

Constituency Characteristics, Expertise, Civil Society Links and Parliamentary Questions

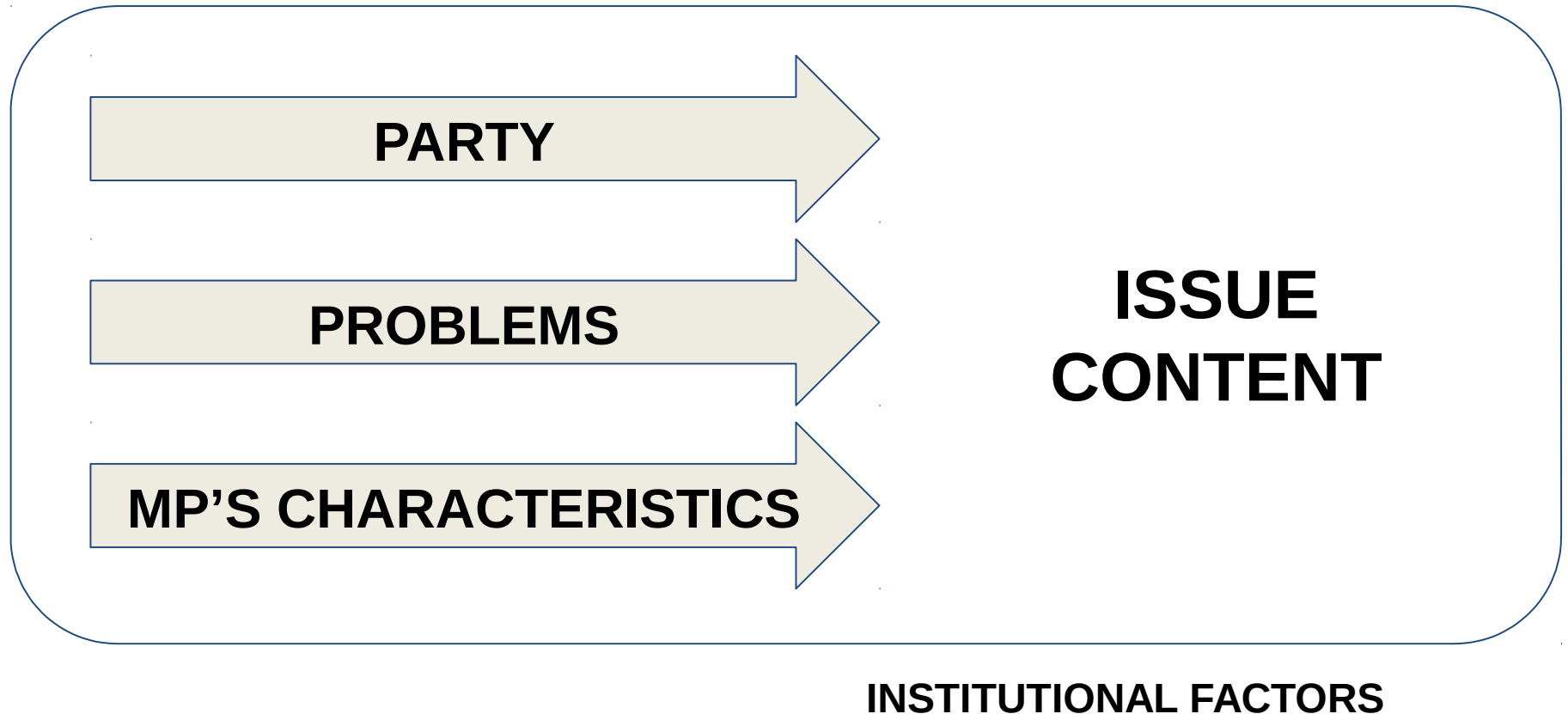
Evidence from Portugal



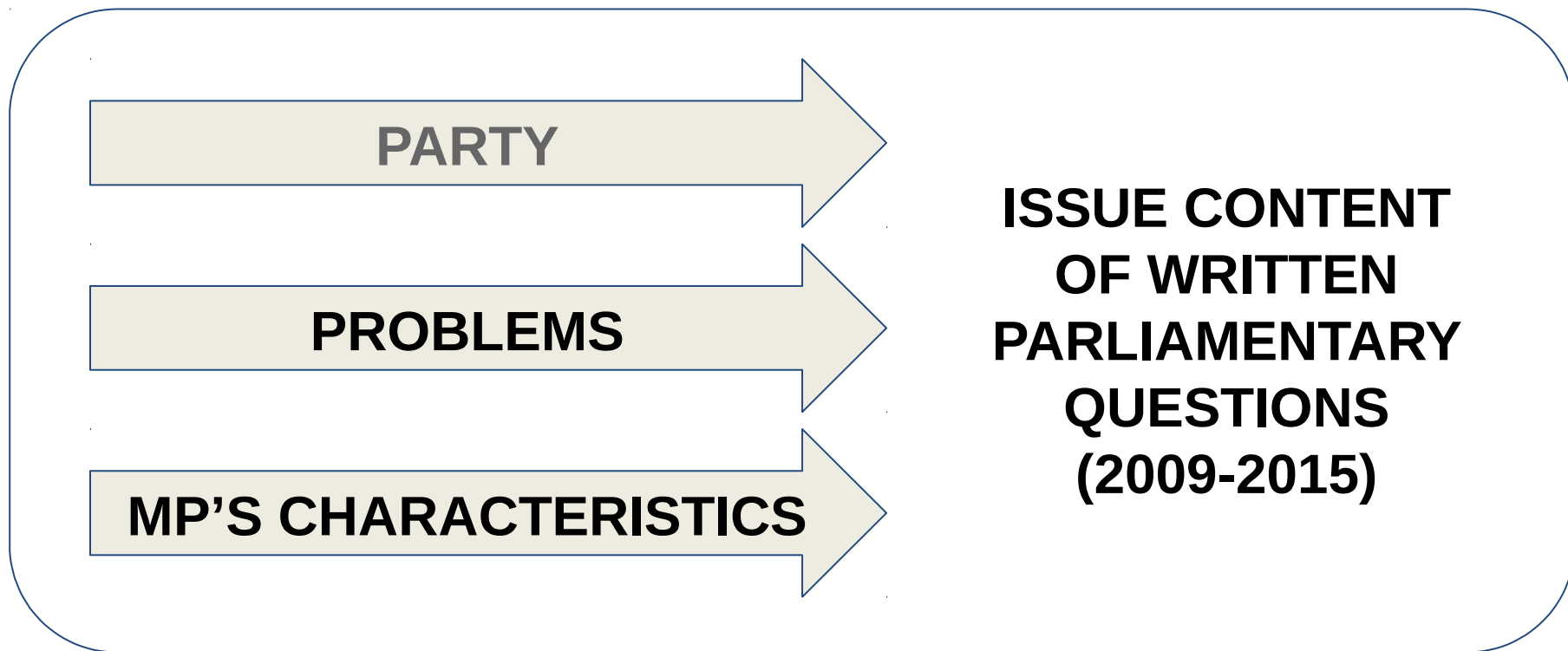
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What determines the issue content of individual parliamentary activities?



What determines the issue content of individual parliamentary activities in Portugal?



Closed PR electoral system

Hypotheses

Personal characteristics:

- H1 – MP's **specialization** has an impact on his/her attention to a topic
- H2 – MPs' **linkages with civil society** have an impact on his/her attention to a topic

Problems:

- H3 - The **characteristics of the constituency** where the MP was elected have an impact on the his/her attention to a topic, especially when questions have a local focus

Data

- ~**14000 written parliamentary questions** (“perguntas ao governo”) submitted by Portuguese MPs during the 11th (2009-2011) and 12th legislature (2011-2015) + data on MPs’ biographies and professional careers
- **DV** - binary, taking 1 if the MP asks at least one question during a legislative session on one of these topics (coding based on Comparative Agendas Project):
 - **Environment**
 - **(Un-)employment**
 - **Law and order**

Distinction between **local** and **general** focus of parliamentary questions

Main IVs

	SPECIALISATION (H1) <i>COMMITTEE</i>	CIVIL SOCIETY LINKS (H2) <i>CIVIC and INTGROUP</i>	CONSTITUENCY CHARACTERISTICS (H3) <i>PROBLEM</i>
ENVIRONMENT	“Committee for environment, territorial issues and local power” +	CIVIC + (=1 if member of civic, educational or cultural group)	Environmental expenditure as a percentage of total municipal expenditure +
EMPLOYMENT	“Committee for employment and social security” +	INTGROUP+ (=1 if leading Union, company, professional order)	Unemployed persons registered at public employment offices as a percentage of resident population +
LAW & ORDER	“Committee for Constitutional affairs, rights and freedoms” +	<i>No effects</i>	Crime registered per thousands inhabitants +

Control variables

PARTY_POSITION (-) is a dummy variable equals to 1 if the MP is currently a member of the national or local decision-making body of the party

SENIORITY (-) measures the number of times an MP was elected

END_CAREER (-) is a dummy variable taking 1 if the MP is more than 64 year-old at the beginning of the legislature

REPLACEMENT (+) is a dummy variable taking 1 if the MP was not elected directly but entered parliament in the course of the legislature as a temporary or permanent substitute of another party member

OPPOSITION (+) is a dummy variable equals to 1 if the MP is member of a party in the opposition

MAGNITUDE (-) measures the number of MPs elected by each constituency

PARTY -> party fixed effects

Analysis

	Environment (general)	Environment (local)	Employment (general)	Employment (local)	Law&Order (general)	Law&Order (local)
COMMITTEE	1.12 (0.30)***	1.03 (0.31)***	1.30 (0.36)***	1.72 (0.63)**	1.07 (0.35)**	0.71 (0.51)
CIVIC	-0.58 (0.39)	-0.53 (0.44)	0.09 (0.57)	1.27 (0.75)	0.07 (0.34)	0.65 (0.34)
INTGROUP	0.04 (0.72)	0.10 (0.62)	-0.64 (1.37)	1.24 (0.89)	-0.06 (0.80)	0.22 (0.40)
PROBLEM	0.10 (0.08)	0.15 (0.08)*	0.04 (0.07)	0.20 (0.10)*	0.03 (0.01)*	0.03 (0.02)
PARTY_POSITION	-0.07 (0.41)	-0.38 (0.48)	-0.12 (0.59)	-0.48 (0.75)	0.35 (0.42)	0.35 (0.47)
REPLACEMENT	-1.04 (0.60)	-1.05 (0.64)	-0.06 (0.55)	-2.45 (0.88)**	-0.53 (0.17)**	-0.37 (0.25)
OPPOSITION	0.83 (0.32)**	0.25 (0.35)	0.98 (0.34)**	0.40 (0.55)	0.86 (0.33)**	0.80 (0.35)*
SENIORITY	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.11)	0.01 (0.13)	-0.65 (0.25)*	0.04 (0.08)	-0.09 (0.09)
END_CAREER	-1.22 (0.59)*	-1.60 (0.70)*	-0.70 (0.87)	-2.02 (1.22)	-0.68 (0.82)	-1.44 (0.98)
MAGNITUDE	-0.55 (0.21)**	-0.70 (0.20)***	-0.18 (0.15)	-0.91 (0.29)**	-0.46 (0.10)***	-0.47 (0.16)**
AIC	931.63	810.37	786.40	346.62	773.55	635.93

Notes; clustered standard errors in parentheses ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Analysis

H1

	Environment (general)	Environment (local)	Employment (general)	Employment (local)	Law&Order (general)	Law&Order (local)
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H2

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Preliminary conclusions

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- Committee membership is by far the strongest determinant of MPs' agendas
- No impact of linkages with civil society
- Contrary to expectations, constituency characteristics seem to matter
- Other control factors have an effect but mostly issue-specific