Where unemployment rates are below-average, on the other hand, increases are linked to a lower degree of bill-drafting activity. Turning to the social risk of old age, there is a clear monotonically increasing relationship between the number of elderly people in a geographical constituency and MPs submitting proposals on pensions. In addition, the graph indicates a ceiling effect, as the curve levels off at higher values. In other words, the difference between geographical constituencies with a very high compared to a high number of pensioners is not as large as that between districts with medium and low levels. Consequently, overall, there is evidence for representation of geographic constituencies in a policy field with variation in numerical salience (pensions) and in a policy field with variation in both numerical salience and problem pressure (unemployment). However, there is no evidence for policy advocacy on behalf of geographical constituencies when it comes to the policy area of welfare (for which geographical variation should mainly reflect problem severity, and not numerical salience, since the overall recipient numbers are low).

The control variables also contribute to explaining patterns of legislative activity related to social security. In line with the theoretical arguments about a baseline model of individual legislative work, the committee variables show substantively strong effects. There is also evidence for government vs. opposition effects, in interaction with time period. It is worth pointing out that, for the policy fields studied here, there is no simple pattern of opposition MPs being more active than their colleagues from the government camp. Other interesting results appear particularly for poverty-related legislative proposals. Currently holding local office and involvement in the CPAS management is positively associated with legislation related to welfare, while first-term MPs are less active in this policy field. Finally, even while controlling for all the other factors, women engage more in legislative work related to welfare than men, which accords with results by other studies such as Ennser-Jedenastik (2017); Bäck et al. (2014).

Taken together, these findings resonate well with the overarching notion that different patterns underlie the representation of party and geographic constituency across the three policies. Elderly people form a large group, so it makes perfect sense that electoral considerations play a large role here. Perhaps more surprising is the additional inverse U-shaped association with

economic left–right positions of the party. This finding suggests that MPs from economically centrist parties look after the concerns of the elderly also for programmatic reasons. The findings for unemployment are less conclusive about the mechanisms. There are left–right differences in the level of activity, and MPs see further need to act where unemployment is above average. The latter perception could reflect a problem pressure mechanism, but also instrumental considerations. The electoral party constituency variables, on the other hand, do not contribute to explaining unemployment-related legislation. Surprisingly, party and geographic constituency factors do not appear to drive individual initiatives related to welfare. Reaction to local problem pressure does not appear to be a driving force in this context. What is found for welfare-related bills, instead, is a dominance of MP-level explanatory factors, such as gender and formal positions in the local administration.

3 Conclusion

This paper argued and presented evidence that MPs work on *national* policy for *local* reasons, a clearly understudied form of dyadic representation. The results show that delegation, expertise, and specialization — as reflected in committee membership — cannot fully account for individual legislative work. The findings also cast doubt on the argument that policy and constituency work are compartmentalized (Fenno, 1978; Norton and Wood, 1993) and thus independent.[14] Instead, the issues that MPs take up in their policy work may very well reflect priorities of the geographical constituency. Individual legislative activity need not be particularistic in terms of content, even when it is rooted in locally important problems. This main argument is confirmed by the result that the relative number of unemployed people and pensioners in the geographical constituency shows a positive association with the number of private members' bills linked to those social risks. In addition, the findings suggest that partisan patterns underlying individual social security legislation are complex. There is no linear left–right relationship, the empirical composition of the party constituency can matter, and results differ across the three sub-fields. This agrees with broader arguments from the literature regarding changing party constituencies in welfare state politics (Häusermann et al., 2013; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015).

The empirical analysis focused on Belgium in the period between 1999 and 2007. Among other reasons, the variation in recipient numbers across electoral districts, coupled with formal rules granting leeway in individual legislative work, made Belgium a suitable case for examining the key arguments. Moreover, given the party-strong environment of Belgium (de Winter and

[14]Compare also Kam (2009) for a critique of this view in relation to dissent in voting.

Dumont, 2006), similar patterns are likely to be found also in other countries. Drawing on just one country, and in a specific period, is necessarily limited in scope. An important caveat linked to the analysis above is that the Christian Democratic parties were in opposition during both legislative periods under study. Thus, it needs to be assumed that the observed overall differences between government and opposition MPs tell enough to control for the extent to which Christian Democratic MPs' behaviour is attributable to opposition status. Due to these limitations, more specific findings should only be generalized with caution. For instance, in the case under study, individual legislative activity on pensions is compatible with representation for vote-seeking reasons, while this is not the case for social welfare (even though Belgium uses obligatory voting). Further research should examine if such patterns are also present in other countries and contexts.

This is warranted, since the findings presented here raise questions linked to the wider debate of whether poor people are less well represented in the political process (e.g., Gilens, 2012; Giger et al., 2012) and how such a bias may be brought about by the interaction of geography and electoral institutions (Jusko, 2017). Such future work should ideally also take into account how representing party and geographic constituency interact. In addition, the approach towards empirically examining party constituency representation, using a flexible functional form for economic left–right and a bootstrapped survey-based measure for electoral support, may also be fruitfully applied to other questions in welfare state research. Finally, the argument that MPs can work on national policy for local reasons applies beyond the field of social policy. Especially the suggested distinction between two types of local salience — size of the affected group and problem severity — may also prove analytically useful in the context of other policy areas.

References

Andeweg, R. B. and J. Thomassen (2011). Pathways to party unity: Sanctions, loyalty, homogeneity and division of labour in the Dutch parliament. *Party Politics 17*(5), 655–672.

André, A., B. Wauters, and J.-B. Pilet (2012). It's not only about lists: Explaining preference voting in belgium. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties 22*(3), 293–313.

Armingeon, K. (2006). Reconciling competing claims of the welfare state clientele. In K. Armingeon and G. Bonoli (Eds.), *The Politics of Post-Industrial Welfare States: Adapting Post-War Social Policies to New Social Risks*, pp. 100–122. Routledge.

Bakker, R., C. de Vries, E. E. Edwards, L. Hooghe, S. Jolly, G. Marks, J. Polk, J. Rovny, M. Steenbergen, and M. Vachudova (2015). Measuring party positions in europe: The chapel hill expert survey trend file, 1999-2010. *Party Politics 21*, 143–152.

Baumann, M. (2016). Constituency demands and limited supplies: Comparing personal issue emphases in co-sponsorship of bills and legislative speech. *Scandinavian Political Studies 39*(4), 366–387.

Bäck, H., M. Debus, and J. Müller (2014). Who takes the parliamentary floor? the role of gender in speech-making in the swedish riksdag. *Political Research Quarterly 67*(3), 504–518.

Bertelli, A. M. and R. M. Dolan (2009). The demand and supply of parliamentary policy advocacy: Evidence from uk health policy, 1997-2005. *Government and Opposition 44*(3), 219–242.

Bevan, S. and W. Jennings (2014). Representation, agendas and institutions. *European Journal of Political Research 53*(1), 37–56.

Blidook, K. and M. Kerby (2012). Constituency influence on 'constituency members': The adaptability of roles to electoral realities in the canadian case. In S. Martin and O. Rozenberg (Eds.), *The roles and function of parliamentary questions*, pp. 69–81. London: Routledge.

Bowler, S. (2010). Private members' bills in the uk parliament: Is there an 'electoral connection'? *The Journal of Legislative Studies 16*(4), 476–494.

Brack, N. and J.-B. Pilet (2016). Explaining mps' constituency service in multilevel systems: the case of belgium. *French Politics 14*(4), 439–468.

Bräuninger, T., M. Brunner, and T. Däubler (2012). Personal vote-seeking in in flexible list systems: How electoral incentives shape belgian mps' bill initiation behaviour. *European Journal of Political Research 51*(5), 607–645.

Busemeyer, M. R., A. Goerres, and S. Weschle (2009). Attitudes towards redistributive spending in an era of demographic ageing: The rival pressures from age and income in 14 OECD countries. *Journal of European Social Policy 19*(3), 195–212.

Cain, B., J. Ferejohn, and M. Fiorina (1987). *The personal vote*. Harvard University Press.

Colomer, J. M. (2011). *Personal representation. The neglected dimension of electoral systems*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Cusack, T., T. Iversen, and P. Rehm (2006). Risks at work: The demand and supply sides of government redistribution. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy 22*(3), 365–389.

de Winter, L. and P. Baudewyns (2015). Candidate centred campaigning in a party centred context: The case of belgium. *Electoral Studies 39*, 295–305.

de Winter, L. and P. Dumont (2006). Do belgian parties undermine the democratic chain of delegation? *West European Politics 29*(5), 957–976.

Deschouwer, K. (2009). *The Politics of Belgium. Governing a divided society.* Houndmills/Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Ennser-Jedenastik, L. (2017). Campaigning on the welfare state: The impact of gender and gender diversity. *Journal of European Social Policy 27*(3), 215–228.

Fenno, R. F. (1978). *Home style : House members in their districts.* Boston: Little, Brown.

Gelman, A. and J. Hill (2007). *Data analysis using regression and multilevel/hierarchical models.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Giger, N., J. Rosset, and J. Bernauer (2012). The poor political representation of the poor in a comparative perspective. *Representation 48*(1), 47–61.

Gilens, M. (2012). *Affluence and influence: Economic inequality and political power in America.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gingrich, J. and S. Häusermann (2015). The decline of the working-class vote, the reconfiguration of the welfare support coalition and consequences for the welfare state. *Journal of European Social Policy 25*(1), 50–75.

Green-Pedersen, C. (2010). Bringing parties into parliament the development of parliamentary activities in western europe. *Party Politics 16*(3), 347–369.

Gschwend, T. and T. Zittel (2016). Who brings home the pork? parties and the role of localness in committee assignments in mixed-member proportional systems. *Party Politics*, 1354068816678884.

Heitshusen, V., G. Young, and D. M. Wood (2005). Electoral context and mp constituency focus in australia, canada, ireland, new zealand, and the united kingdom. *American Journal of Political Science 49*(1), 32–45.

Hemerijck, A. and I. Marx (2010). Continental welfare at a crossroads: The choice between activation and minimum income protection in Belgium and the Netherlands. In B. Palier (Ed.), *A Long Goodbye to Bismarck*, pp. 129–155. Amsterdam University Press.

Hibbs, D. A. (1977). Political parties and macroeconomic policy. *American Political Science Review 71*, 14678–1487.

Hug, S. (2013). Parliamentary voting. In W. C. Müller and H. M. Narud (Eds.), *Party governance and party democracy*, pp. 137–157. New York: Springer.

Häusermann, S., G. Picot, and D. Geering (2013). Review article: Rethinking party politics and the welfare state ? recent advances in the literature. *British Journal of Political Science 43*(1), 221–240.

Jensen, C. (2012). Labour market-versus life course-related social policies: understanding cross-programme differences. *Journal of European Public Policy 19*(2), 275–291.

Jusko, K. L. (2017). *Who speaks for the poor? Electoral geography, party entry, and representation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kam, C. (2009). *Party discipline and parliamentary politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kingdon, J. W. (2003). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Lipset, S. M. and S. Rokkan (1967). Cleavage structures, party systems and voter alignments. In S. M. Lipset and S. Rokkan (Eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments. Cross-national Perspectives*, pp. 1–67. Free Press.

Louwerse, T. and S. Otjes (2016). Personalised parliamentary behaviour without electoral incentives: the case of the netherlands. *West European Politics 39*(4), 778–799.

Maddens, B., G.-J. Put, and J. Smulders (2014). *Het DNA van de kandidaten.* Leuven: Acco.

Marangoni, F. and F. Tronconi (2011). When territory matters: Parliamentary profiles and legislative behaviour in italy (1987-2008). *The Journal of Legislative Studies 17*(4), 415–434.

Martin, S. (2011). Using parliamentary questions to measure constituency focus: An application to the irish case. *Political Studies 59*(2), 472–488.

Mattson, I. (1995). Private members' initiatives and amendments. In H. Döring (Ed.), *Parliaments and majority rule in Western Europe*, pp. 448–487. Frankfurt/New York: Campus/St. Martin's Press.

Miler, K. C. (2007). The view from the hill: Legislative perceptions of the district. *Legislative Studies Quarterly 32*(4), 597–628.

Norton, P. and D. M. Wood (1993). *Back from Westminster : British members of Parliament and their constituents*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Papp, Z. (2016). Shadowing the elected: mixed-member incentives to locally oriented parliamentary questioning. *The Journal of Legislative Studies 22*(2), 216–236.

Pilet, J.-B. (2007). Strategies under the surface: The determinants of redistricting in belgium. *Comparative European Politics 5*(2), 205–225.

Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Renwick, A. and J.-B. Pilet (2016). *Faces on the ballot. The personalization of electoral systems in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Russo, F. (2012). The constituency as a focus of representation: studying the italian case through the analysis of parliamentary questions. In S. Martin and O. Rozenberg (Eds.), *The roles and function of parliamentary questions*, pp. 32–43. London: Routledge.

Saalfeld, T. and D. Bischof (2013). Minority-ethnic mps and the substantive representation of minority interests in the house of commons, 2005-2011. *Parliamentary Affairs 66*(2), 305–328.

Shomer, Y. (2014). What affects candidate selection processes? a cross-national examination. *Party Politics 4*(4), 533–546.

Sieberer, U. (2006). Party unity in parliamentary democracies: A comparative analysis. *The Journal of Legislative Studies 12*(2), 150–178.

Soroka, S., E. Penner, and K. Blidook (2009). Constituency influence in parliament. *Canadian Journal of Political Science 42*(03), 563–591.

Strøm, K. (1995). Parliamentary government and legislative organization. In H. Döring (Ed.), *Parliaments and majority rule in Western Europe*, pp. 51–81. Frankfurt am Main: Campus/Westview.

Suiter, J. and E. O'Malley (2014). Chieftains delivering: Testing different measures of "pork" on an irish data set of discretionary sports grants. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties 24*(1), 115–124.

Thomassen, J. (1994). Empirical research into political representation: Failing democracy or failing models? In M. K. Jennings and T. E. Mann (Eds.), *Elections at Home and Abroad: Essays in Honor of Warren E. Miller*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Thomassen, J. and R. B. Andeweg (2004). Beyond collective representation: individual members of parliament and interest representation in the netherlands. *The Journal of Legislative Studies 10*(4), 47–69.

van Kersbergen, K. (1995). *Social capitalism: A study of Christian democracy and the welfare state*. London: Routledge.

van Kersbergen, K. and B. Vis (2014). *Comparative welfare state politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Van Oorschot, W. (2006). Making the difference in social Europe: Deservingness perceptions among citizens of European welfare states. *Journal of European social policy 16*(1), 23–42.

Vandeleene, A., L. de Winter, C. Meulewaeter, and P. Baudewyns (2013). Candidate selection: Explorations beyond the secret garden of politics. Paper presented at the 12th Politocologenetmaal, Ghent.

Vandenbroucke, F. (2013). *The Active Welfare State Revisited*. Brugge: de Keure.

Vliegenthart, R., S. Walgrave, and C. Meppelink (2011). Inter-party agenda-setting in the belgian parliament: The role of party characteristics and competition. *Political Studies 59*(2), 368–388.

Wauters, B., P. Thijssen, P. V. Aelst, and J.-B. Pilet (2016). Centralized personalization at the expense of decentralized personalization. The decline of preferential voting in Belgium (2003-2014). *Party Politics*.

Woon, J. (2009). Issue attention and legislative proposals in the u.s. senate. *Legislative Studies Quarterly 34*(1), 29–54.

Table 1: Summary of specific predictions for legislative activity across social risks

	Poverty	**Unemployment**	**Old age**
Party constituency			
Economic left–right position	– –	–	?
Stronger electoral support among recipients (vs non-recipients)	+	+	+
Geographical constituency			
Share of recipients			
by reflecting problem pressure	+	+	?
by numerical salience	?	+	++

Table 2: Legislative activity, by Committee for Social Affairs membership (column %)

	Members	**Non-members**	**Non-members of any key com.**
Welfare			(plus Health)
No bill	24	72	77
1 bill	29	21	20
2 or more bills	48	7	3
Unemployment			(plus Finance)
No bill	19	77	79
1 bill	43	19	17
2 or more bills	38	4	4
Pensions			(plus Finance, Health)
No bill	5	64	70
1 bill	29	21	20
2 or more bills	67	15	10
N	21	189	138 / 160 / 166

Considered are only MPs who were in parliament for the full term.
MPs with temporary membership in one of the committees are excluded.

Table 3: Results of multi-level count data regression model

	Welfare	**Unemployment**	**Retirement**
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Party constituency variables			
Econ. left-right	0.55	-0.75	1.13**
	(0.47)	(0.38)	(0.37)
Econ. left-right squared	-0.06	0.05	-0.10**
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Electoral support in group (reference: similar):			
weaker	0.89	0.32	1.63**
	(0.88)	(0.82)	(0.62)
stronger	0.96	-0.68	1.81**
	(0.86)	(1.11)	(0.57)
Geographical constituency variables			
Group size	0.17	-0.02	0.13**
	(0.25)	(0.07)	(0.04)
Group size squared	0.01	0.07***	-0.02
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Controls			
Share as soc. aff. com. member	1.25***	2.20***	1.90***
	(0.30)	(0.26)	(0.23)
Share as soc. aff. com. sub	0.31	0.60	0.45*
	(0.25)	(0.32)	(0.18)
Share as finance com. member	0.61	0.84**	0.79**
	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.28)
Share as finance com. sub	0.32	0.17	0.12
	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.25)
Share as econ. com. member	0.12	0.47	0.35
	(0.31)	(0.42)	(0.37)
Share as econ. com. sub	0.15	0.54	0.13
	(0.23)	(0.31)	(0.29)
Share as health com. member	1.64***	0.18	0.69***
	(0.22)	(0.25)	(0.20)
Share as health com. sub	0.22	-0.16	0.27
	(0.33)	(0.25)	(0.23)
Government and time (reference: Gov, 50th):			
Opposition, 50th parl.	0.06	-1.05**	-0.61*
	(0.32)	(0.38)	(0.28)
Government, 51st parl.	0.15	-0.77*	0.88***
	(0.24)	(0.31)	(0.18)
Opposition, 51st parl.	0.60	1.02**	0.23
	(0.32)	(0.40)	(0.26)
Successor MP	-0.28	-0.43	0.03
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.19)
Below Droop quota	-0.15	-0.12	0.05
	(0.16)	(0.24)	(0.25)
High-level party office	-0.24	-0.55	0.22
	(0.35)	(0.32)	(0.32)
Current local office	0.60**	-0.44	-0.22
	(0.22)	(0.27)	(0.26)
Sole representative	0.28	0.10	0.18
	(0.22)	(0.28)	(0.21)
Seniority (reference: Fourth term or higher):			
First term MP	-0.76*	-0.32	-0.40
	(0.30)	(0.34)	(0.27)
Second term MP	-0.02	-0.14	-0.28

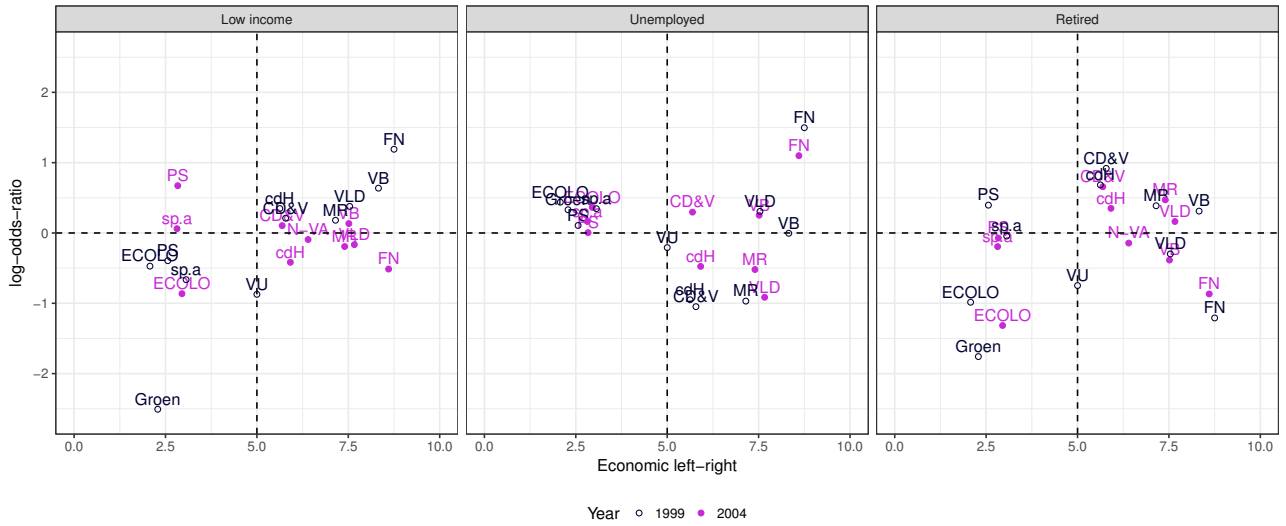
Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

	Welfare	**Unemployment**	**Retirement**
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	(0.30)	(0.37)	(0.25)
Third term MP	-0.29	-0.26	-0.39
	(0.32)	(0.42)	(0.30)
CPAS member	0.95**	-0.12	-0.07
	(0.29)	(0.37)	(0.39)
Female	0.74**	-0.03	0.19
	(0.25)	(0.20)	(0.27)
MP above 50	-0.19	-0.26	0.13
	(0.20)	(0.26)	(0.17)
Francophone	0.04	-0.29	0.40
	(0.29)	(0.33)	(0.22)
Constant	-10.99***	-5.95***	-12.55***
	(1.48)	(1.04)	(0.98)
σ^2_{MP}	0.31*	0.00	0.73***
	(0.15)	(0.00)	(0.20)
N	352	352	352
N cluster	61	61	61
log likelihood	-241.1	-210.0	-353.4

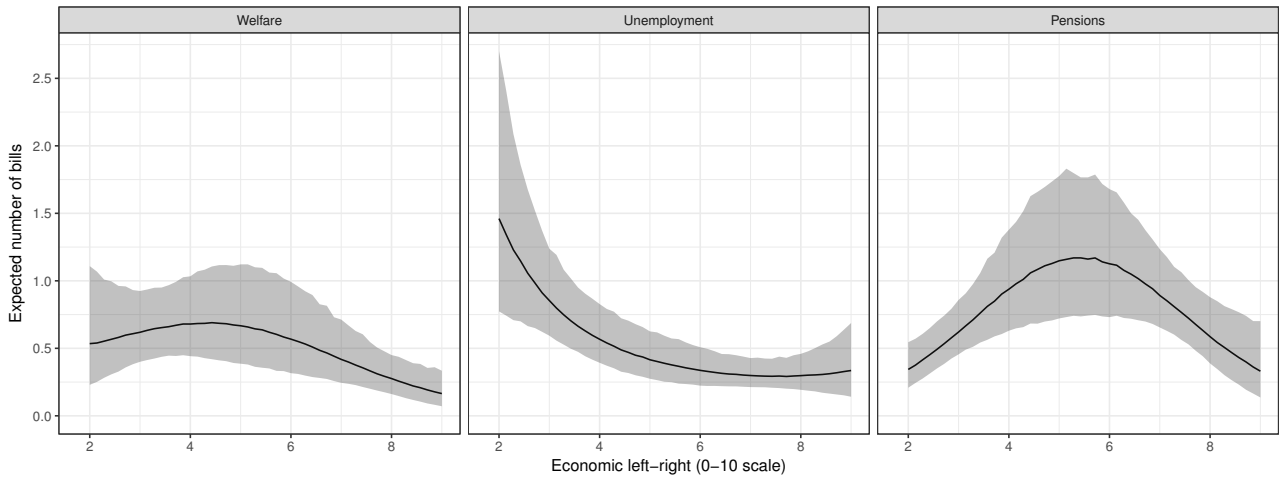
Note: Coefficients, with cluster-robust (party–district level) standard errors in parentheses, $*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001$

Figure 1: Comparing economic left–right positions and parties' electoral support among benefit recipients



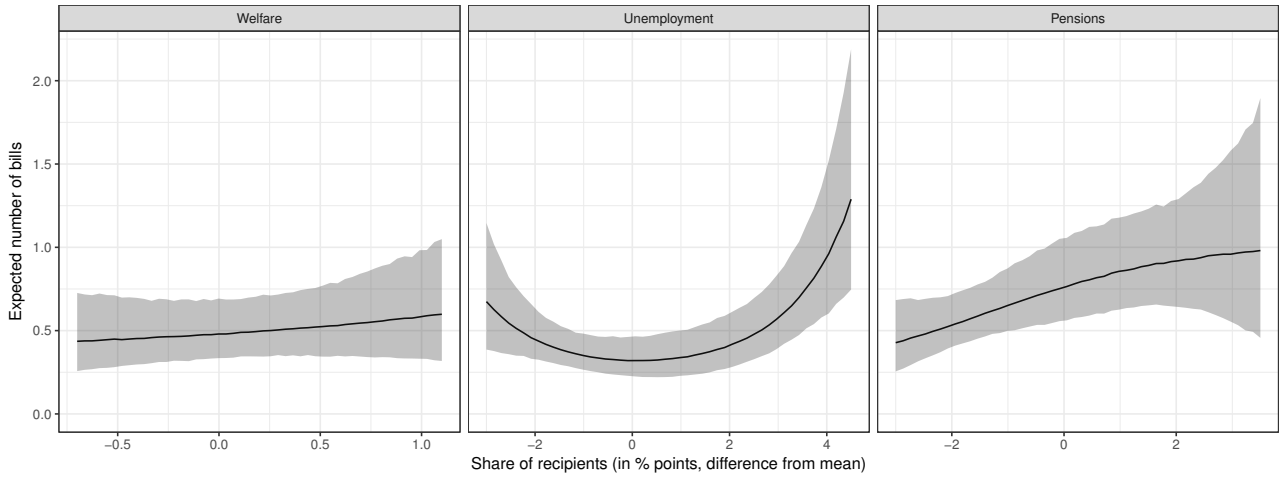
Note: Positive values of the log odds ratio imply that members of the group are more likely to vote for the party than non-members. Based on own calculations using European Values Survey 1999 and European Social Survey Wave 2. See Appendix C for details.

Figure 2: Economic left–right positions and expected number of bills



Note: Plot shows simulated expected values (with other variables at the observed values; duration of mandate is set to full term) and 95% confidence intervals. Values are shown across the range of left–right scores observed in the data at hand.

Figure 3: Salience to geographical constituency and expected number of bills



Note: Plot shows simulated expected values (with other variables at the observed values; duration of mandate is set to full term) and 95% confidence intervals. Values are shown across the range of group size observed in the data at hand.

Supplementary Online Appendices

A Spatial variation in the number of benefit recipients

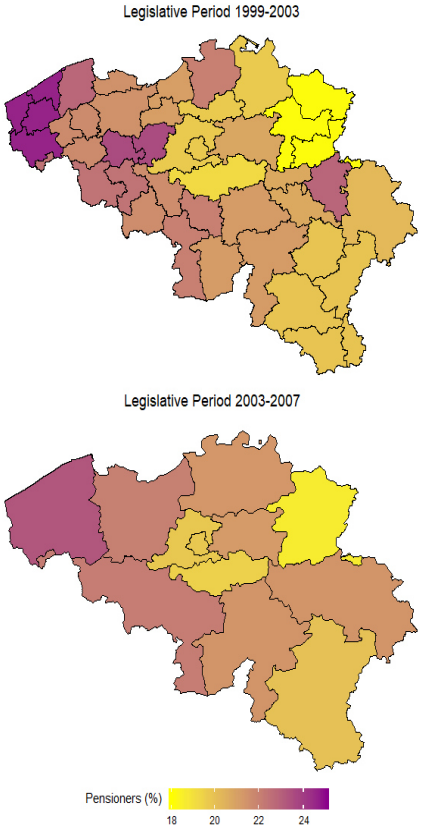


Figure A.1: Pensions

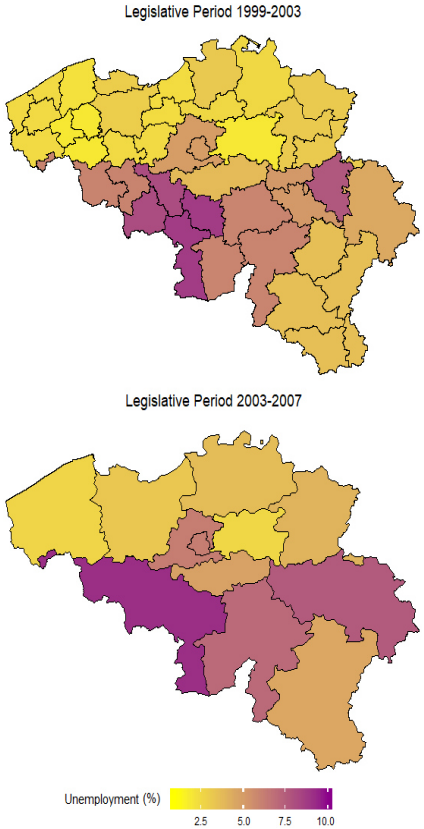


Figure A.2: Unemployment benefits

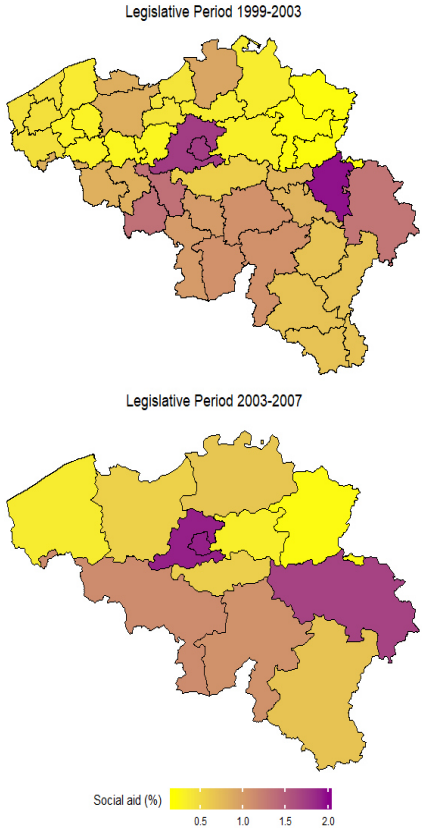
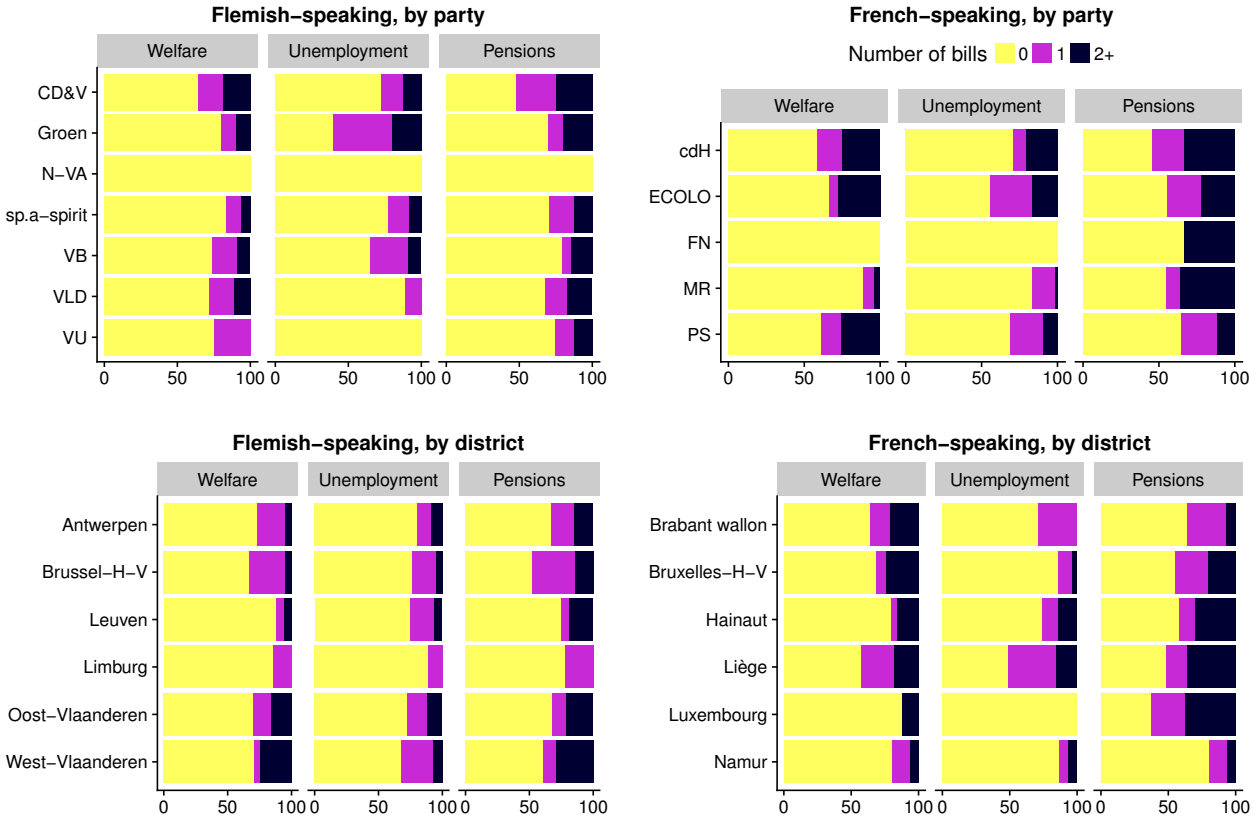


Figure A.3: Welfare

B Variation in MPs' social security-related legislative activity across parties and districts

Figure B.4: Private members' bills at the level of MPs (%)



Note: For MPs who did not serve the full legislative term, figures are proportionally adjusted to a full term (as this creates non-integer values, the category cut-offs are 0.5 and 1.5 for these cases).

C Measuring group-level electoral support

The aim is to derive a measure that captures whether each group of benefit recipients (pensions, unemployment, or welfare) is more, about the same, or less likely to vote for a party than the non-recipients. Such a three-way classification has the advantage of being simple, and, unlike for a continuous variable, it does not require assumptions about functional form of the relationship when included in the regression model.

The measure used is based on the odds ratio for party support in the recipient and non-recipient group. Consider the following example. Suppose 20% of pensioners vote for party P, but only 15% of non-pensioners vote for party P. The odds in the pensioners group are $0.2/0.8 = 0.25$, among non-pensioners they are $0.15/0.85 \approx 0.176$. So the odds ratio of voting for P among pensioners vs. non-pensioners is $\approx 0.25/0.176 \approx 1.14$. Cut-off values chosen for the three-way-classification are based on a 20% change in the odds ($< .8, \geq .8 \leq 1.2, > 1.2$), which should reflect a large-enough difference to matter to the parties in practice. So the example would be classified in the middle group.

To take into account sampling error in the survey data, I use 1000 bootstrap samples, do a three-way classification in each sample, and then take the proportion of samples a party falls into a category to calculate the three final measures. This gives variables with a range from 0-1, which are akin to measures of the probability that the party belongs to the respective category.

Table C.5 summarizes the results.

Population survey data are from the European Values Survey 1999 and European Social Survey Wave 2. I use party choice questions, complemented with party closeness information (EVS-99: Vote intention; Most appealing party, if available and answer to vote intention is "would not vote". ESS-2: Vote choice in 2003 election; Party closer to, if available and vote choice information missing.). Calculations are done separately for each language group (inferred from the party chosen, or region and interview language if "other party"). Information on status as retired or unemployed is directly available from the surveys. The low income group as a proxy for people on welfare comprises those with an income less than 40,000 Belgian Francs (EVS-99) and 40,300 Belgian Francs (ESS-2). In both surveys, this group corresponds to approximately 15% of respondents answering the income question.

Figure C.5: Results from bootstrapped classification of electoral support

	Retired persons						Unemployed persons						Persons with low income					
	EVS 1999			ESS 2			EVS 1999			ESS 2			EVS 1999			ESS 2		
	Lower	Same	Higher	Lower	Same	Higher	Lower	Same	Higher	Lower	Same	Higher	Lower	Same	Higher	Lower	Same	Higher
Flemish-speaking																		
CD&V	0	0	1	0	.016	.984	.952	.045	.003	.032	.168	.8	.155	.402	.443	.151	.53	.319
Groen	.999	.001	0	.996	.004	0	.188	.321	.491	.186	.195	.619	1	0	0	.339	.324	.337
N-VA				.393	.335	.272				1	0	0				.394	.228	.378
VB	.037	.313	.65	.662	.32	.018	.267	.283	.45	.139	.303	.558	.055	.147	.798	.082	.348	.57
VLD	.636	.346	.018	.055	.595	.35	.148	.295	.557	.927	.068	.005	.03	.168	.802	.579	.38	.041
VU	.94	.057	.003				.501	.274	.225				.899	.084	.017			
sp.a-spirit	.158	.523	.319	.477	.495	.028	.158	.233	.609	.275	.404	.321	.763	.186	.051	.152	.534	.314
Francophone																		
cdH	.002	.067	.931	.03	.287	.683	.73	.235	.035	.8	.167	.033	.053	.295	.652	.732	.22	.048
ECOLO	1	0	0	1	0	0	.014	.188	.798	.087	.218	.695	.573	.402	.025	.8	.169	.031
FN	.933	.059	.008	.666	.232	.102	.077	.085	.838	.046	.056	.898	.05	.092	.858	.718	.175	.107
MR	0	.083	.917	.007	.212	.781	.996	.004	0	.8	.184	.016	.063	.441	.496	.465	.429	.106
PS	.001	.152	.847	.16	.676	.164	.31	.451	.239	.127	.503	.37	.939	.061	0	.001	.045	.954

D Measuring legislative activity on social security

Adapting a definition by the Oecd (2013), social security is understood here as comprising "policies related to the public provision of benefits (and financial contributions) to households and individuals in order to provide support during circumstances which adversely affect their welfare, more specifically old age, unemployment and poverty".[1]

The following rules were used to code policies that involve some ambiguity. *Unemployment* covers benefits a person receives when not working ("passive" benefits). This category includes only proposals dealing specifically with benefits to individuals. Some forms of early retirement in Belgium (`prépension`, but not `rétraite anticipée`) are technically and practically a form of unemployment benefit and counted as such.

Welfare refers to non-insurance based policies/welfare policies, including such benefits for older people. Occasionally legislative work refers to social security schemes that specifically apply to small groups, such as artists or military staff. These bills are not counted for the dependent variables used in the analysis, since the local concentration of these groups is not captured by the general recipient group size explanatory variables.

Information on all Belgian private members bills initiated in the period of interest (N=2840) is included in the Comparative Legislation Project dataset (Bräuninger et al., 2007; Bräuninger and Debus, 2009). The data also provide the Belgian parliament's official keywords (based on the Eurovoc classification system) for each bill. The bills of interest were selected in three steps. First, all keywords clearly unrelated to social security were identified and respective bills discarded.[2] Second, remaining keywords were coded into potentially relevant and irrelevant. Finally, all bills containing a potentially relevant keyword (N=1150) were manually coded based on (in order of importance) title, principal descriptor, first keyword, and remaining keywords.

To reduce the risk of overlooking bills of interest, an automated pre-indication based on string searches of central terms (e.g. pension) in title and keywords was used to assist with the manual coding, too. In ambiguous cases, the actual bill (which comes with a summary and a motivation section) was consulted. When a bill referred to more than one of the social security policy fields, it was counted to each of them, since it represents the interests of all affected groups. Coding was conducted by the author and a research assistant. Based on

[1] Benefits may be in cash or in kind, or in the form of taxation rules (tax credits, tax exemptions etc.).

[2] To do so, I relied on policy area codings included in the Comparative Legislation Dataset as well as the issue coding from the Belgian part of the Comparative Agendas Project (Walgrave and De Swert, 2007). Codes from these two schemes are too generic for the final selection of bills, but allow to sort out keywords as irrelevant if these keywords had only been linked to policy areas/topics with no relation to social security, such as foreign or environmental policy.

independent coding of 100 randomly selected bills, we discussed the results and the coding scheme was improved. The remaining proposals were again double-coded independently. The author reviewed all cases with inconsistent codings and then made a final decision.

E Descriptive statistics

Continuous variables	Min	Mean	Median	Max
Bills				
Pensions	0	0.80	0	11
Unemployment	0	0.38	0	7
Welfare	0	0.48	0	10
Recipient group size (%)				
Pensioners	18.08	21.11	21.29	24.54
Unemployed	1.85	4.74	3.70	9.08
Welfare	0.22	0.90	0.69	1.95
Pensioners (de-meaned)	-3.03	0	0.18	3.43
Unemployed (de-meaned)	-2.89	0	-1.04	4.35
Welfare (de-meaned)	-0.68	0	-0.22	1.05
Pensioners (de-meaned, squared)	.00	2.02	.88	11.78
Unemployed (de-meaned, squared)	.00	4.95	2.66	18.89
Welfare (de-meaned, squared)	.00	.31	.23	1.10
Economic left-right				
Linear	2.08	5.38	5.79	8.75
Squared	4.31	33.57	33.47	76.56
Electoral support in group lower				
Pensioners	0	.26	.06	1
Unemployed	.01	.44	.28	1
Low income	.00	.34	.15	1
Electoral support in group higher				
Pensioners	0	.46	.35	1
Unemployed	0	.32	.32	.90
Low income	0	.36	.31	.95
Committee membership				
Share as soc. aff. com. member	0	0.10	0	1
Share as soc. aff. com. sub	0	0.14	0	1
Share as finance com. member	0	0.10	0	1
Share as finance com. sub	0	0.14	0	1
Share as econ. com. member	0	0.09	0	1
Share as econ. com. sub	0	0.14	0	1
Share as health com. member	0	0.10	0	1
Share as health com. sub	0	0.14	0	1
Duration of mandate	105	1185.05	1380	1428

Categorical variables	Mean	Sum
Political competition and time		
Government, 50th parl.	0.31	110
Opposition, 50th parl.	0.17	59
Government, 51st parl.	0.34	118
Opposition, 51st parl.	0.18	65
Seniority		
First term MP	0.47	164
Second term MP	0.22	78
Third term MP	0.12	44
Fourth or higher term	0.19	66
High-level party office	0.08	27
Sole representative	0.24	83
Current local office	0.72	252
CPAS member	0.09	32
Female	0.30	104
MP above 50	0.34	119
Francophone	0.42	149
Successor MP	0.28	99
Below Droop quota	0.30	106

N=352.

F Regression model without committee controls

Table F.1: Results of multi-level count data regression model

	Welfare	**Unemployment**	**Retirement**
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Party constituency variables			
Econ. left-right	0.35	-0.67	1.07*
	(0.58)	(0.49)	(0.43)
Econ. left-right squared	-0.04	0.04	-0.10*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Electoral support in group (reference: similar):			
weaker	1.04	-0.44	1.16
	(0.98)	(0.91)	(0.61)
stronger	1.14	-1.69	1.41*
	(0.95)	(1.16)	(0.58)
Geographical constituency variables			
Group size	0.22	-0.03	0.16**
	(0.26)	(0.11)	(0.05)
Group size squared	0.01	0.07**	-0.05
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Controls			
Government and time (reference: Gov, 50th):			
Opposition, 50th parl.	0.36	-0.72	-0.25
	(0.43)	(0.41)	(0.33)
Government, 51st parl.	0.11	-0.76**	0.60***
	(0.21)	(0.26)	(0.17)
Opposition, 51st parl.	0.70	1.04*	0.09
	(0.36)	(0.50)	(0.32)
Successor MP	-0.12	-0.39	0.14
	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.21)
Below Droop quota	-0.22	-0.26	0.03
	(0.20)	(0.26)	(0.25)
High-level party office	-0.69	-0.75	0.01
	(0.36)	(0.42)	(0.36)
Current local office	0.59*	-0.53	-0.16
	(0.23)	(0.28)	(0.23)
Sole representative	0.53*	0.02	0.10
	(0.24)	(0.33)	(0.21)
Seniority (reference: Fourth term or higher):			
First term MP	-0.91	0.03	-0.23
	(0.47)	(0.38)	(0.29)
Second term MP	-0.03	0.56	0.21
	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.26)
Third term MP	-0.28	0.07	0.12
	(0.36)	(0.39)	(0.25)
CPAS member	0.98***	0.18	0.19
	(0.28)	(0.31)	(0.35)
Female	1.20***	0.18	0.53
	(0.29)	(0.25)	(0.28)
MP above 50	-0.29	-0.26	0.09
	(0.28)	(0.26)	(0.16)
Francophone	-0.07	-0.30	0.35
	(0.33)	(0.41)	(0.24)
Constant	-10.53***	-5.39***	-11.88***
	(1.70)	(1.30)	(1.14)

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

	Welfare	**Unemployment**	**Retirement**
	(1)	(2)	(3)
σ^2_{MP}	1.15***	0.65***	1.30***
	(0.24)	(0.18)	(0.22)
N	352	352	352
N cluster	61	61	61
log likelihood	-266.7	-243.4	-381.2

Note: Coefficients, with cluster-robust (party-district-level) standard errors in parentheses,
$*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001$

G Regression model with district-level standard errors

Table G.2: Results of multi-level count data regression model

	Welfare	**Unemployment**	**Retirement**
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Party constituency variables			
Econ. left-right	0.55	-0.75	1.13***
	(0.35)	(0.50)	(0.22)
Econ. left-right squared	-0.06*	0.05	-0.10***
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.02)
Electoral support in group (reference: similar):			
weaker	0.89	0.32	1.63***
	(1.05)	(0.60)	(0.29)
stronger	0.96	-0.68	1.81***
	(0.98)	(0.69)	(0.24)
Geographical constituency variables			
Group size	0.17	-0.02	0.13***
	(0.18)	(0.06)	(0.03)
Group size squared	0.01	0.07**	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Controls			
Share as soc. aff. com. member	1.25***	2.20***	1.90***
	(0.15)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Share as soc. aff. com. sub	0.31	0.60	0.45*
	(0.17)	(0.45)	(0.19)
Share as finance com. member	0.61*	0.84**	0.79**
	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.25)
Share as finance com. sub	0.32	0.17	0.12
	(0.28)	(0.35)	(0.16)
Share as econ. com. member	0.12	0.47	0.35
	(0.14)	(0.34)	(0.29)
Share as econ. com. sub	0.15	0.54	0.13
	(0.10)	(0.30)	(0.22)
Share as health com. member	1.64***	0.18	0.69***
	(0.17)	(0.35)	(0.13)
Share as health com. sub	0.22	-0.16	0.27
	(0.29)	(0.27)	(0.23)
Government and time (reference: Gov, 50th):			
Opposition, 50th parl.	0.06	-1.05**	-0.61***
	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.18)
Government, 51st parl.	0.15	-0.77**	0.88***
	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.19)
Opposition, 51st parl.	0.60	1.02***	0.23
	(0.42)	(0.27)	(0.31)
Successor MP	-0.28	-0.43	0.03
	(0.18)	(0.35)	(0.20)
Below Droop quota	-0.15	-0.12	0.05
	(0.17)	(0.24)	(0.23)
High-level party office	-0.24	-0.55*	0.22
	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.35)
Current local office	0.60**	-0.44**	-0.22
	(0.20)	(0.17)	(0.15)
Sole representative	0.28	0.10	0.18
	(0.25)	(0.28)	(0.19)
Seniority (reference: Fourth term or higher):			
First term MP	-0.76**	-0.32	-0.40*

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

	Welfare	**Unemployment**	**Retirement**
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	(0.28)	(0.40)	(0.19)
Second term MP	-0.02	-0.14	-0.28
	(0.32)	(0.42)	(0.26)
Third term MP	-0.29	-0.26	-0.39
	(0.35)	(0.44)	(0.37)
CPAS member	0.95***	-0.12	-0.07
	(0.27)	(0.32)	(0.39)
Female	0.74**	-0.03	0.19
	(0.29)	(0.23)	(0.24)
MP above 50	-0.19	-0.26	0.13
	(0.23)	(0.31)	(0.18)
Francophone	0.04	-0.29	0.40*
	(0.28)	(0.29)	(0.18)
Constant	-10.99***	-5.95***	-12.55***
	(1.24)	(1.00)	(0.80)
σ^2_{MP}	0.31*	0.00	0.73**
	(0.14)	(0.00)	(0.22)
N	352	352	352
N cluster	11	11	11
log likelihood	-241.1	-210.0	-353.4

Note: Coefficients, with cluster-robust (district-level) standard errors in parentheses,
$*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001$

References

Bräuninger, T., M. Debus, and M. Brunner (2007). Comparative legislation dataset. University of Konstanz.

Bräuninger, T. and M. Debus (2009). Legislative agenda-setting in parliamentary democracies. *European Journal of Political Research 48*(6), 804–839.

Oecd (2013). Oecd social expenditure database (socx), 1980-2009-2013.

Walgrave, S. and K. De Swert (2007). Where does issue ownership come from? From the party or from the media? Issue-party identifications in Belgium, 1991-2005. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics 12*(1), 37–67.