

**“A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work”? Exploring the connection
between the parliamentary work of MPs and their electoral support.**

Nicolas Bouteuca (UGent), Jef Smulders (KU Leuven),
Bart Maddens (KU Leuven), Carl Devos (UGent) & Bram Wauters (UGent)

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4th conference on ‘Belgium: the State of the federation’
Liège (Belgium), 18th December 2015

Introduction

In order to increase their amount of preferential votes, MPs generally build up a personal reputation (Mayhew, 1974). This can be done highlighting personal traits, which are in the literature often named personal vote earning attributes (PVEA's) (e.g. Shugart et al., 2005; Tavits, 2010). These traits could refer to identity-based elements such as local affiliation or gender (Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Tavits, 2010), or to activities such as constituency service (Cain et al., 1984; Lancaster & Patterson, 1990) or deviant voting behavior (Crisp et al., 2005). We argue that personal reputations could also be built through initiating legislation and controlling the government in parliament. These latter two activities are in itself very important functions of an MP in a parliamentary democracy, but they should also be understood with an electoral connection in mind. By proposing bills and asking parliamentary questions MPs hope to convince voters about their capabilities and realizations, and subsequently to gain electoral support at the next elections. Under ideal circumstances MPs who are active and give qualitative input to the parliamentary debate should get more votes in comparison to those who do not make much effort. The question arises to what extent this is the case. In this article, the added value of 'hard work' in parliament for preferential votes is put to the test.

Earlier research, in candidate-centered as well as party-centered systems, found proof for the assumption that 'hard workers' are rewarded with a greater number of personal votes (Crisp et al., 2004; Rasch, 2009; Bowler, 2011). But all these studies focused on the number of parliamentary questions or sponsored bills to assess the impact of work in parliament on the number of obtained votes. It is, however, self-evident that being a 'good' parliamentarian is more than asking many questions or sponsoring many bills. When the impact of a politician's parliamentary control is nonexistent, when his or her work does not lead to public debates or none of his/her bills influences law-making, then the quality of the parliamentary work is low, irrespective of the number of initiatives. In other words, the quantity of work cannot be the only parameter to decide who is doing a 'good' job and who is not. Relevant legislators also get things done or make life difficult for the government. Because quantity does not (automatically) equal quality, this paper not only tests the connection between parliamentary work and preferential votes by looking at the amount of work of legislators but also by taking the perceived quality of their job as an MP into account. Moreover, contrary to earlier research, we also account for the difference between MPs of government parties and those who belong to opposition parties. This position can affect the leeway given to MPs to build a personal

reputation with their parliamentary work and the parliamentary tools at their disposal to acquire visibility.

In order to test whether parliamentary work pays off in terms of attracting preferential votes, we use of data on the 2014 federal and regional elections in Belgium. This is an interesting case for several reasons. First of all, Belgium is an appropriate example of a flexible-list PR system. This electoral system is quite common in Europe, but has only scarcely been studied. Moreover, preferential votes are highly important for the careers of politicians in these systems. Getting elected into parliament is not primarily the result of personal popularity, but mainly the consequence of having a good list position. But because the latter is related to the amount of preferential votes a candidate received in earlier elections (André et al., 2015), the mechanisms that determine the amount of votes of a candidate are highly relevant. Finally, the Belgian case is interesting because, as far as we know, it is the only country in which the work of MPs is extensively qualitatively assessed by experts.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. In the first two paragraphs we elaborate on personal vote earning attributes (PVEA's) and parliamentary work as a PVEA. Afterwards we address the implications of belonging to a government party and the opposition for the visibility of parliamentary work. Subsequently, the peculiarities of the Belgian electoral system are explained, followed by a description of our data and methods. In the next section the results are described. We end our paper with a discussion and some concluding remarks.

Personal vote earning attributes

In elections, there is not only competition between parties, but also individual politicians enter the electoral arena to compete with each other. These individual politicians could 'earn' their seat by relying on the party label and on the votes obtained by the party, or they could try to build up a personal reputation and gain votes for themselves. The extent to which individuals will do efforts to advance a personal reputation (instead of a party reputation) depends on the electoral system, as Carey and Shugart (1995) contend in a seminal article on this topic. They

distinguish four crucial elements in this perspective: ballot control, vote pooling, types of votes, and district magnitude. The central idea behind these factors is that the more voters have a formal impact on which candidates are elected, the more individual politicians are encouraged to cultivate a personal vote. It is in that perspective relevant to note that the last few years, reforms giving more weight to voters' preferences in the allocation of seats have occurred in several electoral systems across Europe (Renwick & Pilet, 2016). As a result, electoral systems in most European countries now allow voters to express preferences for candidates, not just for political parties. This corresponds to a general trend of 'institutionalized personalization' (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; Balmas et al., 2014), i.e. institutional reforms increasing the role of individual politicians. Preferential votes for candidates have thus become increasingly more important to become elected. This makes that individual candidates will do their best to build a personal reputation, which will yield them votes at elections.

In addition, also parties themselves have an interest in allowing and supporting these personal reputations. The concept of 'behavioral personalization' states that voters increasingly base their vote choice on evaluations of individual candidates, rather than on evaluations of parties (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; Karvonen, 2010). As such, it is in the parties own interest to have many candidates on the list that succeed in attracting votes for themselves, and at the same time, also for the party. This party interest is confirmed by the observation that politicians that score high on preferential votes are rewarded with a good position on the list at the next elections (Crisp et al., 2013; André et al., 2015).

This all points us to the importance of a building a personal reputation in elections. Individual politicians can do so by acquiring or promoting a number of personal traits, which are called 'personal vote-earning attributes' (PVEA) (e.g. Shugart et al., 2005; Tavits, 2010). Two broad kinds of such attributes can be identified: identity-based attributes and activity-based attributes. In other words, it is about who politicians are (identity) and what they do (activity).

We will first discuss identity-based PVEA's. Voters often lack resources, time or interest to become informed about all candidates in elections. Therefore, they rely on voting cues to make their choice at the ballot box (McDermott, 2009). The party a candidate belongs to is the most evident label a voter can rely on to obtain an idea about where the candidate stands for, but also personal characteristics could function as such a cue. Characteristics such as gender (Sanbonmatsu, 2002; McElroy & Marsh, 2010; Mariën et al., forthcoming), ethnic origin

(Téney et al., 2010) and social class (McDermott, 2009) have come forward in research on voting behavior as characteristics that yield more votes among (particular groups of) voters. A special feature in this respect, that has attracted much research attention, is constituted by the local ties of politicians. Research has demonstrated that candidates with a local birthplace in the district and/or with local political experience tend to be electorally more successful in their district than other candidates (Shugart et al., 2005; Tavits, 2010; Put & Maddens, 2015).

Identity is not the only source for building up a personal reputation, politicians could also exploit activities to do so. This is not so easy and requires more effort from voters, as activities are not as visible as identity. A first illustration related to the previous point about local ties, is that some MPs engage extensively in constituency service to increase their local political popularity (Cain et al., 1984; Lancaster & Patterson, 1990). Another way of strengthening their personal reputation is behaving more independently in parliament, either by voting more regularly against the party (Crisp et al., 2005; Tavits, 2005) or by initiating more individual-based legislative proposals (Bräuninger et al., 2012).

In this article, we do not focus on constituency service nor on voting behavior in parliament as PVEA's, but scrutinize the effect of the two most essential functions of parliament, i.e. initiating legislation (by means of bills) and controlling the government (by means of parliamentary questions). We want to figure out whether the quantity and quality of this kind of activities could serve as a personal vote earning attribute. Or in other words, whether engaging in legislative and control work in parliament brings more votes to incumbent MPs.

Most research considers parliamentary work as a dependent variable, and has investigated which electoral system characteristics and individual factors have an impact on the kind of parliamentary behavior (e.g. Tavits, 2010; Bräuninger et al., 2012). An electoral connection is often implicitly presupposed, but not empirically tested. This kind of research has demonstrated that MPs adapt their behavior because they believe it has an electoral effect, but the effect in itself is not investigated. For instance, Bräuninger et al. (2012) found that MPs elected by preferential votes initiate more single-authored bills in order to secure re-election, but whether single-authored bills indeed increase the chance to become re-elected is not studied. It is the aim of the paper to investigate this electoral connection. In the next section, we will give arguments why parliamentary work (here operationalized as initiating legislation and controlling the government) could serve as a PVEA.

Parliamentary work as a PVEA

There are basically two explanations for a connection between parliamentary work and electoral success: one focusing on voters and one on politicians themselves. First, from a voter's point of view there are principle reasons as well as empirical indications to assume that hard working politicians in parliament are rewarded for the job they are doing. The idea is normatively appealing because it reaches to the heart of what representation is. According to Hanna Pitkin (1967), formal representation is more than obtaining the authority or the right to act for someone else, but also includes the possibility to be held accountable for what has been done during the legislative term. It seems rational that politicians who work hard in pursuing the policies preferred by their voters, will receive more votes than politicians who are less active on behalf of their constituents. The literature on economic voting (e.g. Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007) certainly confirms empirically that voters retrospectively reward or punish political performance. In the case of economic voting, voters evaluate the work of the government by looking at the economic evolution. It is, however, unclear whether this approach can simply be transmitted to individual politicians, because the assessment of parliamentary performance imposes more costs and efforts on voters. Even with regard to government performance, the debate remains whether voters are capable to assess the state of the economy and which party is responsible for the current situation (Weschle, 2014; Crisp et al., 2014). As for the work of an individual MP, which is less visible than government decisions, the problem of low political knowledge is even more relevant (Navarro, 2012).

Secondly, politicians themselves could also highlight their parliamentary work in the media and in their electoral campaign, causing an electoral connection. Mayhew (1974) assumed that legislators are primarily seeking re-election and will use three techniques to remain in office: claiming credit for electorally interesting policy decisions, taking popular positions in debates and investing in personal branding. This last technique means that MPs will market themselves by appearing on television or cut ribbons at ceremonies. But they can also create a positive image by being active in parliament, more in particular by asking parliamentary questions or by proposing bills.

Researchers disagree on the fact that politicians primarily use their parliamentary work as an advertisement tool. On the one hand, Lazardoux (2005) found that written questions are not used as a means for re-election, but only as an instrument to control the government in the French Assemblée Nationale. On the other hand, Bräuninger et al. (2012) found that MPs believe that their work in parliament has an impact on their vote share. For the Belgian case they found that the system of preferential voting initiates more single-authored bills.

Despite this disagreement, MPs seem to believe that their parliamentary activity has a positive effect on their personal brand. In this respect the policy-making behavior of MPs is a prime example of the advertising value of parliamentary work. Despite the fact that the vast majority of laws is the result of government initiatives, MPs still submit legislative proposals. This can only be considered as rational behavior if policy motivation is not the only motivation at work (Bowler, 2010). Such and other (e.g. parliamentary questions) parliamentary initiatives allow an MP to paint himself as an active legislator, either directly or by drawing the attention of the media or an interest group. But MPs also advertise themselves and their work in parliament in many other ways: through leaflets, internet blogs, meetings, magazines for party members or related social groups, and newsletters of interest groups affected by the legislation (e.g. Bowler, 2010; Navarro, 2012; De Winter, 1996).

Although there are several indications to assume that parliamentary work will pay off electorally, there is an important counter-argument. It makes sense that a baker who makes delicious cakes has a greater chance of earning a living from his profession than a colleague with cakes of inferior quality. This idea that you get a fair day's wage for a fair day's work is very straightforward for many professions, but not for politicians. Their work is less visible and the political knowledge of the customer (voter) is often not very high (Navarro, 2012). As a result, the positive relation between the performance of politicians and the reward they get for it by means of preferential votes is problematic. The purpose of this article is to analyze this relation between being a 'good' MP and the amount of preferential votes.

As outlined above, research on the connection between parliamentary work and electoral outcome has been scarce. Only recently some single country studies or analyses of European elections have addressed this question. All these studies found proof that 'hard work' pays off, but they all tested this in another way. The only element that these studies have in common is that hard work is operationalized quantitatively, in the sense that the amount of parliamentary

initiatives is used as a proxy for hard work. Proof was found for an ‘electoral connection’ in a majority system such as the UK. MPs who initiate many legislative proposals receive a small increase in votes (Bowler, 2010). This also seems to be the case in flexible list PR-systems such as Slovakia and Norway. In Slovakia, the amount of bills is positively related to the amount of preferential votes (Crisp et al., 2013), while in Norway this seems to be the case for parliamentary questions (Rasch, 2009). Finally, Navarro analyzed the European Parliament. Based on data from the 2004 and 2009 elections, he demonstrates that a high activity rate of incumbent MEPs increases the probability of their re-election. MEPs writing many reports and asking many questions have a larger chance to get re-elected. Parliamentary attendance and giving speeches, however, does not have a significant effect (Navarro 2010). Navarro (2012) repeated his study with a focus on re-selection by the party instead of re-election. He found that parliamentary questioning and attendance of meetings of the European Parliament has a small positive effect on the chances of politicians to get re-selected by their parties. The writing of reports and giving speeches do not have a significant effect.

The connection between parliamentary work and electoral outcome has never been tested for Belgium before. Moreover, all existing research in other countries only uses the amount of parliamentary questions or the number of bill proposals as a proxy for hard work. This means that MPs who ask many questions or propose many bills are automatically considered as hard-working and visible MPs. However, one very well aimed parliamentary question can be more effective for the creation of a personal brand than hundred questions nobody cares about. In other words, quantity does not automatically equal quality. That is why hard work will not only be operationalized quantitatively in this article, but also qualitatively by making use of experts surveys.

Based on the fact that it is normatively appealing to reward hard working politicians, that politicians advertise their work, and that voters and parties seem to make retrospective evaluations at election times, we formulate a first hypothesis:

H1a: MPs who initiate many legislative proposals and ask many parliamentary questions will get more preferential votes at the elections.

H1b: MPs whose parliamentary work has an impact (as assessed by experts) will get more preferential votes at the elections.

Parliamentary work: government versus opposition

Legislation and government control are two of the most important functions of an MP in parliaments across the globe (Norton, 1994; Coghill et al., 2012). These two tasks are linked to specific parliamentary instruments: bill proposals and parliamentary questions. Both instruments are used by MPs to generate personal publicity (Bowler, 2010; Bailer, 2011). Since time is scarce and these activities take time and sometimes demand an effort of legislators to acquire expertise on the subject, we can assume that they will use their scarce time as efficiently as possible (Strøm, 1997). This means that they will prefer those parliamentary instruments that have the largest impact for their visibility. With this in mind, there are reasons to assume that bill proposals are a more effective advertising instrument for MPs who belong to a government party, while parliamentary questions are more interesting for MPs from opposition parties.

There are reasons to assume that bill proposals are more suited when MPs belong to the government majority. Law-making is in general realized by MPs from the governing majority, not by MPs from the opposition (Norton 2008). The chance that a bill proposal turns into law is much higher when the proposal comes from an MP that belongs to the government majority. This higher potential success rate for a legislative proposal is important because by becoming law, the initiative of the MP could actually impact upon public policy. This automatically draws more media attention towards a proposal than when a proposal has no chance of turning into law.

In a system of coalition governments there is an additional reason why bill proposals from an MP that belongs to the governing majority can draw considerable attention. This is the case for bills that are not in line with the coalition agreement. MPs of governing parties sometimes behave as ‘coalition mavericks’, not because they think that their proposal will get voted, but in order to render visibility to their party within ‘grey’ government coalitions. In some cases, however, it is not only a way to create visibility, but a genuine attempt to create an alternative coalition to get a legislative proposal voted. In both cases it is a spectacular and newsworthy initiative. Based on the reasoning above we formulate a second hypothesis:

H2: The effect of legislative proposals or bills on the number of votes will be higher among MPs from government parties (compared to MPs from opposition parties).

With regard to parliamentary questions, things seem to be the other way around. The existing literature considers parliamentary questions as a tool of the opposition, as they are generally used to control the government which is mainly the task of the opposition (Norton, 2008). MPs who belong to a governing party will certainly not ask questions that could be harmful for their own minister, not only because this could endanger the stability of the government that their party supports, but also because this could have a serious negative impact on their own chances to get re-selected by their party at the next elections (Longley & Hazan, 2000; Hazan, 2006; Depauw & Martin, 2009). This high party discipline is a feature of all Western democracies and disrupts the control function of MPs of government parties (Patzelt, 2000). This does not mean that they never ask questions, but usually only to allow their ministers to score or to emphasize inconsistencies in the policy positions of the opposition (Saalfeld, 2011). Thus, parliamentary questions are mainly used by members of the opposition (Lazardeux, 2005; Dandoy, 2011) to challenge ministers or to accuse them of poor governance or the implementation of bad policy (Saalfeld, 2011). These critical parliamentary questions of the opposition are far more newsworthy than the uncritical questions of MPs who belong to the governing majority.

Although it is generally expected that parliamentary questions are an opposition tool, there is also a possibility that MPs that belong to the majority will also use them in order to increase their visibility. Certainly in political systems with coalition governments there are incentives for MPs to ask questions to ministers that belong to the government they support. Firstly, questions can be used in order to overcome problems of ministerial drift and to make sure that the partners of the coalition act in accordance with the coalition agreement (Martin & Vanberg, 2011). Secondly, the amount of legislative proposals that are turned into law is very low. As a result, parliamentary questions are also for MPs of the majority one of the few tools that can be used to catch media attention. Moreover, these MPs run less risk of not being re-selected when a critical parliamentary question addresses a minister of one of the other parties of the coalition. In fact, they could even be rewarded when their work draws a lot of media attention because within a 'grey' government coalition majority parties feel the need to create their own programmatic visibility towards the voters. Notwithstanding these thoughts, we formulate a third hypothesis:

H3: The effect of the number of parliamentary questions on the number of votes will be higher among MPs from opposition parties (compared to MPs from government parties).

While the above hypotheses relate to the quantity of legislative proposals and questions, it can also be argued that the impact of the quality of parliamentary work will depend on whether or not an MP belongs to the opposition. Even though an MP works hard and has an impact on the parliamentary debate, resulting in a high quality assessment, if s/he belongs to a government party, the impact and visibility of this performance will arguably be dwarfed by the political weight of the ministers in his or her party. These highly visible ministers probably draw most preferential votes and will eclipse even the strongest MPs. In an opposition party, on the contrary, the ‘star’ MPs in parliament will be functionally equivalent to ministers and will therefore attract more preferential votes. Hence we formulate the following and last hypothesis:

H4: The effect of the quality of parliamentary work will be higher among MPs from opposition parties (compared to MPs from government parties).

In the next section, we will give some background information about the electoral system in Belgium. Afterwards, we will indicate how we have operationalized the variables of our analysis.

The Belgian electoral system

In 1899, Belgium was the first country to introduce proportional representation (PR). One can vote for an individual candidate, or cast a single list vote endorsing the order of candidates on the list that was decided by the party. Multiple preference voting was introduced in 1995, making it possible to cast preferential votes for more than one candidate (only on one and the same list). Belgium thus uses a flexible-list PR system: party lists of candidates as decided by the party may be changed as a result of preferential votes that individual candidates receive. Unlike open list systems, the order of candidates is only changed if individual candidates reach a threshold of preferential votes. In practice, however, candidates reach this threshold only seldom (Wauters & Weekers, 2008), as a result of which the Belgian flexible list system is sometimes characterized as a ‘closed-list system in disguise’ (De Winter, 2005; Crisp et al., 2013).

According to Belgian electoral law, every candidate reaching the eligibility number earns one of the party seats. In general only a few candidates on top of the lists reach that number solely on the basis of their preferential votes. All others need list votes in order to reach the eligibility number. If candidates receive less votes than needed to, list votes are added to their personal votes until they reach that eligibility number. This is repeated until all seats for the list are allocated. The number of list votes can be exhausted before all seats have been assigned, however. Remaining seats then go to candidates with the largest number of preferential votes who are not yet elected. Candidates are then exclusively selected on the basis of their personal preferential votes.

In 2002, in line with the ‘institutional personalization’ of politics (see above), an electoral reform trying to increase the influence of voters, reduced the number of list votes for a party in a district to the half. The effect has been rather modest. Although there has been a rise in the number of MPs elected ‘out of order’, in practice voters still generally accept – by not changing it – the order of candidates decided by the parties: they only decide the number of seats a party wins, not which candidate takes a seat (Wauters, 2003). The grip of parties on the selection of MPs remains firm. That some candidates are elected ‘out of order’ is often even the result of a conscious party strategy, for instance when they put well-known candidates at the bottom of the list, because of the high visibility of this particular position.

The 2002 electoral reform also increased the magnitude of districts, introducing provincial districts. This ‘provincialization’ of the district magnitude for the Chamber and the Flemish regional parliament has “drastically shifted the power of candidate selection to a higher, if not the highest, level of decision-making within parties. [...] Frequently, hard-working backbenchers are passed over in favor of ‘surprise’ candidates attracting a lot of media attention” (De Winter, 2005:426).

This power of the party, far exceeding the power of the voter, does not make the individual performance of candidates irrelevant, since selectors often take a candidate’s previous electoral performance into account. André et al (2015) demonstrate that while preferential votes only make the difference for a mere handful of candidates between election and defeat, they “have an important indirect effect on a candidate’s prospects for a career in politics, capable of incentivizing them to spend considerable time and effort chasing preferential votes” (André et

al., 2015:10). Preferential votes are especially relevant for individual candidates because party nomination strategies reward candidates with high numbers of preferential votes with better list positions in the next election, increasing the chances of getting elected. So party selectorates do take into account the individual preferential votes, also when the party leadership decides on the appointment of ministers. Furthermore, ‘the political weight’ or reputation of MPs depends on their personal popularity.

Data and variables

The hypotheses discussed above are tested on the basis of data on the 2014 federal and regional elections in Belgium by means of an OLS regression model. The analysis is limited to the incumbent MPs from the Flemish Parliament and from the Dutch-speaking language group in the federal Chamber of Representatives who ran for office again and served the complete previous legislative term. Of the 88 incumbent federal MPs and the 124 incumbent Flemish MPs, respectively 67 and 94 participated in the 2014 elections. As a result, we have 161 units of analysis.

The dependent variable is the number of preferential votes a candidate won. As the size of the districts differs widely (ranging from twelve seats for the district of Limburg for the Chamber to 33 seats for the district of Antwerp for the Flemish Parliament) we work with the relative amount, i.e. the percentage of preferential votes calculated on the basis of the total number of valid votes in the district. Because this variable is highly skewed and values are all-positive, it is advisable to apply a logarithmic transformation (Gelman and Hill, 2007: 59-65). We use a natural log transformation because the resulting coefficients are easier to interpret.

The main independent variable is parliamentary work, operationalized both in a quantitative and a qualitative manner. The quantitative operationalization of parliamentary work is twofold, as it is based on the amount of parliamentary questions on the one hand, and bills or proposed laws on the other. With respect to the first variable, we take into account both oral and written questions of an MP during the past parliamentary term, divided by the number of years of the respective term. This last correction is necessary as an incumbent MP of the Flemish Parliament served five years, while members of the Chamber only served four. Regarding the bills, we count all proposed laws for which an MP was author. We distinguish, however, between first

authored bills and other bills (for which the MP was only second, third, ... co-author), as we assume that first authored bills generally generate more visibility for the MP. Again, we correct for the duration of the legislative term.

For the qualitative assessment of parliamentary work we make use of evaluations that were published in two Flemish newspapers for which political reporting belongs to their core business (De Morgen and De Standaard). At the eve of the 2014 elections these newspapers published reports in which political journalists scrutinized the parliamentary activities of all Flemish incumbent MPs. The result of this assessment is a score between zero and five in De Morgen and between zero and ten in De Standaard. For our analysis, we doubled the score of De Morgen and added both scores to a global score on a scale ranging from zero to twenty. These scores can be interpreted as expert surveys since political journalists are in a good position to evaluate the parliamentary work of the MPs they cover on a daily basis. Moreover, these newspapers have a longstanding experience with these evaluations, as a result of which their methodology has gradually been improved.

In order to make these reports, the following methodology is used by both newspapers. There are two basic guidelines: quantity does not equal quality and only the parliamentary work of a politician is considered. The latter means that although a politician can be popular apart from his or her work in parliament (e.g. by being a popular mayor), s/he will not be rewarded for it in the reports. The former means that politicians who ask many questions or formulate many bills do not automatically receive a high score. On the contrary, MPs who burden the government with irrelevant questions are punished for their behavior. Hence, high scores are the result of expertise, reputation and the amount of influence an MP has. For instance, a politician who always gives eloquent speeches or an MP of the opposition who can get a bill voted will receive a high score. This qualitative assessment of the work of MPs is done in two steps. First, prominent MPs (e.g. party leaders, party group chairmen, experienced MPs) are asked for their opinion on colleagues of their own party. These informal interviews enable the journalists to draft a report on every incumbent MP. In a second step, these draft reports are discussed in a meeting with all political journalists of the newspaper.

Whether it makes statistical sense to distinguish between a qualitative and a quantitative component of parliamentary work (the former based on media assessments, the latter on the number of bills and questions), will be analyzed on the basis of a factor analysis. We include

the number of first authored bills, the number of other bills, the number of oral questions and the number of written questions on the one hand, and the media assessment of the quality of work on the other¹. Table 1 presents the result of this factor analysis.

Table 1: Results of factor analysis with three factors and varimax rotation.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
# of bills (1st author)	0.912	0.037	0.081
# of bills (other)	0.925	0.024	0.122
# of oral questions	0.394	0.701	0.158
# of written questions	-0.173	0.880	0.052
media assessment score	0.132	0.129	0.982

The results of the analysis (Table 1) show that three factors can be distinguished. A first factor is related to the number of bills laid down by the MPs (both those as first author with a factor loading of 0,912 or as additional author with a factor loading of 0,925). We construct a number of bills variable by adding up all the submitted bills, while counting the first authored bills twice. As already argued, the first authored bills generate more visibility for an MP and should therefore have a larger weight. The second factor is determined by the oral (factor loading 0,701) and written (factor loading 0,880) questions. While the first factor clearly pertains to the legislative function of MPs, the second factor captures their controlling function. This second component of the quantitative aspect of parliamentary work will be measured by adding up all the questions. As explained above, we divide both quantitative indicators by the number of years in the legislature, in order to control for the difference between the regional and the federal parliament.

The factor analysis also confirms that it makes sense to distinguish between these two quantitative components on the one hand and the quality of parliamentary work on the other. The latter variable, as measured by the assessment of the MPs in the media, only loads high (0,982) on the third factor and thus stands apart from the quantitative variables. The Pearson

¹ We also tested models including the number of interpellations of MPs. A factor analysis including the latter variable, however, indicates that the interpellations can be considered as a separate component of parliamentary work, with low factor loadings on both the legislative, control and quality dimensions. This special status of interpellations is probably due to the fact that the submission of interpellations is, in most cases, strictly monitored by the parliamentary group: the MPs have to take turns to interpellate the government or have to respect the internal pecking order. As a consequence, a large number of MPs introduce no interpellations at all during a legislative term.

Hence, it can be argued that the number of interpellations is not a valid indicator of the quantitative output or work capacity of individual MPs. Therefore, we omitted interpellations from the analysis.

correlation between the qualitative variable and the number of bills and questions is 0,247 and 0,216 respectively.

In order to assess the impact of parliamentary work as a PVEA, we have to control for a number of variables which have a significant impact on the number of preferential votes according to previous research. To start with, we know that the number of preferential votes is strongly dependent on media coverage during the campaign (Maddens et al., 2006; Van Aelst et al., 2006). As a rough indicator of the amount of media coverage for each candidate, we counted the number of newspaper articles in which the name of the candidate was mentioned at least once in a political context during the official campaign period, i.e. three months before the elections. We browsed all articles of the six major Flemish newspapers: De Standaard, De Morgen, De Tijd, Het Nieuwsblad, Het Laatste Nieuws and Metro.²

Also, it has been shown that the number of preferential votes is significantly affected by the campaign expenses: the more a candidate spends on his or her campaign, the better the result (Maddens et al., 2006; Maddens & Put, 2013). Candidates are required to declare their campaign expenses to the electoral court in their district. They also have to indicate which expenditures were financed by gifts, by party sponsoring and by the personal resources of the candidate. The latter data are not published, but were collected by registering the individual declarations, which can be consulted by the voters during a short period after the election. On average, 80% of the individual expenses are sponsored by the party.³ We know from previous research that these sponsored expenses are not really individual, but rather part of the general campaign of the party in the district which the candidates have to register as individual expenses for legal reasons (Maddens et al., 2015). As a result, data about individual expenses seriously overestimate the actual amounts spent by the candidates for their individual campaign. A more accurate indicator of the individual campaign costs are the expenses declared to have been financed from the personal resources of the candidate. In this analysis we therefore use the personal investment in the campaign as a proxy variable for individual campaign spending. The campaign expense variable is the amount spent per registered voter in the district, expressed in eurocent. It can be assumed that the relationship between expenses and votes is non-linear in the sense that the marginal returns of spending will gradually decrease with the amount spent.

² We would like to thank Jan Surquin for compiling these data into one dataset.

³ Due to very strict legal limits, only a negligible part of the expenses (between 1 and 2 percent on average) is financed from donations.

To allow for this possibility, the normal practice in campaign expense research is to also include the squared expenses in the regression model. The squared spending term is expected to have a negative coefficient (e.g. Palda, 1994; Samuels, 2001).

Another important determinant of preferential votes is incumbency (Maddens & Put, 2013; Put & Maddens, 2015). In our analysis, this is of course a constant. We nevertheless include the impact of incumbency in our study by taking into account the political seniority of the candidate. This variable is operationalized as the number of years a candidate has already been an MP or a minister at any political level (federal, regional or European).

Next, the preferential vote rate is also influenced by gender. On average, a female candidate receives less preferential votes than a male candidate. However, this is mainly due to the fact that women candidates generally obtain a lower position on the list, spend less and have less media exposure. When these variables are controlled for, the gender effect generally disappears (Wauters et al., 2010) or is even reversed according to some studies (Put & Maddens, 2015).

We also need to control for some mechanical effects which determine the number of preferential votes. The most important mechanical effect involves the position on the list. We know that candidates in highly visible positions on the ballot form automatically draw more votes (Geys & Heyndels, 2003). The main critical positions are those at the top and the bottom of the list. We include the first four positions and the last position on the list as dummies in our analysis, with the other positions as reference category.

Another mechanical effect that has to be controlled for concerns the size of the party in the district and the relative number of voters per party per district that cast a preferential vote for a candidate instead of a list vote. A related factor is the average number of preferential votes cast by the voters who do not cast a list vote, a variable which varies significantly between parties and districts (Wauters, 2003). The higher the total percentage of votes for a party in the district, the higher the percentage of the party electorate in the district casting a preferential vote, and the higher the average number of preferential votes cast by this party electorate, the larger the pool of potential preferential votes available to candidates. Finally, the percentage of preferential votes per candidate will necessarily depend on the size of the list as a function of the number of seats at stake and hence the district magnitude. The larger the district, the larger

the total number of candidates contesting the preferential votes, and thus the smaller the relative amount of votes the average candidate will receive.

Analysis

In the first model presented in Table 2, the various variables discussed above are included in an OLS regression model without interactions. It shows that the qualitative indicator of parliamentary work has a significant and positive effect on electoral success, with a partial R^2 of 0.045. Since we transformed the dependent variable, the resulting parameters are to be recalculated by taking the exponent. As we use a transformation on the basis of natural logs (base e), the parameters can be interpreted as approximate proportional differences (Gelman and Hill 2007).⁴ Hence, the parameter of 0.025 implies that an extra point on the scale of quality of parliamentary work (the newspaper scores, ranging from 0 to 20) corresponds to a 2.5% increase in the number of preferential votes for the candidate. The two quantitative indicators, on the other hand, do not have a significant effect. The number of bills variable has the expected positive sign, but is too small to be significant. The parliamentary questions variable has an even smaller parameter which is, somewhat surprisingly, negative. Thus, the conclusion is that Hypothesis 1 is confirmed with regard to the quality of parliamentary work (H1b) but not with regard to the quantity (H1a). Thus, in general, MPs are only rewarded by the voters if their parliamentary work is considered as being outstanding, not if they merely produce a lot of output.

All the mechanical variables have, as expected, a significant effect which is generally much stronger than the effect of parliamentary work. But it is more relevant to compare parliamentary work with the other substantive variables in the model. It can be seen that media coverage has a stronger effect than parliamentary work. The partial R^2 for media coverage is 0.103, against only 0.045 for the qualitative aspect of parliamentary work. Gender and belonging to the opposition or the government also appear to be more important. Male candidates obtain significantly less preferential votes than women (partial $R^2=0.073$), about a quarter less on average. Perhaps, this is a compensation effect due to the inclusion of a number of control variables affecting votes for women candidates. Candidates belonging to a governing party

⁴ Gelman and Hill (2007) nevertheless notice that this correspondence becomes weaker as the magnitude of the parameters increases.

appear to have an advantage with regard to preferential votes (partial $R^2=0.096$). They obtain more than a quarter more preferential votes than opposition party candidates. The effect of seniority is slightly smaller (partial $R^2=0.060$), but still higher than the effect of the quality of parliamentary work. An extra year of parliamentary experience corresponds to a preferential vote increase of 1.5%. The effect of campaign expenses is significant but comparatively small (partial $R^2=0.031$). The squared expenses parameter is borderline significant and has the expected negative sign, indicating that the expense effect gradually decreases with increasing expenses

Table 2: Results of OLS regression analyses with logged number of preferential votes (as percentage of all valid votes in the district) as dependent variable (unstandardized coefficients).

	Model 1 (without interactions)			Model 2 (with interactions)		
	OLS estimate	S.E.	Partial R^2	OLS estimate	S.E.	Partial R^2
Intercept	-2.612 ***	0.368	.	-2.683 ***	0.373	.
% of list in district	0.053 ***	0.004	0.582	0.052 ***	0.004	0.592
% of preferential votes / list	0.012 ***	0.003	0.132	-0.022 ***	0.005	0.112
Average # of pref. votes / list	0.297 ***	0.053	0.076	0.008 **	0.003	0.041
# of seats in district	-0.024 ***	0.005	0.178	0.274 ***	0.053	0.162
First position on list	1.510 ***	0.119	0.533	1.483 ***	0.116	0.540
Second position on list	0.639 ***	0.108	0.196	0.634 ***	0.106	0.205
Third position on list	0.556 ***	0.109	0.155	0.604 ***	0.107	0.187
Fourth position on list	0.380 ***	0.118	0.068	0.432 ***	0.116	0.090
Last position on list	0.239 *	0.132	0.022	0.224 *	0.130	0.021
Government party	0.276 ***	0.071	0.096	0.786 ***	0.183	0.117
Sex (1 = man)	-0.240 ***	0.072	0.073	-0.235 ***	0.070	0.075
Political seniority	0.015 ***	0.005	0.060	0.018 ***	0.005	0.085
Campaign expenses	0.131 **	0.062	0.031	0.135 **	0.060	0.035
Campaign expenses ²	-0.003 *	0.002	0.024	-0.003 **	0.001	0.028
Media coverage	0.001 ***	0.000	0.103	0.001 ***	0.000	0.090
Newspaper score	0.025 **	0.010	0.045	0.053 ***	0.014	0.098
# of bills	0.003	0.003	0.009	-0.001	0.005	0.000

# of questions	-0.001	0.000	0.018	-0.000	0.001	0.005
Score * government party				-0.054 ***	0.019	0.055
# of bills * government party				0.009	0.006	0.016
# of questions * government party				-0.001	0.001	0.012
<i>Adj. R²:</i>	<i>0.8349</i>			<i>0.8447</i>		
<i>N:</i>	<i>161</i>			<i>161</i>		

The second model in Table 2 also includes the interactions of the three parliamentary work variables with the dummy whether or not a candidate belongs to a government party. Neither of the two interactions with the quantitative aspects of parliamentary work is significant, contrary to what was expected on the basis of Hypotheses 2 and 3. Hence we have to conclude that producing more output as an MP does not lead to more preferential votes, irrespective of whether s/he is from an opposition or a government party.

But the government/opposition variable does appear to make a difference with regard to the quality of parliamentary work. This interaction is significant and, as expected, negative. The parameter is -0.054 which more or less equals the main effect of the score. This implies that belonging to a government party effectively neutralizes the impact of high quality parliamentary work on the number of preferential votes. Thus, as expected on the basis of Hypothesis 4, it are only the opposition MPs who draw an electoral profit from doing a positively assessed job in parliament. It is also noteworthy that taking this interaction into account increases the main effect of the quality of parliamentary work. This now has a partial R² of 0,098, which is comparable to the partial R² of media coverage (0,090).

Conclusion

Electoral systems across Europe increasingly invite individual candidates to build up a personal reputation and earn personal votes. In this article, we have investigated whether parliamentary activities could be considered as such a personal vote-earning attribute (PVEA). In line with previous studies, we found that parliamentary work in Belgium indeed increases the number of votes of an incumbent MP. Our case study, however, adds two new elements to the existing literature.

First, our results clearly show that it is not so much the quantity of the parliamentary work that matters, but the quality of it. Both the number of initiated bills and the number of questions did only have very marginal effects on the number of votes, but the scores on a qualitative assessment of their parliamentary work (by experts) had a large and significant effect. Previous studies only focused on quantitative indicators, but our study demonstrates that, where available, a qualitative assessment of parliamentary work does a much better job in explaining variance in preferential votes. For an MP seeking re-election, it is not a good strategy to table as much bills and questions as possible, but to use these selectively in order to have an impact and to get noticed by the media and the voters.

Second, it comes forward from our analysis that the quality of parliamentary work only yields more votes for MPs from opposition parties. MPs from government parties are often held on a leash in parliament in order to safeguard the government majority or are overtrumped by government ministers rendering their parliamentary work less relevant. The government status of an MP's party is, therefore, an important intervening variable when assessing the impact of parliamentary work.

Our findings are also highly relevant for the public debate. European electoral systems are increasingly encouraging candidate-centered competition, but not always without discussion. Electoral reforms that increase personalization seem to be more frequent than reforms that reduce it (Renwick & Pilet, 2016). From a democratic point of view, this is an interesting evolution, as open-list systems decrease the chances that power is concentrated in the hands of a selected party elite. Closed lists give a lot of power to the political parties and their leaders, because ultimately they decide which candidates become elected. An argument in favor of a closed system refers to the possibility to give unknown politicians a chance to become elected. Parties can protect young talented candidates or hard-working backbenchers against voters who are insufficiently able to assess the quality of politicians. Too much emphasis on personal votes would create TV-stars rather than good parliamentarians, it is argued.

The proponents of more openness reject this argument and contend that hard working politicians have a good chance to be re-elected. This article gives empirical support to this view, because it shows that hard work indeed increases the number of preferential votes (at least for MPs from opposition parties). As such, this could be seen as a supporting argument for proponents of more open list systems.

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