Blurred Lines: The Use of Constituency-Based Assistants among Election-Seekers

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Abstract

Do parliamentarians use their staff allowances for (re)election purposes? If so, what electoral institutions mediate that investment? We argue that local staff ("constituency staff") is used to promote candidacies. Candidates must persuade two actors whose importance varies according to the electoral system: their party or voters. Thus, we expect that parliamentarians investment in local staff is a function of their political ambition and the electoral system.

To test the argument, we study the number of constituency hires by 1174 individual Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) over a five-year period. We find that the size follows European and national electoral cycles. Members from candidate-centered systems keep more local assistants on their pay roll, and are more responsive to the electoral calendar. In party-centered systems, reelection-seeking members also invest more locally than those who wish to exit Parliament, but the investment is lower and fluctuates less than in candidate-centered systems.

Introduction

Politicians in liberal democracies – for good reasons – often receive state support both for campaign activities and parliamentary work. However, the two types of support obey to different principles and ought to be separated. Public funding for

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parties provide voters with more choice by creating greater equality among competitors (van Biezen, 2008, 348; Murphy, 2016, 117). In contrast, support for parliamentary work is intended to help elected representatives execute their mandate. The two tend nevertheless to blend. In this article, we investigate the electoral institutions that incentivize such behavior.

Parliamentary allowances have grown over the years and, with it, the scope of abuses (IPU, 2012). The increases are justified by policy makers' growing dependence on expertise and demands for constituency work (Poguntke, Scarrow, and Webb, 2016, 665). In Parliament, staff is important for the separation of powers, as assistants help translate promises into policies. In constituencies, staffers are also part of parliamentarians' "home style" (Fenno, 1978). They help representatives meet with citizens and establish an "electoral connection" (Mayhew, 1974). This is also a moment when election seekers present themselves to future voters.

The blurred lines between constituency work and (re-)election activities open a room for manoeuver that incumbent candidates can use. We already know that parliamentary allowances have become an important source of funding for incumbents running for election (Gauja 2010, 158-160; Bolleyer and Gauja 2015, 334; Nassmacher 2006, 466-499). We ask *to what extent parliamentarians use constituency-based assistants ("local staff") to forward their electoral ambitions*, and *how electoral institutions mediate that investment.*

Candidates rely on two types of support. They need votes and a party endorsement. The relative importance of one over the other is defined by the electoral system (Carey and Shugart, 1995). We argue that election-seeking parliamentarians allocate local staff resources as a function of the actors they need to convince. We find that candidates who can benefit from cultivating a personal vote invest in more local staff, especially during campaign periods. In contrast, candidates who can ride on the party label – conditional on a party endorsement – tend to make a small but longer-term local investment than those who do not plan to seek reelection.

Personal staff as electoral resources are one of the least researched fields in the study of political finance because obtaining reliable data is difficult (Poguntke et al., 2016, 665). Politicians are reluctant to share the information. In our case, data on the European Parliament (EP) is available due to the pressure journalists have exercised over a decade.[1] As a result, the EP publishes the names of members' assistants on its website.[2] We construct a unique data set on the number of local staff hires made by a total of 1174 individual members (MEPs) over a five-year

[1] One of the first requests for information on staff allowances was made (and denied) in 2005 (European Ombudsman, 2008).

[2] European Parliament 2015a, Article 2(c).

period (2012–17).

By relying on data from a supranational assembly, we produce general insights on the effects of institutional design. We test how political behavior changes within the same institution in accordance to incentives produced by the electoral system at the member-state level. We argue that Parliament's internal organization – such as its staffing system – has to be considered in its broader institutional context. When candidates improve their chances by cultivating a personal vote, more resources are spent outside of Parliament. This also holds when career paths lead out of Parliament, so that the internal budget finances campaigns at other levels of government. Last, while individual allowances are often justified as a means of ensuring independence from parties in office, a party-centered ballot will lead candidates to invest more in the extra-parliamentary party organization.

Our findings have special implications for the European Parliament. Individual staff resources is seen as a way to mend the democratic deficit of the European Union because it might create personal links between representatives and their constituents (Føllesdal and Hix, 2006; Habermas, 2012; Hobolt, 2014). MEPs' district work is both an input (information) and an output (communication) for parliamentary tasks. Through these interactions, MEPs bring their European expertise to the local level (Poyet, 2018). However, we show that national differences in electoral institutions also imply that citizens are represented differently within the same institution because candidates resond to different incentives. Moreover, since the system of local assistants is poorly regulated and monitored, candidates with a seat in the European Parliament are at an advantage due to their access to local hires.

In the next section we describe the staffing system in the EP before presenting our theoretical framework. We then present our data, research design and empirical results. Last, we discuss the implications of our findings.

Staff allowances in the European Parliament

Staff allowances are key to the efficiency with which Members of Parliament (MPs) execute their mandate. They allow for the recruitment of personal assistants, which help MPs secure their policy goals. Personal staff are recruited directly by MPs, which is what distinguishes them from staff employed by party groups and parliaments' secretariats. Their career is intrinsically connected to that of an MP. Thus, they loyally serve the needs and interests of their employers.

The staff allowance system of the EP is similar to other parliaments (Author, a, 105-108). MEPs' personal staff can work in the EP as (accredited) parliamentary

assistants or in constituencies as local staff (Article 34(1), European Parliament, 2009). In 2017, MEPs dispensed with an individual staff allowance of 24,164 euro per month, which is the highest in the European Union (EU) (European Parliament, 2016a). In comparison, MPs in Italy receive 3,690 euro, 9,618 euros in France, 15,000 euros in Germany and 7,000 pounds in the United Kingdom (UK) (Assemblée nationale 2017; Bundestag, 2012, 131; Rogers and Walters, 2006, 66-67).

Local and parliamentary assistants are financed over the same budget. Until recently, MEPs were free to allocate spending. The majority chose to invest most of the allowance for constituency staff, which conforms to practices in, for example, France and the UK (Assemblée nationale, 2013, 518; Rogers and Walters 2006, 65-67; Author a, 98). Following an expense scandal in 2008 (WikiLeaks, 2009), the EP initiated reforms. In 2009, it introduced a common legal framework whereby parliamentary staff are hired according to a single set of rules (Regulation 160/2009). Parliamentary assistants became *de facto* employees of the EP (Author, b, 297), which increased the prestige of their role. New contracts provided personal assistants with incentives to pursue longer careers and to acquire levels of expertise similar to staff in party groups and the EP's Secretariat. The greater expertise should have in turn encouraged MEPs to spend more of their staff allowance for parliamentary assistants.

Following a review in 2015, it became clear that this was not the case. Many MEPs were not recruiting more parliamentary than local staff. The EP called for a greater spending balance (European Parliament, 2015b, Point 17, p. 191) and required MEPs to spend at least a quarter of their allowance for the employment of parliamentary assistants (Article 2d, European Parliament, 2015a). In 2016, almost two-thirds of the personal staff worked in parliament (Figure 1).

Although the 2015 reform introduced rules to re-balance the numbers of parliamentary and local staff, the management of local staff's contracts remained untouched. Unlike contracts for parliamentary assistants which are managed by the EP's Secretariat, the expenses for local staff are administered by a multitude of third agents ("paying agents", Articles 35 and 36, European Parliament, 2009) hired by MEPs. The administration of expenditures for local staff is – due to a fragmented nature of control between the European and national level – difficult to control [3]

Given the current system, it is not surprising that the EP's administration is unable to thoroughly screen MEPs' expenditures for local staff. Ultimately, this provides opportunities to use local staff for tasks that go beyond the exercise of MEPs' parliamentary mandate. In the following, we identify MEPS' incentives

[3]See Point 9, Preamble, European Parliament, 2015a.

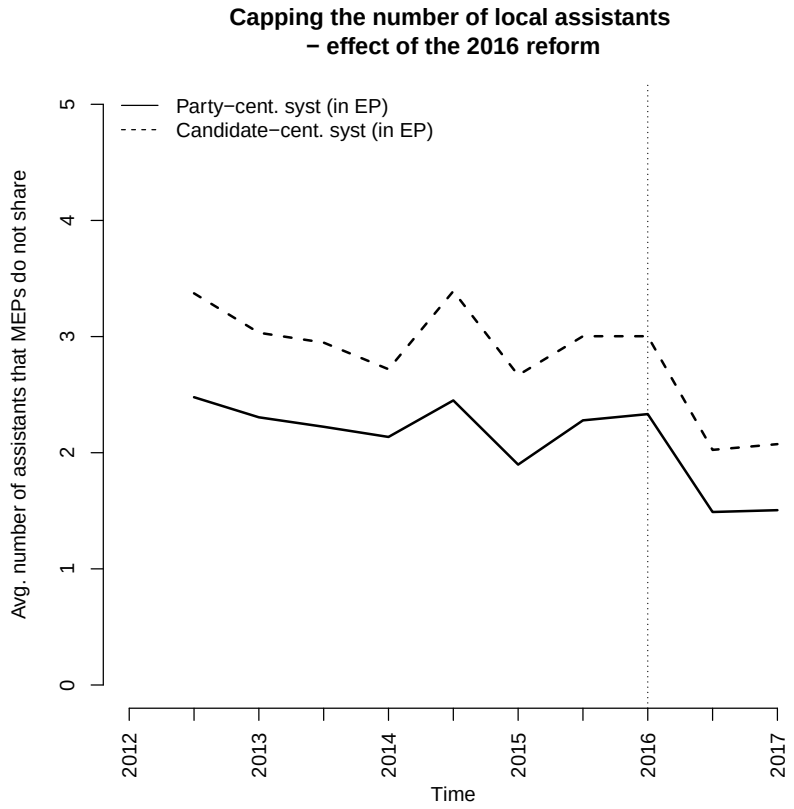


Figure 1: The average number of local assistants among MEPs over time. Figures are reported separately for representatives from candidate-centered and party-centered systems.

to seize these opportunities. Although such activities are prohibited by law and represent a conflict of interest (Article 33(2), European Parliament, 2009; Point 12 of the Preamble, European Parliament, 2015a), the blurred lines between assistance to MEPs as representatives and candidates are such that any rational goal-oriented politician would respond to the same incentives in a similar fashion.

Theoretical Framework

This article argues that MEPs use staff allowances to forward their career plans (Schlesinger, 1966; Black, 1972). Some parliamentarians intend to seek election also in the future and use local assistants to obtain that goal. Specifically, we argue that local hires are a function of the actors MEPs must persuade to access the ballot (the party) and to be elected (voters). In the short term, staff is an asset in a campaign. In the long-term, it is an investment in the relationship with MEPs' main principal. Depending on the electoral rules, that principal is either voters or the party.

Overall, MEPs' decisions to hire local assistants can be illustrated as in Figure 2. Members first decide if and where to seek election. They can either seek re-election to the EP (static ambition) or at the national level (progressive ambition). They then refer to the electoral rules to identify the main principals to persuade. In candidate-centered systems we expect that MEPs cater mostly to voters, since members stand to gain from cultivating a personal vote. In party-centered systems, we expect candidates cater primarily to parties, since members are reliant on a party endorsement to stand a chance of being elected.

In the following, we explain why we expect differences in hiring decisions, before we detail how this materializes in different institutional settings.

Local assistants as campaign assets

In multilevel systems, parliamentarians' career goals may be diverse (Black, 1972). They can wish to seek re-election to their current office (static ambition) or secure office elsewhere (progressive amibtion). Politicians anticipate and adapt to the future institutional setting in order to acquire that office.

Members of the European Parliament hold substantially different ambitions (Meserve, Pemstein, and Bernhard, 2009; Daniel, 2015; Høyland, Hobolt, and Hix, 2017). We already know that investment in legislative activities (such as participation) is a function of MEPs' static (European) or progressive (national) ambitions, as well as the relevant electoral system (Høyland et al., 2017). Survey data from the European Parliament Research Group (EPRG) indicate that 38 % of the MEPs

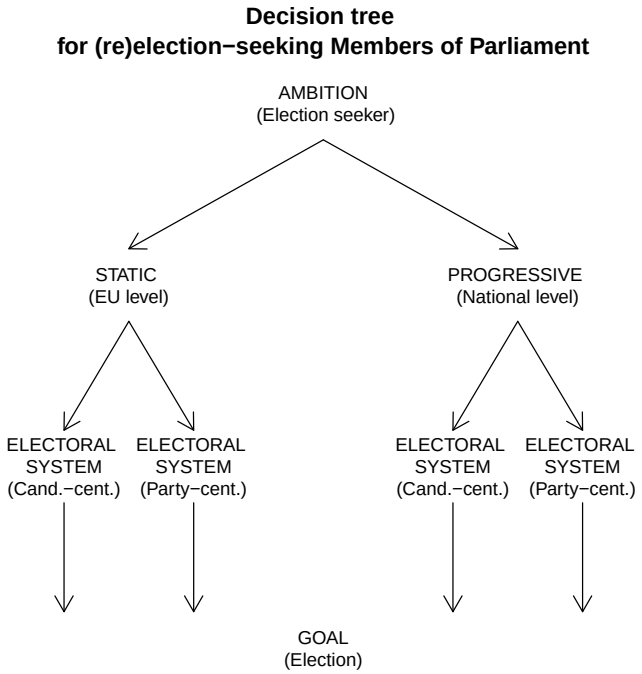


Figure 2: Members of Parliament spend their staff allowance according to their ambition and those they need to convince to get there.

saw themselves with a political career at the EU-level, while 18 % favored a position in national politics; either in parliament or in government (Hix, Farrell, Scully, Whitaker, and Zapryanova, 2016). Due to those diverse goals, we expect the group of MEPs to adapt to both European and national contexts. However, since the proportion of MEPs that aspire to national mandates is lower, we expect a more moderate response to the national setting.

The system of local assistants is prone to vote-seeking strategies. First, local assistants link MEPs to their constituency. Second, they are MEPs' personal employees. Third, local hires escape the monitoring required under one set of centrally monitored rules. The combination of these characteristics makes them ideal for election activities. Thus, we expect that local assistants are used for electoral purposes.

In its simplest form, it implies that the number of local assistants increases prior to elections. Hiring more staff in an election than a non-election year has already been observed for political parties (Poguntke et al., 2016, 666). We investigate the same behavior at the individual level, where politicians maximize their winning chances by deploying assistants in constituencies so as to strengthen their link with voters (Downs, 1957; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1984; Müller and Strøm, 1999).

Hypothesis 1 *The number of local assistants increases prior to elections.*

Members' responsiveness to the electoral calendar depends on incentives embedded in the electoral system (Jennings and Wlezien, 2016). However, the assumption of forward-looking election-seekers implies that representatives in many respects lead an eternal campaign. We therefore expect differences in hiring practices between electoral systems throughout the term, and not merely at election time. In the next section we make comparisons between electoral systems.

Variation in personal-vote seeking between electoral systems

Different electoral systems create different incentives for cultivating a personal vote (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Farrell and McAllister, 2006; André, Depauw, and Shugart, 2014). This affects the choices made by candidates. We consider two broad categories.

In *candidate-centered systems*, voters choose among individual candidates (often from the same party). Candidates improve their election chances by cultivating a personal profile, which distinguishes them from fellow party competitors. In single-member districts, an MP's personal profile also contributes to attracting voters to the party. In these cases, candidates are more likely to invest in highly visible ac-

tivities, such as constituency-work, since individual success depends on the support of many, relatively uninformed voters.

The specific task of local assistants is to improve MPs' contact with their constituents. They work to heighten MPs' profile, which in turn fosters name recognition during elections. For this reason, we expect that the number of local assistants is higher in candidate-centered systems than in systems where candidates count on the party label to win seats. Furthermore, MPs in candidate-centered systems are more responsive to the electoral calendar, as they face more competitors during elections. Hence, we also anticipate a greater mobilization in these systems as elections approach.

Hypothesis 2 *The number of local assistants is higher in candidate-centered systems. It also increases more prior to elections.*

We can twist this argument around and see it from the perspective of candidates in party-centered systems.

In *party-centered systems*, voters in effect only choose between parties. The personal profile is important for the within-party candidate selection, however. To improve their likelihood of being selected, incumbent candidates are invest in activities that are valued by the party. Assuming parties are policy-seekers and better informed about legislative activities than voters, their incumbent candidates are prone to do less constituency service and more in legislative work. We expect this choice to crystalize in the allocation of staff resources.

This logic has already resulted in several contributions to the literature on European electoral systems. Members from candidate-centered systems maintain more contacts with individual constituents, are more likely to hold a permanent local office (Bowler and Farrell, 1993), display a greater presence in social media (Obholzer and Daniel, 2016) and in particular during highly visibile activities (Daniel, Obholzer, and Hurka, 2017). Furthermore, re-election-seeking MEPs from candidate-centered systems spend less time in parliament than their colleagues (Høyland et al., 2017). This meshes with findings that the legislative record of incumbent candidates has a positive effect on re-(s)election in party-centered systems (Frech, 2016; Author, c; Borghetto and Lisi, 2018), while the impact is minimal in candidate-centered systems (Wilson, Ringe, and van Thomme, 2016; Däubler, Christensen, and Linek, 2018).

Variation in ambition within party-centered systems

Relying on the party label frees up time and resources for other activities. However, MPs who plan to contest an election are still led to invest in the party organization.

There are two reasons for this. First, candidates and parties share the same fate. It is in the candidate's interest that the party organization is fit to lead a successful campaign. Second, candidates are dependent on the party endorsement to stand a reasonable chance of winning. They may, therefore, be led to provide the party with staff in exchange for a salient slot on the party list.

Hypothesis 3 *In party-centered systems, MEPs who intend to build a political career tend to hire more local assistants (than those who do not).*

Previous research shows that even when allowances pertain to individual members, MPs contribute with these for party purposes. In several countries, MPs pay part of their salary as a "party tax" or "tithy". Office space is used for party meetings. Telephone and other communication technologies are used for political advertising. Travel allowances are spent for campaign travels, and the personal staff is involved in campaigning activities (Bolleyer and Gauja, 2011, 781). In such cases, parliamentary allowances become indirect subsidies for electoral campaigns, parties, and candidates (Nassmacher, 2006, 450).

In the multilevel governance system of the EU, parties often prioritize national politics and building the party organization rather than policy-making in the EU.[4] Staff allowances – and in particular local assistants – are valuable resources in this respect. Local assistants frequently work in the party offices at the national level, and no mechanisms of surveillance are set up to ensure that they perform strictly MEP-related tasks. Several borderline cases have been reported in this respect (MEPs Project, 2017; Jeannin, 2017; Fansten, Bretton, and Halissat, 2017). For example, former MEP Corinne Lepage writes about her national party, MoDem:

> "[...] some MEPs' assistants serve political parties. When I was elected to the European Parliament in 2009, the MoDem demanded that one of my assistants worked at the Paris headquarters. I refused by indicating that this seemed to me contrary to the European regulations as well as illegal. The MoDem did not dare to insist, but my colleagues were forced to meet this requirement. Thus, during 5 years, the private secretary of [MoDem President] François Bayrou was paid ... by the staff allowance of

[4] This is a twist on the argument made by Pemstein, Meserve, and Bernhard (2015). They show that marginal parties more often prioritize influence in the EP. The argument *a contrario* is that mainstream parties do not.

> Marielle de Sarnez [MEP], on European money. This case is not unique [to MoDem]..." (Lepage, 2014, 24, authors' translation)

The Lepage example illustrates our point. When testing the last hypothesis, we compare different types of ambition within party-centered systems. In her book, Lepage (2014) identifies herself as someone exempt from the pressure put on career-oriented party members, since she has had a career outside parliament as a lawyer. She then implies that her relative "unprofessional" status compared to other collegues is the reason why she did not comply. A similar argument has been made for Members of the House of Commons during the British expense scandal in 2009 (Bell, 2010).

The MoDem case also illustrates the context we believe favors such behavior. European elections in France are the most party-centered of them all (i.e. closed-list proportional representation). Candidate selection is also highly centralized, leaving a large discretion to the party leaders. Prior to the scandal, the MoDem had gone through a period of severe financial problems. Its parliamentary group had been decimated following the 2007 national elections, which meant that party income had diminished. At the same time, the party delegation in the EP enjoyed exceptionally generous monthly allowances. The solution – as *Libération* reports it – was to share the financial burden (Fansten et al., 2017). Hence, several employees in the party were hired either part-time or full-time as local assistants. In addition to EP-related work, they performed tasks for the MEPs' national party.[5]

The remainder of this article tests the generalizability of these claims on a original dataset.

Data and method

Our dataset includes observations of 1174 individual MEPs. Members were observed each semester (January-June; June-January) between 2012 and 2017. During this period, all member states organized at least one national election in addition to the 2014 European ballot. In total, the data includes 7143 observations with each MEP being observed up to ten times.

[5]The allocation of time for each employer remains unclear. The most concrete example is that of Stéphane Thérou, assistant to MEP Sylvie Goulard. He was employed for 110 hours a month by the EP while accumulating 70 hours for the party. The French work week is normally limited to 140 hours a month (35 hours a week). Confronted with this, the financial manager in MoDem, Alexandre Nardella, pointed out that "if the MEPs did not assign tasks to their employees, I would not be able to check [whether they performed tasks for the MoDem]" (quoted in Fansten et al., 2017)

In the second part of the analysis, we add information from survey data collected by the EPRG (Hix et al., 2016). The structure remains the same, but the sample is restricted to a subset of 336 respondents with a total of 2075 observations.

Variables

Dependent variable: Politicians are reluctant to release information on both the rules and actual figures of their funding, since the public is negatively disposed towards these arrangements; even when money is lawfully spent. In our case, the names of members' staff were made available in 2011 after a long period of public pressure (European Parliament, 2015a, Article 2(c)).[6] The list has been continuously updated since then and is the source we use.

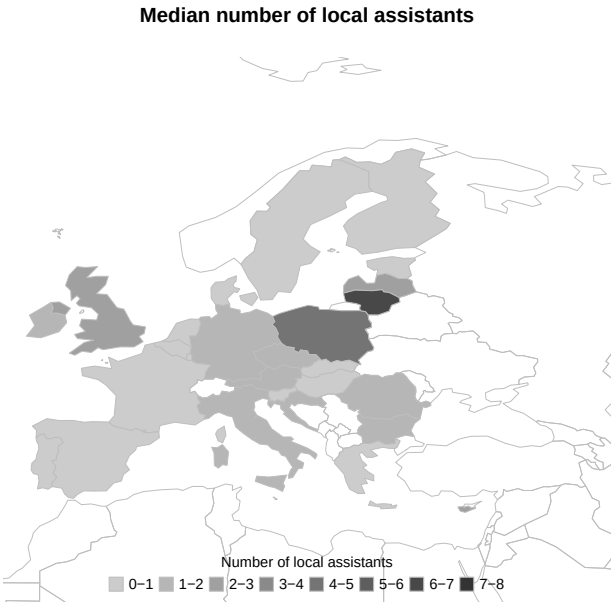
Our dependent variable thus reports the *Number of local assistants* that an MEP employed at the time of the observation. The variable ranges from zero to 43, with the median MEP employing 2 individuals. To illustrate national differences, the upper map of Figure 3 displays the median local staff size per MEP in each member state as of January 2014.

Independent variables: For clarity (and statistical power), we dichotomize our institutional variables into *candidate-* and *party-centered systems* at each level of government. This way, we have a robust measure which taps into the effect of intra-party competition and party control on MEPs' allocation of resources. The lower map in Figure 3 renders a geographical representation of this classification. The results of the analysis could be dependent on the thresholds in the classification. To counter this, we have taken several measures. First, since the original scale is ordinal (which would multiply the number of borderline cases), we have preferred a binary classification. Second, we have opted for a rather restrictive definition of "party-centered" systems. Third, we tested alternative classifications. The results remain largely the same (see appendix for further discussion and alternative models).

Proximity to European election is a binary variable indicating the spring term prior to the 2014 election. Similarly, *Proximity to national election* is a continuous measure capturing the (negative) number of years to next national parliamentary election. Electoral cycles vary between four and five years. For comparability, we censured the measure to a maximum of four years.

Personal ambition indicates MEPs who pursue a European career. The source for this variable is the EPRG MEP survey (Hix et al., 2016). Respondents were asked

[6] One of the first requests for information on staff allowances was made (and denied) in 2005 (European Ombudsman, 2008).



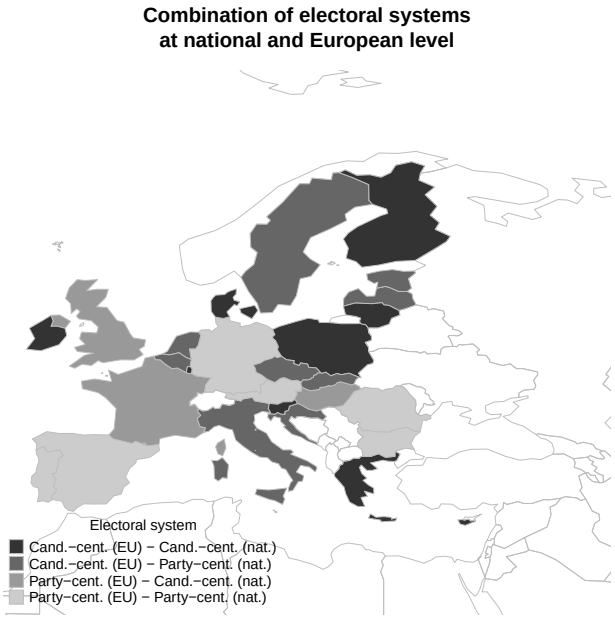


Figure 3: The number of local assistants in an MEP's employment varies between member states. The electoral systems at the national and European levels vary and do not necessarily overlap.

where they see themselves in 10 years. We coded as having a personal ambition those who want to remain members of the EP (in a leadership position or not) or become a Commissioner.

We begin by comparing the number of local employees *between* electoral systems. We expect that MEPs from candidate-centered systems keep more people on their local pay-roll. In the second set of models, we also compare between systems, but this time we leverage the time-varying component to consider the effect of the electoral calender. We expect the number of hires increases prior to elections, although more so in candidate-centered systems. In the third set of models, we compare the effect of ambition *within* in each electoral system. When MEPs hail from party-centered systems, we expect that those with a European ambition invest more in their party than those who don't.

Control variables: Our analyses contain a set of control variables designed to isolate the effect of electoral systems on hiring practices.

Local assistants are paid on local wages. Yet, MEPs' budget is the same regardless of the country of origin.[7] MEPs' capacity to finance local staff, therefore, varies. We control for this by including a measure of the local *Labor cost* per member state. When we consider the time-varying effect of the electoral calendar, the analysis also includes a lagged version of the dependent variable (*Local assistants (lag)*), so that the initial number of assistants for each MEPs is controlled for (thereby controlling away the effect of labor cost).

Furthermore, the reform adopted in 2015 – and coming into force in 2016 – aimed at regulating the use of local assistants relative to parliamentary assistants. *Reform* is a binary variable which indicates whether an observation was done before or after the reform. Similarly, we control for the *Size of member states*, assuming MEPs from larger member states have a greater need for constituency-based assistants. We furthermore allow for the possibility that MEPs are at the end of their political career (*Age*), or that they have already opted for a European career, and, therefore, enjoy a certain incumbency advantage that lets them spend less on constituency work (*Incumbent*; they have been reelected at least once).

There are several party-specific aspects, such as size, resources and ideology, which might impact the need and will among MEPs to hire local assistants. The organizational capacity of national parties varies. This affects their ability to provide candidates with resources for campaigning. State money to parties is allocated as

[7] A ceiling on the salary of local assistants has been set based on the average gross annual pay per member state. The ceiling varies between maximums of 2,793 euro in the least wealthy Member States and 7,990 euro in the wealthiest Member States (European Parliament, 2016b).

a function of their size in national parliaments. This means that parties with small or no parliamentary membership are worse off (Murphy, 2016, 108-109). MEPs from smaller parties might therefore have to finance more local staff over their own budget. A similar argument can be made for governmental parties. Their control over the executive administration give them access to more assistance. This would imply a negative correlation between MEPs staff size and governmental position. On the other hand, parties in government also have resources to co-opt members. This is sometimes argued to increase party unity. This would imply a positive correlation between staff size and governmental position. In our analysis, we control for these aspects with two variables: *Party size in national parliament* (a proportion) and *Party in government* (binary).

When hiring local assistants, MEPs trade legislative activities for constinuency work. Parties vary in how they value legislation at the EU level. That is, parties' attitudes towards European integration affect their choices on EU politics (Hobolt and Høyland, 2011). Parties with more detailed EU policy agenda are more likely to treat European elections as first order and field candidates with policy-making potential (Pemstein et al., 2015; Daniel, 2016). Pro-European attitudes are, therefore, expected to mitigate the pressure by national parties to invest locally. However, as the example of MoDem illustrates, we do not expect the effect to be exclusive to eurosceptic parties. MoDem has – in contrast to Front National, which has been subject to similar accusations – profiled itself as an EU-enthusiastic party. Furthermore, attitudes towards European integration are often shared by parties and MEPs. Stronger European attitudes are likely to reflect an MEP's institutional identity as well as his propensity to pursue a European career. According to Bolleyer and Gauja (2015, 334), political actors with strong institutional identities are also less likely to misuse staff allowances in general.[8] *Party's euroenthusiasm* is a 7-point scale with high levels indicating pro-EU attitudes. It is adopted from the 2010 and 2014 rounds of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017). We expect it to have a negative effect on the number of local hires.

[8]With data on the British and Australian case, Bolleyer and Gauja (2015, 334) show that the use of parliamentary allowances as a source of indirect income is less frequent when institutional identities are greater than partisan identities. For example, in majoritarian democracies, such as the United Kingdom, MPs define themselves as to whether they are in government or in opposition. When this occurs, it is difficult to distinguish between state and party resources, which will increase the propensity of MPs to use their allowance for party purposes.

Modelling choices

Our dependent variable, y, expresses the number of local assistants an MEP has in his employment. Sometimes several MEPs hire the same person. We have consequently divided each employee by the number of known employers. We end up with a continuous variable censored at 0. To account for this, we estimate a Tobit model; a linear regression with a right-censored dependent variable. The variable y_i^* is a normally distributed latent variable which defines the observable values of y.[9]

$$y_i = \begin{cases} y_i^* & if \quad y_i^* > \ 0 \\ 0 & if \quad y_i^* \leq \ 0 \end{cases}$$

The data is an unbalanced panel, and we alternate in how we leverage that variation.

First, we compare *between* electoral systems, while controlling away period-specific fluctuations in local hiring (model 1). That is, we include random intercepts for the time period in question (α_{period_i}).

$$\begin{aligned} y_i^* = & \alpha_{period_i} \\ & + \beta_k \times Controls_i \\ & + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_i \end{aligned}$$

Second, we consider the effect of the electoral calendar in each electoral system. That is, we are interested in within-individual changes over time. The model, therefore, includes a lag of the dependent variable as well as random intercepts for individual MEPs (α_{mep_i}). We test the predictions in two variations of the model, where our interest is with the proximity of either European (model 2) or national elections (model 3), depending on the electoral system.

$$\begin{aligned} y_{it}^* = & \alpha_{mep_i} \\ & + \beta_k \times Lag_{i(t-1)} \\ & + \beta_k \times Controls_i \\ & + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_{it} \\ & + \beta_k \times Electoral\ Calendar_{it} \\ & + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_{it} \times Electoral\ Calendar_{it} \end{aligned}$$

Finally, we zoom in on a subset of the data (i.e.: the respondents to the EPRG

[9] Another source of uncertainty is that we do not know whether assistants are full-time or part-time employees. In the appendix, we treat this as a measurement error in a series of alternative interval-censored models. The results remain similar to those reported in the main text.

survey (Hix et al., 2016)) to consider the effect of ambition *within* electoral systems. We estimate two different models in this respect. In the first, we emphasize between-individual variation (Model 4). It includes random intercepts for each period of observation (α_{period_i}). In the second (Model 5), we leverage within-individual variation in ambition by including random intercepts for MEPs (α_{mep_i}). A respondent's change of ambition is weighted heavily in the estimation (since MEPs stated ambition can vary between survey rounds). We thereby explicitly test whether MEPs' behavior changes when their type of ambition changes. While the latter model is a more realistic description, its generalizability is lower. Only 12 respondents out of 336 had a change of mind between survey rounds.

$$
\begin{aligned}
y_i^* = & \alpha_{mep_i/period_i} \\
& + \beta_k \times Controls_i \\
& + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_i \\
& + \beta_k \times Personal\ Ambition_i \\
& + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_i \times Personal\ Ambition_i
\end{aligned}
$$

The coefficients can be interpreted as in any linear model. One unit change in the predictor causes a β increase in the number of local assistants. Our main interest lies with the effects of the electoral systems at the national and European level, their respective electoral calendars as well as the effect of personal ambition.

Results

We begin by verifying whether the use of local assistants is conditioned by electoral systems in a time-fixed model. Combinations of electoral systems at the European and national level are included as dummies. The reference group is MEPs from member states applying a party-centered ballot at both levels of government.

Results are reported in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 4. Local staff is significantly larger in candidate-centered systems. In member states where all election seekers can count on a party-centered ballot in future contests (be it on the national or European level) the typical member is predicted to keep around 2 local assistants on his pay-roll.[10] This figure increases to a staff of almost 5 when all electoral venues are candidate-centred. We see the most substantial difference in local staff between

[10]Most of the numeric variables are mean-centered: A "typical" MEP is here a member observed prior to the 2015 reform, from an average-sized member state, with average labor cost. The member is a male in his first term of average age. His party has an average score on euroenthusiam, has an average size in the national parliament and is not part of the government.

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Model 1
Intercept	1.96 [1.74 , 2.16]
Reform	-0.48 [-0.96 , 0.04]
Size of member state	0.05 [0.05 , 0.05]
Labor cost	-0.13 [-0.14 , -0.12]
Female	-0.52 [-0.67 , -0.36]
Incumbent	0.14 [-0.01 , 0.29]
Age	-0.02 [-0.03 , -0.01]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.13 [-0.18 , -0.09]
Party size in national parliament	-2.66 [-3.14 , -2.18]
Party in government	0.27 [0.11 , 0.44]
Party-centered syst. (in EP) - Candidate-centered syst. (in MS)	0.16 [-0.05 , 0.38]
Candidate-centered syst. (in EP) - Party-centered syst. (in MS)	1.03 [0.83 , 1.21]
Candidate-centered syst. (in EP) - Candidate-centered syst. (in MS)	2.82 [2.58 , 3.03]
Number of Observations	7143
σ^2 - Period of observation (Autumn/Spring)	0.27

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 1: Results from a left-censored (Tobit) regression: The use of local assistants is conditioned by both European and national electoral systems.

electoral systems at the European-level. This makes sense, as a larger proportion of MEPs pursue a European career.

In the following, we begin by considering electoral mobilization in different electoral systems. We explicitly test how different ambitions lead to different hiring decisions (with a focus on party-centered systems).

Incentives for personal vote-seeking

This section explores whether local hires increase prior to an election and whether the decision is dependent on the electoral system. Our underlying argument is that additional hires are motivated by MEPs' ambition. When interpreting the results,

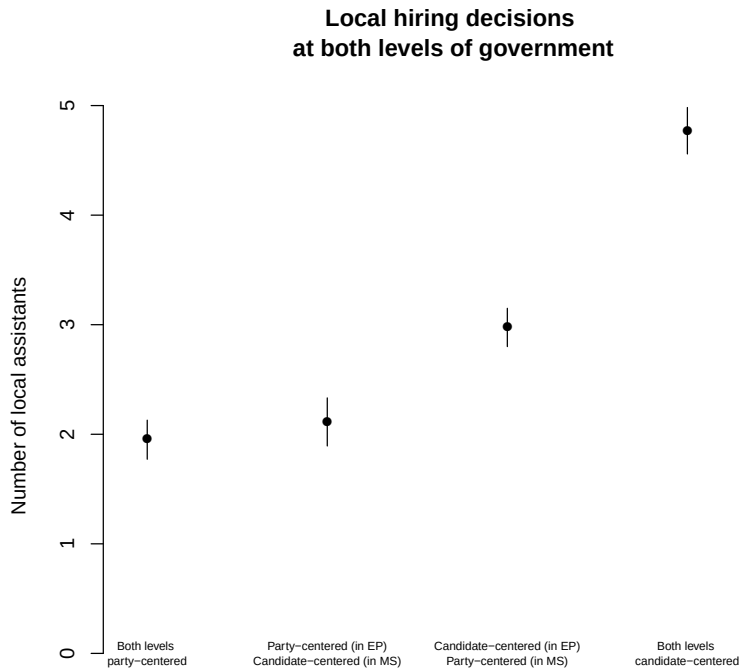


Figure 4: The size of local staff increases as the share of MEPs who need to cultivate a personal vote increases.

we therefore compare with reelection rates and/or the proportion of respondents to the EPRG survey who claim to pursue either a European or national political career (Hix et al., 2016).

Our focus is on the time-varying component in MEPs' hiring decisions. Thus, the models estimate the "quasi-change" in staff size as a function of the electoral calendar. The results are illustrated in Figures 5 and 6[11]. They show – in line with hypothesis 1 – that local hires increase before elections regardless of the level of government. However – as predicted by hypothesis 2 – the degree of mobilization is mediated by the electoral system.

MEPs from *candidate-centered* systems tend to proceed to more additional hires during elections. The European campaign period in the spring of 2014 implied a median increase of 0.55 assistants per MEP. That is, one in two members was likely to proceed to an additional hire. This finding is similar to the reelection rate in 2014, where 52% of the MEPs returned to office (Author, c, 7). The same rationale holds for national elections, although the effect is more substantial. When the national electoral system is candidate-centered, the predicted number of local assistants is 0.44 higher immediately before a national contest compared to immediately afterwards. The effect can be compared to the 21 % of MEPs who reported to strive for a national career (Hix et al., 2016). If we are to believe this comparison, it means that those who pursue a national career proceed to two additional hires before the national election. One reason for this high figure might be that MEPs enter the national race as challengers and therefore compensate by investing more resources.

Mobilization in *party-centered* systems is significantly lower, with a median increase of 0.28 assistants per member before the European election. A possible interpretation is that slightly fewer than one in three MEPs recruited an additional employee for the campaign period. This is lower than the 38 % share (from European party-centered systems) who wanted to keep working at the European level (Hix et al., 2016). In contrast, a national election is not predicted to impact hires at all. One reason might be that only 14 % of the respondents from these countries intend to switch to the national level. Overall, many MEPs in party-centered systems *do not* proceed to hire additional assistants during electoral campaigns. This is in line with the argument that candidates in these systems are elected on the party label and, therefore, have less need for local assistants to build a personal reputation with voters.

There are two takeaways from these findings: First – while MEPs' personal allowance could potentially contribute to bridging the gap between representatives

[11]The full results are reported in Table 3 in the appendix

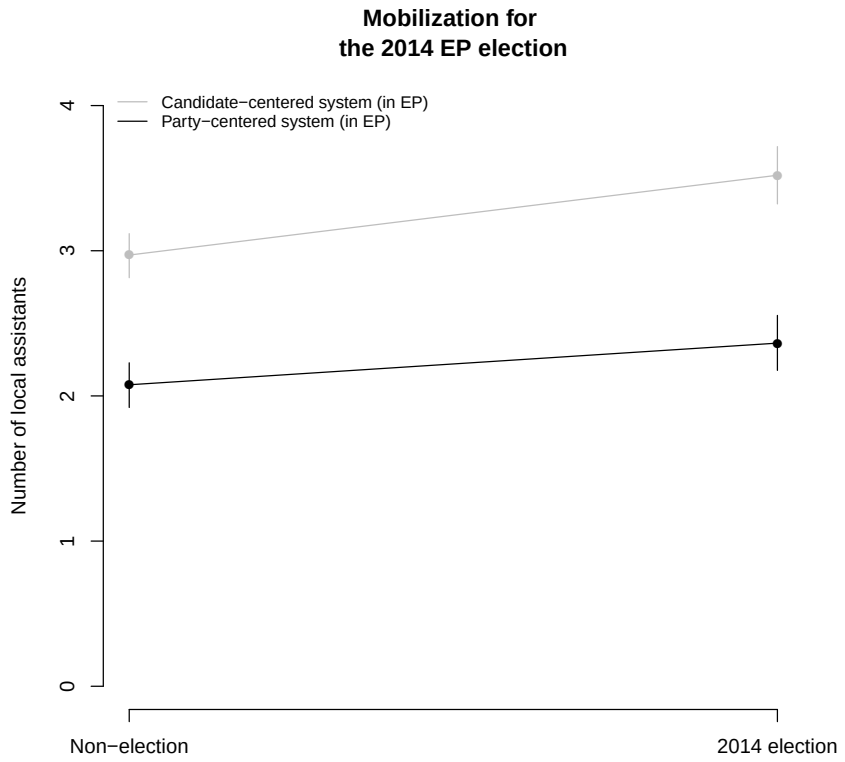


Figure 5: Local hires increased before the 2014 European election. The effect is the greatest among members who may gain from a personal vote.

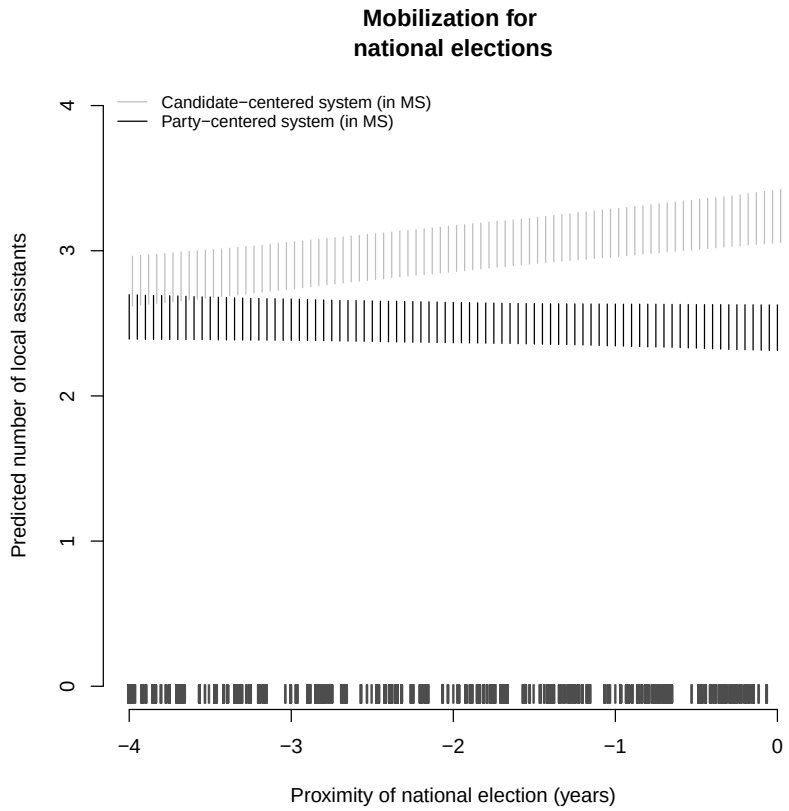


Figure 6: Local hires also increases as national elections approach, but only among members who may gain from a personal vote.

and voters – local staff is also frequently used for contesting elections (hypothesis 1). We can interpret the increase in staff prior to elections as the size of Parliament's direct support for campaigning activities. Second, the size of the contribution varies accross member states. The single system of allowance produces very different effects depending on the electoral system in use (hypothesis 2). From this perspective, the level of government matters less than personal ambition.

Next, we consider the effect of changing ambition when the party is the key gate-keeper to reelection.

Party control over the ballot (Hypothesis 3)

To explore how parties affect MEPs' spending, we leverage the variation in their stated career goals as reported in the EPRG survey (Hix et al., 2016). We then contrast the effect of ambition between systems where intra-party competition is brought to the voters and systems where parties exercise substantial control over the ballot.

In many instances, MEPs and party interests are aligned. Both agree on prioritizing staff investments either on the European or the national level. To tap into the effect of party control, we identify situations where interests likely diverge. That is, we study instances where MEPs would not hire a local assistant unless the party requires so. The models are a generalization of the example provided by former MEP Lepage (2014). She claimed that her colleagues complied with MoDem's requirements because they did not want to jeopardize their political career, while she held no such ambition and was therefore free.

We run two models with alternative specifications. Both include an interaction between personal ambition and party-centered systems. We expect it to be positive and statistically significant (hypothesis 3). In the first version (model 4), we compare ambition and electoral system between individuals. In the second (model 5), we emphasize the effect when respondents change their mind.

Figure 7 illustrates the predicted number of local assistants for different scenarios.[12] We see that when parties control access to the ballot, reelection-seeking MEPs are estimated to hire one additional local assistant (0.91) compared to colleagues who do not want reelection (model 4). The estimate increases to slightly more than 1 when we give weight to situations where MEPs have indeed changed their intentions (model 5). We can interpret this as the difference in party tax paid by careerist MEPs competing in party-centered systems. We find no such effect in candidate-centered systems.

[12]The full results are displayed in Table 4 in the appendix.

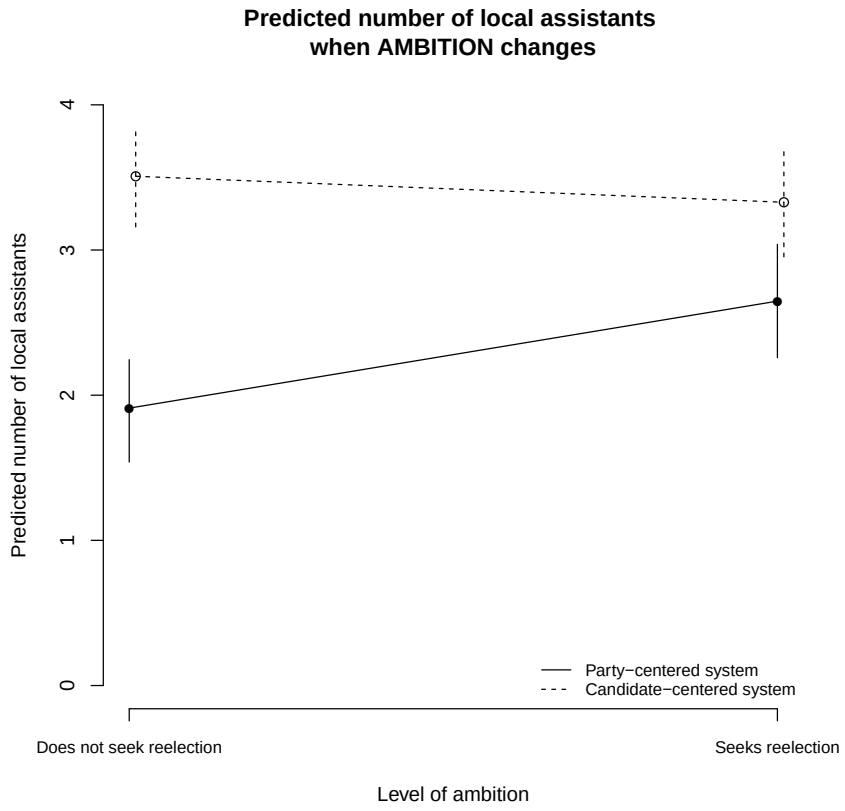


Figure 7: Effect of party control over the ballot.

The party control over the ballot means that election-seekers invest more in the party (hypothesis 3) than those who intend to exit EU politics. It also means that party colleagues can cooperate more than in candidate-centered systems, since they share the same electoral fate and do not compete for the same votes. This is reflected in the decision to pool resources. An assistant can be employed by more than one MEP. This practice is more common among members elected from European party-centered systems. In January 2017, more than half of the members from party-centered systems had at least one shared local assistant on their payroll. In contrast, only one in 5 members from candidate-centered systems made the same choice.

Paradoxically, the 2015 reform seems to have produced unintended side-effects in this regard. It aimed to rebalance spending between the local level and Parliament. Indeed, the number of local assistants decreased, with about one in two MEPs cutting back on the number of local employees (see the negative and significant coefficient in Tables 3 and 4). In other words, it effectively decreased the amount of staff allowances that can be used on extra-parliamentary activities. Many MEPs seem to have reacted by pooling resources. Figure 8 illustrates the average number of local assistants that MEPs share over time. Pooling was marginal until 2015, but increased marquably following the implementation of the reform. A high official in the EP whom we interviewed made the following observation (Interview, 2015)[13]:

> "Groups of members share the cost of accredited [parliamentary assistants] or local assistants. This is mainly for accredited [parliamentary assistants], but we have certain numbers also for local, which seems to be political group support. Sometimes, this makes sense, because they are sharing assistants providing an administrative or logistic support [...]. Sometimes it seems to be more focused on national politics."

While shareing assistants might give some economy of scale, it also ties up resources which MEPs no longer dispose of freely. The EP initially opted for a system that finances individual representatives rather than parliamenatry groups in order to limit party dependence. The 2015 reform has had the opposite effect.

Discussion

Representatives face a trade-off between constituency-oriented work and legislation. The pros and cons are often set by the institutional context (Ashworth and

[13]This interview was carried out by the authors in Brussels in 2015 for explorative purposes and to inquire about the availability of data.

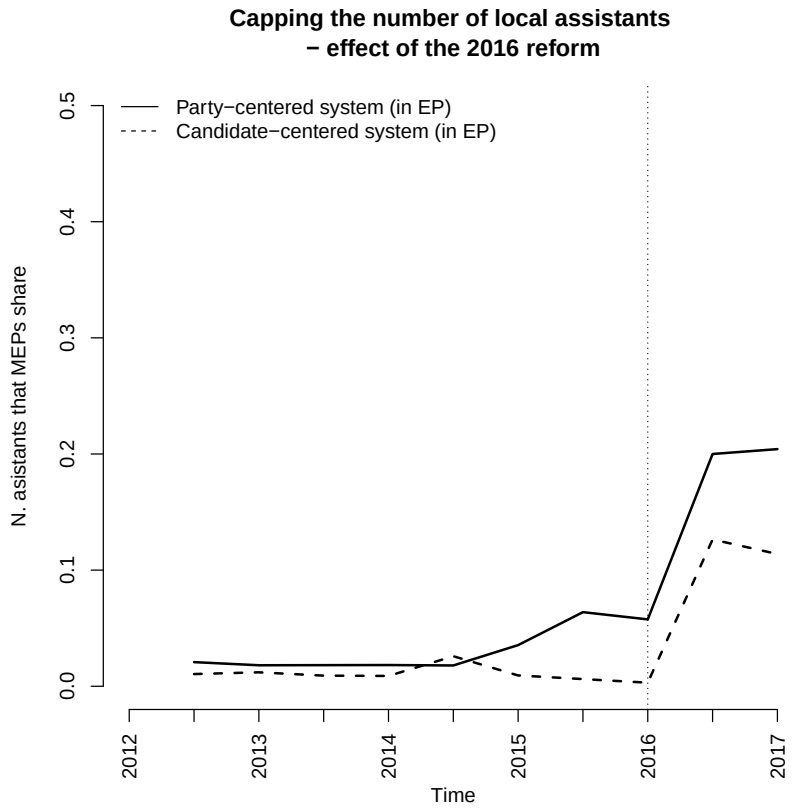


Figure 8: MEPs from party-centered systems are more likely to respond to shortage of resources by shareing local assistants.

de Mesquita, 2006). We have demonstrated that local hiring decisions follow different rationales depending on the electoral system, electoral calendar and career ambitions. Our findings shed light on the practical and normative implications implied in the system of staff financing and how this might be reformed in the future.

Practical and normative implications

First, we have shown that MEPs competing in candidate-centered systems hire more local staff, since they can increase their chances of (re)election by cultivating a personal vote. Policy-seekers who also want (re)election face the dilemma on how to distribute their allowance between parliamentary and local staff. A solution is a dynamic approach to recruitment, where local staff is mobilized before elections and demobilized afterwards. This frees up resources for parliamentary work in-between campaign periods. Thus, hiring practices tend to follow the electoral cycle.

Second, we have demonstrated that hiring decisions in party-centered systems are somewhat less responsive to the electoral calendar. We have argued that this is because candidates run on a party label and can, therefore, spend less on local staff during the campaign period. However, MEPs cannot free-ride on the party organization that ensures their reelection. Thus, we see that reelection-seeers in member states where access to lists is controlled by parties, invest more in local assistants compared to those who do not want reelection. It is important to note, however, that the total investment in local staff is nonetheless lower in the party-centered systems.

Third, EU citizens are represented differently in the same institution depending on where they hail from. Our first finding was that MEPs from candidate-centered systems keep more local assistants on their payroll than those in party-centered systems. Local staff is argued to connect citizens and representatives. They help ascertain the needs and wants of citizens. The EU is known for its "democratic-deficit" and for being "too distant" (Føllesdal and Hix, 2006). Providing MEPs with local assistants is a step towards improving the democratic representation. However, in the absence of a common electoral system – and in spite of a single system of staff allowances – there is variation in local staff presence. At best, this implies an improvement of the democratic representation in half of EU's member states. Furthermore, parliamentary and local assistants are financed over the same budget, so that an increase in one leads to a decrease in the other. Increased local spending, therefore, implies fewer resources for parliamentary assistance, and this varies systematically across member states. This means that EU citizens are represented differently depending on their member state.

Fourth, the financial arrangement for personal staff produces differences in opportunities between candidates even *within* member states. The system of personal parliamentary resources combined with a candidate-centered ballot likely provides MEPs with an incumbency advantage in European elections. Furthermore, they can help members parachute into national politics (when the national system is candidate-centered). This runs counter to the principle of fairness of the electoral process that has guided most European solutions for state financing of parties (Nassmacher, 2006). These mechanisms aim to guarantee an equal playing field between competitors that the EP staffing system obstructs.

Furthermore, the extent to which voters can hold MEPs accountable depends both on the electoral system and the degree of party competition. We know that in single-member districts, parties whose candidate has been implicated in scandals tend to do worse at the ballot (Basinger, 2013). However, voters are in a double bind (Dimock and Jacobson, 1995; Vivyan, Wagner, and Tarlov, 2012). As observed in the United Kingdom's 2009 expence scandal, the more voters care about which party wins, the less they can commit to sanction misbehavior. Accountablity is somewhat higher in open-list systems where voters can decouple parties from candidates (Rudolph and Däubler, 2016). In spite of that, the closer the race, the more likely MPs are to misuse staff allowances in the first place (Eggers, 2014). In the context of the EU, where ballot structures and the degree of competition vary, it means that MEPs are electorally accountable in different ways depending on where they are elected.

Last, our findings indicate that recent reforms might have increased, rather than decreased, party control. By introducing a minimum amount to spend on parliamentary assistants, the EP hoped to enhance its legislative and control capacity. However, many MEPs reacted to the reform by sharing assistants, thus limiting their autonomy. The reform appears as a quick fix for an underlying problem created by Parliament pursuing two goals at once. On the one hand, it has spent substantial and increasing amounts on staff in general to strengthen its capacity in inter-institutional relations. On the other hand, budget increases over the last two decades have prioritized individual allowances. Such arrangements are often justified as a means to ensure MEPs' independence from parliamentary groups. However, national parties' potential control over MEPs' staff allowance increased after the reform, even if the amount available is now limited.

Overall, our findings indicate that local staff is used to forward MEPs' careers, whether through campaigning or party work. These activities are not foreseen in the rules governing staff allowances. When making their spending decisions, MEPs,

thus, walk a fine line between the intended and prohibited purposes of staff allowances. State support to campagin activities and parliamentary activities are common and legitimate. Yet, they obey to different principles and ought to be separated. The current system, in contrast, often incentivizes the blending of the two.

The way forth

The EP can reform its staff allowance in two ways to avoid this situation: by increasing the control or changing the incentives.

One option would be to uphold the prohibitions for local staff to work on campaigns or for national parties. This could be achieved by establishing additional controlling and auditing mechanisms, including an independent body. This was done in the United Kingdom after the 2009 expense scandal. However, it creates administrative burdens for members and limits their prerogative of independence, which is a basis of representative democracy. Reforms of parliamentary allowances are, in principle, associated with improved citizens' trust and electoral accountability. Yet, from the UK experience, it is unclear whether the changes improved the trust of citizens (see Heerde-Hudson, 2014).

The solution would involve controlling expenditures, investigating misappropriations, taking remedy and being transparent with information (see Heerde-Hudson, 2014). Media might alleviate some of the financial burden from Parliament, since access to information and the free press lowers the cost of control. However, the EP has proven particularly reluctant to disclose information in the past. Moreover – even conditioned on a change in EU transparency practices – a more rigid monitoring system might uncover and prevent misuses or outright fraud, but it will not address the incentives that career-oriented MEPs are subject to.

Another option would be to reduce the money MEPs have at their disposal. This can be done by redirecting resources to support services within Parliament or reducing the overall staffing budget. Redirecting staff resources either to more civil servants or to the transnational parliamentary groups would effectively remove the possibility to finance personal careers, while Parliament would retain the resources for legislative activities. Monitoring systems are already in place for these services, and their incentives to spend money outside Parliament are minimal. This would be in keeping with the principle that a well-staffed parliament is important for the separation of powers. However, while this might increase "democracy through parliament" it would come at the expense of "democracy in parliament", as more hierarchical power is given to the party groups (Brack and Costa, 2018)

Reducing the amount for individual staff is clearly up to debate among MEPs. Reducing the amount of money in politics is advocated as a solution to political misconduct in general, since money attracts people whose primary interests are personal enrichment rather than the public good. It is unclear how the amount of staff resources has been decided in the EP, and little research exists on whether the current solution improves the connection with citizens. Prior to the 2015 reform, the Secretary General of the EP presented a note on the best practices in national parliaments (PE 402.198/BUR and annexes). However, we were denied access based on the Secretary General's right to confidentiality. Parliament will reform its staffing system also in the future. Whatever the solution it opts for, the quality of the debate and the public acceptance would improve if the EP was more transparent in how the sums are set.

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Appendix

Result tables for the main models

In this section we report the results tables for the models reported in the article's main text. They are all from left-censored Tobit models:

$$y_i = \begin{cases} y_i^* & if \quad y_i^* > \ 0 \\ 0 & if \quad y_i^* \leq \ 0 \end{cases}$$

The models are fitted by Bayesian estimation using MCMC simulation. Prior distributions on regression coefficients are multivariate normal with an expected value of 0 and a standard deviation of 10. The choice is rather unrestrictive, and predictors are allowed to effectively control for each other. Simulations are run 10000 times with two chains and a 5000 iterations' burn-in. To reduce autocorrelation in the results, we let the model run through an adaptive phase before we sample every 10^{th} iteration, while discarding the rest. The chains show no signs of non-convergence.

In model 1 (reported in Table 2) we compare hiring decisions between electoral systems while controlling away time-varying effects with period-specific random intercepts. The model is defined as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} y_i^* = & \alpha_{period_i} \\ & + \beta_k \times Controls_i \\ & + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_i \end{aligned}$$

In models 2 and 3 (Table 3) we compare individuals over time. The models include a lagged version of the dependent variable and random intercepts for individual MEPs. Model 2 investigates the effect of the European electoral calendar, while model 3 investigates the effect of the national calendars conditional on the electoral system in use.

$$\begin{aligned} y_{it}^* = & \alpha_{mep_i} \\ & + \beta_k \times Lag_{i(t-1)} \\ & + \beta_k \times Controls_i \\ & + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_{it} \\ & + \beta_k \times Electoral\ Calendar_{it} \\ & + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_{it} \times Electoral\ Calendar_{it} \end{aligned}$$

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Model 1
Intercept	1.96 [1.74 , 2.16]
Reform	-0.48 [-0.96 , 0.04]
Size of member state	0.05 [0.05 , 0.05]
Labor cost	-0.13 [-0.14 , -0.12]
Female	-0.52 [-0.67 , -0.36]
Incumbent	0.14 [-0.01 , 0.29]
Age	-0.02 [-0.03 , -0.01]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.13 [-0.18 , -0.09]
Party size in national parliament	-2.66 [-3.14 , -2.18]
Party in government	0.27 [0.11 , 0.44]
Party-centered syst. (in EP) - Candidate-centered syst. (in MS)	0.16 [-0.05 , 0.38]
Candidate-centered syst. (in EP) - Party-centered syst. (in MS)	1.03 [0.83 , 1.21]
Candidate-centered syst. (in EP) - Candidate-centered syst. (in MS)	2.82 [2.58 , 3.03]
Number of Observations	7143
σ^2 - Period of observation (Autumn/Spring)	0.27

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 2: Results from a left-censored (Tobit) regression: The use of local assistants is conditioned by both European and national electoral systems.

In models 4 and 5 (Table 4) we compare MEPs who seek a European career with those who don't within each type of electoral system. In model 4 we compare mainly across individuals while controlling away period-specific fluctuations (period-specific intercepts). In model 5 we compare within individuals who in one survey round express the wish to continue a European career and in another survey round do not.

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	2.05 [1.8 , 2.28]	2.22 [1.98 , 2.48]
Local assistants (lag)	0.58 [0.56 , 0.6]	0.59 [0.56 , 0.61]
Reform	-0.71 [-0.8 , -0.61]	-0.69 [-0.79 , -0.6]
Size of member state	0.03 [0.02 , 0.03]	0.03 [0.02 , 0.03]
Labor cost	-0.07 [-0.08 , -0.06]	-0.07 [-0.08 , -0.06]
Female	-0.29 [-0.48 , -0.11]	-0.29 [-0.47 , -0.09]
Incumbent	0.23 [0.11 , 0.36]	0.22 [0.1 , 0.35]
Age	-0.02 [-0.03 , -0.01]	-0.02 [-0.03 , -0.01]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.04 [-0.09 , 0.01]	-0.03 [-0.08 , 0.02]
Party size in national parliament	-1.41 [-1.93 , -0.89]	-1.38 [-1.89 , -0.89]
Party in government	0.08 [-0.05 , 0.21]	0.06 [-0.09 , 0.18]
Prox. of EP election	0.55 [0.38 , 0.72]	0.36 [0.24 , 0.49]
Party-centered syst. (in EP)	-0.89 [-1.1 , -0.69]	-0.89 [-1.09 , -0.69]
Prox of EP election * Party-centered syst. (in EP)	-0.27 [-0.5 , -0.02]	
Party-centered syst. (in MS)	-0.48 [-0.65 , -0.3]	-0.76 [-1 , -0.54]
Prox. of national election	0.03 [0 , 0.07]	0.11 [0.06 , 0.16]
Prox of national election * Party-centered syst. (in MS)		-0.13 [-0.19 , -0.06]
Number of Observations	7047	7047
τ - Individual MEP	0.58	0.59

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 3: Results from a left-censored (Tobit) regression: The use of local assistants is conditioned by both European and national elections.

$$
\begin{aligned}
y_i^* = & \alpha_{mep_i/period_i} \\
& + \beta_k \times Controls_i \\
& + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_i \\
& + \beta_k \times Personal\ Ambition_i \\
& + \beta_k \times Electoral\ System_i \times Personal\ Ambition_i
\end{aligned}
$$

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	3.51 [3.09 , 3.89]	3.47 [2.82 , 4.2]
Reform	-0.47 [-0.94 , -0.02]	-0.39 [-0.55 , -0.22]
Size of member state	0.04 [0.04 , 0.05]	0.04 [0.03 , 0.05]
Labor cost	-0.14 [-0.16 , -0.13]	-0.13 [-0.16 , -0.1]
Female	-0.43 [-0.69 , -0.18]	-0.32 [-0.88 , 0.26]
Incumbent	0.6 [0.35 , 0.85]	0.22 [-0.11 , 0.58]
Age	-0.02 [-0.03 , -0.01]	-0.01 [-0.04 , 0.01]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.11 [-0.2 , -0.02]	-0.22 [-0.41 , -0.03]
Party size in national parliament	-1.37 [-2.31 , -0.41]	0.34 [-0.97 , 1.62]
Party in government	0.05 [-0.25 , 0.34]	0.17 [-0.07 , 0.41]
Party-centered syst. (in MS)	-0.8 [-1.07 , -0.54]	-0.67 [-1.3 , -0.1]
Personal ambition at national level	0.52 [0.19 , 0.82]	0.34 [-0.2 , 0.88]
Party-centered syst. (in EP)	-1.59 [-1.98 , -1.23]	-1.44 [-2.12 , -0.75]
Personal ambition at EU level	-0.17 [-0.52 , 0.17]	-1.34 [-1.91 , -0.77]
Party-centered syst. (in EP) * Personal ambition at EU level	0.91 [0.43 , 1.42]	1.12 [0.4 , 1.8]
Number of Observations	2075	2075
σ^2 - Period of observation (Autumn/Spring)	0.16	-
σ^2 - Individual MEP	-	2.63

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 4: Results from a left-censored (Tobit) regression: The use of local assistants is conditioned by both European and national electoral systems.

Robustness checks/alternative models

In this section we test the robustness of the findings. In particular, we want to make sure that the results are not driven by our choices of operationalizations. We consider two potential sources of error. First, our measure of the dependent variable may be inexact. In the first subsection, we treat this as a measurement error.

Second, we consider the dichotomization of the electoral systems. The choice of threshold between party- and candidate-centered systems may have a bearing on the results we report. In the the second subsection, we report results from alternative categorizations.

Alternative measurement of the dependent variable

Our dependent variable, y, expresses the number of local assistants an MEP has in his employment. While we know the number of employees registered to each MEP, we do not know whether their contract is full-time or part-time.

As a robustness check, we estimatet an alternative model which treats the problem as a measurement error. Each observation of the dependent variable (and its lag) is defined as an interval-censored normal distribution ranging between the observed number of local assistants and half of that count. In other words, we assume that all assistants can be hired either in a 50% contract or a full-time contract, or anywhere in-between.

Just as with the Tobit model, our alternative observed variable, y, is also defined as a function of the latent variable, y^*. Its distribution is censored, so that $y_i \in (\frac{a_i}{2}, a_i)$.

$$y_i = \begin{cases} 0 & if \quad y_i^* \quad = 0 \\ a_i & if \quad y_i^* \quad > 0 \end{cases}$$

Note that the size of the interval changes for each observation. At lower values of y, the interval is narrow, while it increases as y becomes larger. It reflects our assumption that assistants are more likely to be part-timers when MEPs hire more people. The choice implies that higher counts on the observed variable tend to produce lower effect on the estimated regression coefficients while the precision decreases. The model thereby produces a highly conservative estimation of the effect of covariates.

The results are reported in Tables 5, 6 and 7. The original Tobit model (left-censored regression) is reported in the first column in each table, while the output from the twin interval-censored model is reported in the subsequent column. As the tables make clear, the results are robust. While the effects are overall smaller (i.e.:

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Right censored (Tobit)	Interval-censored
Intercept	1.96	1.6
	[1.74 , 2.16]	[1.5 , 1.71]
Reform	-0.48	-0.42
	[-0.96 , 0.04]	[-0.67 , -0.16]
Size of member state	0.05	0.03
	[0.05 , 0.05]	[0.02 , 0.03]
Labor cost	-0.13	-0.07
	[-0.14 , -0.12]	[-0.07 , -0.06]
Female	-0.52	-0.27
	[-0.67 , -0.36]	[-0.34 , -0.2]
Incumbent	0.14	0.1
	[-0.01 , 0.29]	[0.03 , 0.18]
Age	-0.02	-0.01
	[-0.03 , -0.01]	[-0.01 , -0.01]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.13	-0.06
	[-0.18 , -0.09]	[-0.09 , -0.04]
Party size in national parliament	-2.66	-1.3
	[-3.14 , -2.18]	[-1.56 , -1.04]
Party in government	0.27	0.13
	[0.11 , 0.44]	[0.04 , 0.22]
Party-centered syst. (in EP) - Candidate-centered syst. (in MS)	0.16	0.08
	[-0.05 , 0.38]	[-0.02 , 0.19]
Candidate-centered syst. (in EP) - Party-centered syst. (in MS)	1.03	0.61
	[0.83 , 1.21]	[0.51 , 0.71]
Candidate-centered syst. (in EP) - Candidate-centered syst. (in MS)	2.82	1.51
	[2.58 , 3.03]	[1.4 , 1.61]
Number of Observations	7143	7143
σ^2 - Period of observation (Autumn/Spring)	0.27	0.14

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 5: Results from an two alternative regressions: MEPs from candidate-centered systems hire more local assistants.

we assume that the real count of local staffers is probably lower than the observed list of employees), the direction and precision remain similar to the main model.

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Right censored	Interval censored	Right censored	Interval censored
Intercept	2.05 [1.8 , 2.28]	1.55 [1.43 , 1.68]	2.22 [1.98 , 2.48]	1.66 [1.53 , 1.77]
Local assistants (lag)	0.58 [0.56 , 0.6]	0.35 [0.33 , 0.36]	0.59 [0.56 , 0.61]	0.35 [0.34 , 0.36]
Reform	-0.71 [-0.8 , -0.61]	-0.43 [-0.48 , -0.39]	-0.69 [-0.79 , -0.6]	-0.43 [-0.48 , -0.38]
Size of member state	0.03 [0.02 , 0.03]	0.01 [0.01 , 0.02]	0.03 [0.02 , 0.03]	0.01 [0.01 , 0.02]
Labor cost	-0.07 [-0.08 , -0.06]	-0.04 [-0.04 , -0.03]	-0.07 [-0.08 , -0.06]	-0.04 [-0.04 , -0.03]
Female	-0.29 [-0.48 , -0.11]	-0.15 [-0.24 , -0.06]	-0.29 [-0.47 , -0.09]	-0.15 [-0.24 , -0.07]
Incumbent	0.23 [0.11 , 0.36]	0.14 [0.07 , 0.2]	0.22 [0.1 , 0.35]	0.13 [0.07 , 0.19]
Age	-0.02 [-0.03 , -0.01]	-0.01 [-0.01 , 0]	-0.02 [-0.03 , -0.01]	-0.01 [-0.01 , 0]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.04 [-0.09 , 0.01]	-0.02 [-0.05 , 0]	-0.03 [-0.08 , 0.02]	-0.02 [-0.04 , 0.01]
Party size in national parliament	-1.41 [-1.93 , -0.89]	-0.67 [-0.93 , -0.4]	-1.38 [-1.89 , -0.89]	-0.67 [-0.93 , -0.41]
Party in government	0.08 [-0.05 , 0.21]	0.03 [-0.03 , 0.1]	0.06 [-0.09 , 0.18]	0.02 [-0.05 , 0.09]
Prox. of EP election	0.55 [0.38 , 0.72]	0.26 [0.18 , 0.35]	0.36 [0.24 , 0.49]	0.18 [0.12 , 0.24]
Party-centered syst. (in EP)	-0.89 [-1.1 , -0.69]	-0.5 [-0.6 , -0.39]	-0.89 [-1.09 , -0.69]	-0.5 [-0.6 , -0.41]
Prox of EP election * Party-centered syst. (in EP)	-0.27 [-0.5 , -0.02]	-0.13 [-0.25 , 0]		
Party-centered syst. (in MS)	-0.48 [-0.65 , -0.3]	-0.24 [-0.34 , -0.15]	-0.76 [-1 , -0.54]	-0.39 [-0.5 , -0.28]
Prox. of national election	0.03 [0 , 0.07]	0.01 [0 , 0.03]	0.11 [0.06 , 0.16]	0.05 [0.03 , 0.08]
Prox of national election * Party-centered syst. (in MS)			-0.13 [-0.19 , -0.06]	-0.06 [-0.1 , -0.03]
Number of Observations	7047	7047	7047	7047
τ - Individual MEP	0.59	2.3	0.59	2.3

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 6: Results from alternative regressions: The use of local assistants is conditioned by both European (columns 1 and 2) and national elections (columns 3 and 4).

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Right censored	Interval censored
Intercept	3.51 [3.09 , 3.89]	2.46 [2.25 , 2.69]
Reform	-0.47 [-0.94 , -0.02]	-0.42 [-0.66 , -0.18]
Size of member state	0.04 [0.04 , 0.05]	0.02 [0.02 , 0.03]
Labor cost	-0.14 [-0.16 , -0.13]	-0.07 [-0.08 , -0.07]
Female	-0.43 [-0.69 , -0.18]	-0.25 [-0.38 , -0.11]
Incumbent	0.6 [0.35 , 0.85]	0.31 [0.18 , 0.45]
Age	-0.02 [-0.03 , -0.01]	-0.01 [-0.02 , 0]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.11 [-0.2 , -0.02]	-0.04 [-0.09 , 0]
Party size in national parliament	-1.37 [-2.31 , -0.41]	-0.71 [-1.23 , -0.18]
Party in government	0.05 [-0.25 , 0.34]	0.04 [-0.11 , 0.2]
Party-centered syst. (in MS)	-0.8 [-1.07 , -0.54]	-0.4 [-0.53 , -0.26]
Personal ambition at national level	0.52 [0.19 , 0.82]	0.29 [0.13 , 0.46]
Party-centered syst. (in EP)	-1.59 [-1.98 , -1.23]	-0.9 [-1.1 , -0.72]
Personal ambition at EU level	-0.17 [-0.52 , 0.17]	-0.13 [-0.31 , 0.05]
Party-centered syst. (in EP) * Personal ambition at EU level	0.91 [0.43 , 1.42]	0.51 [0.26 , 0.76]
Number of Observations	2075	2075
σ^2 - Period of observation (Autumn/Spring)	0.16	-
σ^2 - Individual MEP	-	0.09

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 7: Results from alternative regressions: MEPs from party-centered systems with ambition to stay in Parliament hire more local assistants.

Alternative categorization of electoral systems

The results may be sensitive to the way in which electoral systems are operationalized. In the main text, we classified national and European systems sligthly differently.

At the European level, all systems follow a principle of proportional representation. Party-centered systems at the European level are coded as such when lists are ranked and closed or when the possibility for voters to reorder candidates are such that it rarely affects the distribution of seats. These are labeled *Party-centered system (EU)*. That is, we had a restrictive definition of "party centered". The remaining systems – open lists, flexible lists and single transferable votes – are lumped together and labeled *Candidate-centered system (EU)*. This classification is based on Däubler and Hix (2017).

At the national level, we apply a slightly different cut-off: The variation in electoral systems is greater, including majoritarian and mixed systems. As a basis, we have relied on the rank-ordered index suggested by Farrell and McAllister (2006). We have applied a cut-off between mixed-member systems such as Germany ("party-centered") and single-seat districts such as in France and the UK ("candidate-centered"). The index was recently updated for 16 of the 28 EU member states by Söderlund (2016).On the ordinal scale used by the author, we use a cut-off at 4; between "Mixed-member system with plurality rule" and "Single-seat districts, plurality with party control". For the remainder of the member states, we have relied on descriptions available on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Parline database. The classification can be represented in a two-by-two table, as reported in Table 8.

In the following tables we report the results from alternative operationalizations of national systems. In particular, we apply a more restrictive understanding of "party-centered" similar to the one used for European elections: On the rank order suggested by Söderlund (2016) we classify only systems with a lower rank than 3 (Ordered list PR and Closed list PR) as party-centered. Given that the category of "candidate-centered" systems now include more individuals with moderate to low incentives to cultivate a personal vote, we expect the estimated effect of electoral systems to be more modest. The results are displayed in tables 9, 10 and 11.

	National party-centered	National candiate-centered
EP party-centered	Germany	France
	Spain	United Kingdom
	Portugal	Hungary
	Austria	
	Romania	
	Bulgaria	
EP candidate-centered	Italy	Luxembourg
	Netherlands	Greece
	Belgium	Ireland
	Sweden	Finland
	Czech Republic	Denmark
	Slovakia	Slovenia
	Estonia	Lithuania
	Latvia	Poland
	Croatia	Malta
		Cyprus

Table 8: Combinations of national and European electoral systems according to their incentives to cultivate a personal vote.

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Base-line model	Alternative threshold
Intercept	1.96	2.15
	[1.74 , 2.16]	[1.9 , 2.4]
Reform	-0.48	-0.49
	[-0.96 , 0.04]	[-0.99 , 0.03]
Size of member state	0.05	0.05
	[0.05 , 0.05]	[0.05 , 0.06]
Labor cost	-0.13	-0.13
	[-0.14 , -0.12]	[-0.14 , -0.12]
Female	-0.52	-0.51
	[-0.67 , -0.36]	[-0.65 , -0.36]
Incumbent	0.14	0.14
	[-0.01 , 0.29]	[-0.01 , 0.3]
Age	-0.02	-0.02
	[-0.03 , -0.01]	[-0.02 , -0.01]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.13	-0.16
	[-0.18 , -0.09]	[-0.2 , -0.11]
Party size in national parliament	-2.66	-2.62
	[-3.14 , -2.18]	[-3.07 , -2.1]
Party in government	0.27	0.3
	[0.11 , 0.44]	[0.11 , 0.46]
Party-centered syst. (in EP) - Candidate-centered syst. (in MS)	0.16	-0.3
	[-0.05 , 0.38]	[-0.56 , -0.02]
Candidate-centered syst. (in EP) - Party-centered syst. (in MS)	1.03	0.81
	[0.83 , 1.21]	[0.57 , 1.04]
Candidate-centered syst. (in EP) - Candidate-centered syst. (in MS)	2.82	2.65
	[2.58 , 3.03]	[2.43 , 2.89]
Number of Observations	7143	7143
σ^2 - Period of observation (Autumn/Spring)	0.27	0.27

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 9: Alternative operationalizations of electoral system: MEPs from candidate-centered systems hire more local assistants.

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Original threshold	Alternative threshold	Original threshold	Alternative threshold
Intercept	2.05	1.96	2.22	1.56
	[1.8 , 2.28]	[1.75 , 2.17]	[1.98 , 2.48]	[1.43 , 1.68]
Local assistants (lag)	0.58	0.58	0.59	0.35
	[0.56 , 0.6]	[0.56 , 0.6]	[0.56 , 0.61]	[0.34 , 0.36]
Reform	-0.71	-0.7	-0.69	-0.44
	[-0.8 , -0.61]	[-0.79 , -0.6]	[-0.79 , -0.6]	[-0.48 , -0.39]
Size of member state	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.01
	[0.02 , 0.03]	[0.02 , 0.03]	[0.02 , 0.03]	[0.01 , 0.01]
Labor cost	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.04
	[-0.08 , -0.06]	[-0.08 , -0.06]	[-0.08 , -0.06]	[-0.04 , -0.03]
Female	-0.29	-0.29	-0.29	-0.15
	[-0.48 , -0.11]	[-0.48 , -0.11]	[-0.47 , -0.09]	[-0.25 , -0.06]
Incumbent	0.23	0.23	0.22	0.13
	[0.11 , 0.36]	[0.1 , 0.35]	[0.1 , 0.35]	[0.07 , 0.19]
Age	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01
	[-0.03 , -0.01]	[-0.03 , -0.01]	[-0.03 , -0.01]	[-0.01 , 0]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.04	-0.05	-0.03	-0.03
	[-0.09 , 0.01]	[-0.1 , 0]	[-0.08 , 0.02]	[-0.06 , 0]
Party size in national parliament	-1.41	-1.27	-1.38	-0.58
	[-1.93 , -0.89]	[-1.81 , -0.72]	[-1.89 , -0.89]	[-0.84 , -0.31]
Party in government	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.01
	[-0.05 , 0.21]	[-0.08 , 0.18]	[-0.09 , 0.18]	[-0.06 , 0.08]
Prox. of EP election	0.55	0.54	0.36	0.19
	[0.38 , 0.72]	[0.37 , 0.72]	[0.24 , 0.49]	[0.13 , 0.25]
Party-centered syst. (in EP)	-0.89	-0.93	-0.89	-0.53
	[-1.1 , -0.69]	[-1.13 , -0.74]	[-1.09 , -0.69]	[-0.62 , -0.43]
Prox of EP election * Party-centered syst. (in EP)	-0.27	-0.26		
	[-0.5 , -0.02]	[-0.5 , -0.03]		
Party-centered syst. (in MS)	-0.48	-0.44	-0.76	-0.32
	[-0.65 , -0.3]	[-0.62 , -0.24]	[-1 , -0.54]	[-0.44 , -0.21]
Prox. of national election	0.03	0.03	0.11	0.04
	[0 , 0.07]	[0 , 0.06]	[0.06 , 0.16]	[0.01 , 0.06]
Prox of national election * Party-centered syst. (in MS)			-0.13	-0.05
			[-0.19 , -0.06]	[-0.08 , -0.02]
Number of Observations	7047	7047	7047	7047
τ - Individual MEP	0.59	2.26	0.59	2.26

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 10: Alternative operationalizations of electoral system: The use of local assistants is conditioned by both European (columns 1 and 2) and national elections (columns 3 and 4).

Dependent variable: 'Number of local assistants'	Original threshold	Alternative threshold
Intercept	3.51	2.32
	[3.09 , 3.89]	[2.13 , 2.51]
Reform	-0.47	-0.43
	[-0.94 , -0.02]	[-0.67 , -0.17]
Size of member state	0.04	0.02
	[0.04 , 0.05]	[0.02 , 0.02]
Labor cost	-0.14	-0.07
	[-0.16 , -0.13]	[-0.08 , -0.07]
Female	-0.43	-0.24
	[-0.69 , -0.18]	[-0.38 , -0.11]
Incumbent	0.6	0.3
	[0.35 , 0.85]	[0.17 , 0.44]
Age	-0.02	-0.01
	[-0.03 , -0.01]	[-0.02 , 0]
Party's euroenthusiasm	-0.11	-0.07
	[-0.2 , -0.02]	[-0.11 , -0.02]
Party size in national parliament	-1.37	-0.45
	[-2.31 , -0.41]	[-0.94 , 0.05]
Party in government	0.05	0.02
	[-0.25 , 0.34]	[-0.13 , 0.17]
Party-centered syst. (in MS)	-0.8	-0.28
	[-1.07 , -0.54]	[-0.42 , -0.14]
Personal ambition at national level	0.52	0.3
	[0.19 , 0.82]	[0.13 , 0.47]
Party-centered syst. (in EP)	-1.59	-0.91
	[-1.98 , -1.23]	[-1.11 , -0.73]
Personal ambition at EU level	-0.17	-0.13
	[-0.52 , 0.17]	[-0.31 , 0.05]
Party-centered syst. (in EP) * Personal ambition at EU level	0.91	0.48
	[0.43 , 1.42]	[0.22 , 0.74]
Number of Observations	2075	2075
σ^2 - Period of observation (Autumn/Spring)	0.16	0.1

Note: Median effect with 95 % symmetric posterior density interval.

Table 11: Alternative operationalization of electoral system: MEPs from party-centered systems with ambition to stay in Parliament hire more local assistants.