# Parliamentary questions and individual representation in a party-dominated environment: evidence from Portugal

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## Abstract

Recent studies (Colomer 2011, André & Depauw 2014) have found that personal representation is likely to emerge also in proportional system, but little is known about the mechanisms behind it. The Portuguese electoral system features a multi-member closed-list PR system with relatively centralised procedures of candidate selection. In such systems, the specific placement a candidate gets on the list is likely to be decisive for his/her re-elections. Those who make a decision on list ranking are party elites at district and central level, therefore there seem to be few incentives to cultivate a personal vote and to build an individual reputation. If electoral reasons are expected to play a marginal role (Carey & Shugart 1995), a puzzle remains as to why Portuguese MPs differ so much in their action. The present paper focuses on a specific (but to date fairly neglected) type of parliamentary individual activity, parliamentary questions. Through a novel data set covering the population of written questions to the cabinet in Portugal from 2007 to 2015, it explores the impact of electoral (electoral vulnerability, type of candidate selection methods within political parties) and non-electoral explanations (career, gender, education, ideology) on the number of questions asked by individual MPs. By examining this understudied topic, the Portuguese case can shed more light on the growing importance of the individualisation of parliamentary roles and the conditions that foster the use of parliamentary questions.

Keywords: political representation; parliamentary questions; vulnerability; Parliaments; Portugal

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Beginning in the 1970s, the debate about the crisis of Parliaments has certainly contributed to boosting the empirical study of legislative institutions. One of the main concerns raised by this literature was the growing distance between representatives and voters, as well as the negative feelings of citizens with regard to political representation. Against this background, both scholars and practitioners started to devote more attention to the understanding of parliamentary functions besides "law-making" and of parliamentary work at an individual level (Leston Bandeira 2013). Partially as a follow-up to this discussion, many Parliaments started implementing reforms (though with very different timings) aimed at enhancing the visibility of MPs' individual activities and at providing them with those resources that may foster their autonomy and enable them to take a more active role in the decision-making process.

The Portuguese Parliament is an example of the efforts to enhance MPs' independence of action and the relations with their constituencies. In 2007 an important reform was approved that granted MPs more resources vis-à-vis their parties in order to increase the efficiency of legislators and the Parliament as a whole, as well as to strengthen the professionalisation, accountability and transparency of MPs' mandates (Filipe 2009; Leston-Bandeira and Tibúrcio 2016). One of the measures included in the 2007 reform was the possibility of MPs to submit an unlimited number of questions to the government. Since then, this tool has emerged as one of the main activities undertaken by Portuguese deputies, although individual MP's productivity can differ substantially.

The main goal of this paper is to examine the determinants of MPs' questioning activity in Parliament. Starting from the assumption that Mps value re-election, we aim to unveil the impact of electoral vulnerability on their

parliamentary behaviour. Our main expectation is that, all other individual level factors staying equal, candidates who got a lower and "riskier" position in the party list will face more reselection pressures to build a reputation as hard-working and competent MPs when given the possibility to prove themselves (because either they got (re)elected or they were appointed to substitute a fellow MP). However, the impact of vulnerability may depend on the size of electoral districts, with distinct effects in constituencies of low or high magnitude. Therefore, The effects of our key dependent variable are tested in districts with different size, allowing us to examine the existence of possible interactive effects between vulnerability and district magnitude.

Portugal is a typical "least-likely case" to observe this mechanism at play because its institutional setting envisages very limited incentives for personalisation. It is a closed-list proportional representation electoral system with strong centralised parties.  Yet, there is also a significant variation in terms of district magnitude, which is a crucial feature for determining voter-deputy relations. All these characteristics are expected to stimulate 'party vote' and to hinder the performance and visibility of individual legislators. Moreover, there is also a substantial reason that makes Portugal a case worthy of consideration. Over the last decades electoral reform has been a key topic in the debate about political representation and the quality of democracy, especially due to the inertia of political parties and the inability for implementing institutional changes with the aim to strengthen the linkage between citizens and their representatives.

In the following, we will first review the literature on legislators' productivity and the incentives accounting for MPs' activities. Then we will present our research design and data. Section fourth aims to test the main

hypotheses, while the final section summarises the findings and discusses their implications.

## Literature and hypotheses

Research on parliamentary democracies has long acknowledged the importance of studying the activities of legislative institutions. From a normative point of view this strand of research has emphasised two important aspects (Shugart 2008). On the one hand, legislation is considered the most important means for the 'authoritative allocation of values' (Easton 1953) and a crucial element for ensuring policy congruence, i.e. to guarantee the connection between citizens' preferences and lawmakers' policy output. On the other, research has been concerned with descriptive representation, by examining to what extent elected representatives reflect the characteristics of their constituents and their impact on political agenda. Overall, the analysis of parliamentary outputs is relevant for better understanding political representation and responsiveness in democratic regimes.

The 'mainstream' research agenda has looked at Parliaments, especially in parliamentary systems, as competitive arenas where the political parties are the crucial actors. The problem with this approach is twofold. On the one hand, parties cannot be considered as unitary actors and the level of cohesion has decreased over time, mainly as a consequence of the growing volatility of the electorate and the tensions within the party in public office (Katz 2001). On the other, and related to this, it has been shown that individual MPs are sensitive to 'personal vote' even in parliamentary democracies (Riera 2011). Therefore, a focus on individual legislators can certainly contribute to close this gap.

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Our aim is to explore why some MPs are more active than others. In particular, we conceptualise legislators' productivity as the questions presented in parliament at the individual level. The main argument is that electoral factors are powerful incentives driving legislators' work. This proposition stems from two components, one related to the motivations for engaging in more activities and the second based on the consequences of MPs' action.

Regarding the motivations, the connection between electoral pressure and legislators' behaviour requires making a basic assumption on the rationality of political actors. Empirical research has pointed out that MPs' action is driven by a number of reasons. However, it is widely agreed that re-election is by far their most relevant motivation (Mayhew 1974; Schlesinger 1966). Even when legislators are more policy or ideological oriented, these goals always depend on the prerequisite of conquering a parliamentary seat (Strom 1997). Recent cross-national studies have also found that legislators' office goals influence party loyalty and legislature behaviour, showing that those MPs seeking office in the national executive branch are more likely to follow the party line than representing constituents' concerns (Kernecker 2015).

Whereas it is fairly accepted that re-election is one of the main MP's goals and thus one of the main determinants of their behaviour, the discussion is still open as regards the strategies available to reach this objective. How does one secure the support of those having the most impact on the selection process? When these are voters, candidates' priority should be to strengthen the connection with their district. The personal vote has been conceptualised as 'the portion of candidates' electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record' (Cain et al. 1987). A study on the British House of Common has found that legislators' productivity

is associated to constituency service and that this is an important means to foster their performance and increase their chances to be re-elected (Bowler 2010). In Belgium there is also evidence of the importance of personal vote: MPs are more active when their electoral success depends on strong ties with their voters (Brauninger et al. 2012).

However, when legislators in closed-list systems seek re-election we should also consider that MPs are first and foremost accountable to their respective party organisations. It is widely known that parties in European democracies play a crucial role in candidate selection (Norris 1997; Hazan and Rahat 2010). When parties choose candidates to public offices, they face a delegation problem because this person will be the public face of the party and his/her actions will affect party's reputation or the electoral performance (Katz 2001). Parties must hire an agent to represent them and that acts on their behalf. According to the principal-agent theory, parties face two main problems, namely adverse selection and moral hazard. Of course, they have several ex-ante or ex-post mechanisms to overcome these problems. As a number of authors have noticed (Samuels and Shugart 2010; Strom 1993), screening is a crucial tool that parties may use to avoid adverse selection. Parties have to decide how much they can trust a prospective candidate according to their past records. New candidates are likely to gain party's trust by developing (mostly) voluntary work and socialisation within the party organisation. It is commonplace in political science to call such efforts as 'party service' (Saalfeld and Müller 1997; Best and Vogel 2014), which implies developing party-related activities and a high level of participation in the party organisation. This experience is crucial in parties with a high degree of centralisation and strong hierarchical and vertical links. In this context, service

in the party organisation is likely to bring the greatest reward, i.e. the selection for a winnable seat.

Another important record that influences the ties between individuals and the party organisation is based on the activities developed in national politics, i.e. service in national legislative house or in executive offices. This is an arena where parties may reduce their lack of information about legislators' profiles, background, expertise and so on. MPs action is a way to show not only legislators' commitments to their own party, but also to gain visibility and to increase the popularity of the party. On the other hand, parliamentary activity is a powerful incentive especially for those candidates more unsecure to be included in eligible seats. In other words, showing a higher level of productivity may be an effective mean to overcome the asymmetrical information of this type of candidates vis-à-vis top candidates – who usually displays a high visibility and are well-known figures within the party organisation.

Electoral institutions and political factors generate incentives for legislators to cultivate their personal reputations not only by paying attention to their constituents' needs, but also by strengthening their party reputation. Insofar as legislators value re-election, those MPs who are more vulnerable to defeat are likely to devote relatively more resources to the goal of re-election. However, studies that focus on MPs' activities have largely ignored within-system differences, taking for granted that legislators operating under the same set of rules all behave in a similar manner. We argue instead that MPs' vulnerability significantly influences legislators' productivity. It has been shown that electoral vulnerability matters in legislative voting decisions; those who are electorally vulnerable are more sensitive to voter preferences and more resistant to party pressure. Some studies have found, for instance, that

electoral vulnerability boosts legislators' responsiveness to constituents (Burden 2004; Griffin 2006). These results are based mainly on the US experience, but a recent comparative study confirms the importance of electoral vulnerability even in multi-member districts (André et al. 2015). However, the evidence regarding the relationship between electoral pressures and parliamentary questions is mixed (Kellerman 2015). Vulnerability leads to greater use of questions in some countries but not others (Lazardeux 2005; Rash 2009; Soroka et al. 2009, Louwerse and Otjes 2016).

Besides the importance of marginal seats and vulnerability, the impact of electoral institutions deserves a closer examination. Since Carey and Shugart's (1995) seminal contribution, researchers have focused on the impact of district magnitude on MPs' behaviour and attitudes. The classic hypothesis posits that in districts with high magnitude MPs are more prone to shrink and free-riding, thus showing less work in particular vis-à-vis their constituency. A study on Belgium seems to confirm these expectations (Brauninger et al. 2015). André et al. (2015) also found that district magnitude significantly interacts with electoral vulnerability, and its impact grows weaker as MPs become more vulnerable to defeat. On the other hand, district size significantly affects candidates' campaign norms, i.e. the way candidates pursue a personal reputation (vs. party reputation) during election campaigns (André et al. 2014). Finally, district magnitude was also found to significantly affect MPs' orientations towards constituencies (Heithusen et al. 2005; Pilet et al. 2012). In the two countries with multi-member districts analysed in this study (Belgium and Portugal), candidates elected in bigger districts are more likely to defend the party line, while in districts with a small size the focus on voters is greater.

Therefore, the empirical evidence suggests that electoral institutions – namely district size – exert an important effect representatives' action.

Based on the theoretical arguments presented above, we can formulate our main hypotheses:

*H1: Electoral vulnerability is positively associated to the number of parliamentary questions addressed to the government by individual legislators.*

*H2: MPs elected in districts with lower magnitude are more likely to show higher levels of parliamentary activity.*

*H3: Legislators with strong ties to their constituency are more prone to propose questions related to a specific district or region.*

**The Portuguese Parliament and MPs' questions**

Portugal is a suitable case for examining the connection between electoral pressures and productivity for two main reasons. First, MPs' action in Portugal has generally displayed a very low degree of personalisation. This situation emerges not only with regard to the activities and attitudes of prospective candidates (Lisi and Santana-Pereira 2014), but also when we look at constituency service and dissent from the party line, two crucial indicators of the degree of autonomy of legislators. On the one hand, it has been noted that MPs' constituency orientation centres mainly on the national rather than on the local level (Teixeira 2009). In addition, candidate and MPs' surveys indicate that representatives do not spend much time on constituency activities, while general elections are, by and large, referenda on government performance. In general, the focus at election time is typically and overwhelmingly on national party competition. On the other, the party cohesion in Parliament is rather

strong, with party dissent related more to local issues than to national matters (Leston-Bandeira 2009).

Second, Portugal has a proportional representation system with 22 multi-member constituencies and closed lists. The huge imbalance in the size of electoral districts, with very large districts in the coastal areas and very small districts in both the non-coastal areas ad the expatriate constituencies, are essential elements for testing the impact of district magnitude on legislative behaviour. This variation allows us to better investigate how MPs' performance varies in multi-member districts.

It should also be noted that Portuguese Parliament grants numerous privileges and competences to party directorates and parliamentary groups (PG). For instance, the distribution of resources (e.g. debate time), the setting of the parliamentary agenda and the election of decision-making bodies is managed at the PG-level. In addition, procedural rules and institutional constraints contribute to strengthening the level of cohesion of Portuguese parties. As some authors have noticed (van Biezen 2003; Teixeira 2009), this phenomenon originated from the democratic transition period, where the main priority was to strengthen and consolidate the position of new parties.

The centrality of parties in parliamentary activities is reinforced by candidate selection processes. A number of studies have pointed out the high level of centralisation of recruitment within Portuguese party organisations (Lobo 2003; Teixeira 2009; Freire and Teixeira 2011). In particular, the party in central office is responsible for the choice of prospective MPs, while the party leaders have often the final say on the party list to be submitted to voters. Yet, there are also some differences among parties worthy of consideration. While radical left parties, particularly the PCP (Portuguese Communist Party),

emphasise the involvement of party cadres and value the work of activists, the two mainstream parties (Socialist Party, PS, and Social Democratic Party, PSD) tend to be more open and inclusive, and they also show a relatively higher level of decentralisation. Although the Constitution establishes that MPs mandates are based on national representation rather than to territorial criteria, parties are the main *de facto* gatekeepers for achieving political representation.

## Data and methods

In order to measure MPs' activity we use the number of written parliamentary questions to the government (*perguntas ao governo*).[1] With respect to other parliamentary control instruments, they have a range of interesting properties which, arguably, provide an advantageous viewpoint to study MPs activities. First there are no formal limits to the number of questions an MP can ask.[2] While part of the questions might still be coordinated at the level of parliamentary group, this implies some margin of freedom for individual MPs. Secondly, unlike other written questions like "requerimentos", they are exclusively directed to members of the cabinet and not to local officials. This should make them more politically salient, especially in a rather centralised political system like Portugal. Finally, although it is difficult to draw comparisons between authoring (or signing) a question and authoring other kinds of documents (such as the text of a bill) in terms of time-consumption,

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1 The cabinet is legally obliged to respond within a period of thirty days.

2Thus, they differ from both oral questions to the prime minister and the ministers, where each party is allowed a specific amount of time during the periodic "question time" debate, and interpellations, which are limited to two questions per group per legislative session.

figures suggest that this is the most frequent activity in a typical MP's agenda.[3]

We collected data on the population of 26657 written parliamentary questions directed to the cabinet from September 2007 to September 2015 from the Parliament's website. Overall, this time span comprises two election terms and a half: during the second-half of the X (2007-2009) and the whole XI legislatures (2009-2011) Portugal had a socialist majority, during the XII legislature (2011-2015) a coalition of the social democratic party (PSD) and the popular party (CDS-PP) was in charge.[4]

We extracted the names and party of all authoring MPs, the question title, date and addressee/s. Data on MP' biographies, regardless of their questioning activity, were collected for the X and XI legislatures by Freire, Seiceira, and Viegas (2009) and for the XII legislature by Viegas, Freire, and Lisi (2015). Since MPs may stay in office only for part of the legislature (for instance, they can ask to be replaced in case of serious illness), we kept only those deputies that – according to the official records – were active for at least 80% of the time the parliament was in session. Moreover, we removed Mps from the small Green party (no more than 2 seats per legislature) and all deputies elected by the European or extra European electoral district. This reduced our group from 925 Mps spending at least a day in parliament to 609.

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3 See for instance the descriptive data on parliamentary activities published annually by the research office of the Portuguese parliament and available online as reports (http://www.parlamento.pt/ActividadeParlamentar/Paginas/Relatorios-e-estatisticas.aspx [in Portuguese]).

4The *perguntas ao governo* were introduced after the reform of the Standing Orders in 2007, in the middle of the 4-year X legislature (2005-2009). This means that only the last two sessions of this legislature are taken into consideration. On the other hand, the XI legislature lasted only two years because it was interrupted by a snap elections in May 2011.

One assumption underlying our whole inquiry is the willingness of MPs to run for a new mandate in the following elections.  Yet, different reasons may hold back incumbents from following this path, such as the prospect of retirement or the decision to go back to their private jobs full-time. MPs intentions are, of course, difficult to discern. To partially control for the possibility that some Mps may decide to step down in the coming elections, we checked whether their names reappeared on the party electoral list. Remarkably, all Mps in the three terms under study opted for a new term in office.

Drafting questions can be considered a time consuming activity, so it might seem surprising the volume of activity reached by certain deputies, especially in the first two short legislatures considered in this study. Data reveals that these figures, in some cases, are artificially inflated by repeated questions. These are questions that are the same in terms of content and are even tabled on the same date but that are officially recorded as distinct files because they are addressed to different ministers or they refer to different localities. Since our main interest is to use the number of written questions as an indicator of individual activity and the marginal effort required to table an additional repeated question is almost null, in the following we are going to remove these observations from the dataset. Specifically, we remove repeated questions asked on the same date, by the same party, whose title shares the first three words. We retain repeated questions when they refer to different electoral district, since we aim at capturing whether there is evidence of constituency service on the part of Portuguese MPs. The final dataset contains 19667 observations.

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The present analysis uses three dependent variables. The unit of analysis is the deputy during a legislative term. The first DV measures activity in terms of mean number of written parliamentary questions "signed" by a deputy in a session (an ordinary legislative term is composed of 4 sessions). Be aware that a single question can have multiple sponsors (always from the same party in Portugal). Since the order of signatures does not reflect a different degree of responsibility and, as a result, visibility, questions were counted multiple times, one for each signatory.[5] The second and third DV are subsets of the first. The second was obtained by filtering only questions which makes explicit reference to the district where the MP was elected.[6] Since the target of many questions is often a territory larger than the single district (for instance, a question inquired about state financing of music conservatories in the region of Alentejo, including at least 5 districts), our third DV aggregated questions by region.[7] For instance, MP Fernando Manuel de Jesus from the Porto district signed 109 questions in total in the XII legislature: 14 concerned his district and 20 the region where his district is located (North).

There have been several attempts to measure electoral vulnerability. One fundamental choice is whether electoral vulnerability should be considered as an objective status of legislators or the subjective perception of their chances

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5 Please see Annex A for a detailed illustration of the distribution of signatures across MPs and across individual parliamentary questions.

6 Questions were coded manually by two MA students using only the title of the question, following the criteria listed by Martin (2011). Given the number and the length of some questions, checking also the whole text for geographical references would have been too time-consuming.

7 Some of the 20 districts making up mainland and insular Portugal are divided among more than one of the 7 existing regions (NUTS II, namely North, Center, Lisbon, Alentejo, Algarve, Açores, Madeira). In this case, we assigned the district to the region holding the greatest portion of the territory.

to be re-elected. While some authors defend the latter option, it is extremely difficult to collect data that can directly measure the (dynamic) perception of vulnerability in the mindset of legislators. In addition, there is evidence (Cohen 1984) that most legislators feel unsecure, thus showing that legislators' opinion is hardly a good measure of electoral vulnerability. On the other hand, one can devise objective measures of electoral vulnerability based on the kind of incentives underlying the electoral system. The closed-list proportional system in use in Portugal suggests measuring vulnerability as the ratio between the position that candidate holds in the party list and the number of seats won in that district by the MP's party, always in the most recent election (Andre et al., 2015). For instance, the second "safe" candidate in a party list that won 5 seats gets 0.4. The sixth "not elected" candidate in the same list gets 1.2. There is a considerable proportion of cases of deputies replacing their colleagues in the course of the legislature (14%), sometimes in a permanent way. They are kept in the final data set if their substitution lasts longer than 80% of the total time of the legislative term. *Vulnerability* varies from a minimum of 0.04, the head of the socialist party list in Lisbon in 2005 (where the PS gained 23 seats), and a maximum of 4 for the 4th candidate in the PSD list in Castelo Branco (where the PSD won just 1 seat, so the MP in question was the 3rd replacement).

District magnitude is the number of representatives per district where the MP was elected. The Portuguese electoral committee marginally update this count at each election to reflect changes in the population of the districts. The two biggest districts are Lisbon and Porto, electing together more than one third of the assembly. The smallest districts are all located in the hinterland (see figure 2).

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INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

To inspect the functioning of the electoral connection in Portugal, we control for a range of alternative factors. The first important feature that deserves to be checked is the position of the Mp in the party hierarchy. *Party leadership* is a dummy variable capturing whether an MP holds a position in the party executive or legislative boards, either at the national or local level. Although formally Portuguese parties display relatively high levels of centralisation in the selection of candidates, it is not uncommon for the party statutes to envisage a role for regional and local party bodies. Belonging to these elites, which ultimately constitute the party selectorate, should be associated with a less proactive stance of Mps in terms of questioning. Politicians in these positions can consolidate their chances of reselection and (re)election through other types of party service (see also Louwerse and Otjes 2016).

Mps differ not only in terms of access to decision-making bodies but in their level of specialisation. The more varied the issue interests of Mps, the greater the chances of finding areas where they can ask a question. Since one of the main criteria driving committee assignment is the level of expertise in that specific area, we use committee memberships as a proxy of specialisation. *Number of committees* counts the number of standing parliamentary committees each MP is a member of. It varies from 0 to 5.

Local experience is a dichotomous variable taking 1 if the MP holds or held in the past a political office at the municipal or regional (Madeira or Azores) level. Unfortunately, we are not able to say whether the council where candidates served as representatives is also in the district where they were eventually

elected, although we expect this to be the case in the greatest majority of cases. We expect candidates with this sort of background to make more district- or region-related questions.

Another way to capture the strength of the link with the constituency is to look at the number of *mandates won in the same district.* We expect that MPs reconfirmed many times in the district are more likely to ask district or region-centred questions.

Finally, we introduced several variables that only serve control purposes. Gender has value 1 for women. Opposition takes 1 for MPs not belonging to the ruling party/coalition. Mandates in parliament measures the number of legislative terms served in office. It is 0 if the MP is a freshman. Since it correlates with *Mandates for the same district*, it replaces it only when the goal is explaining the variance in the total number of questions. Finally, we introduced two categorical variables *party group* and *legislative terms*, controlling respectively for the parliamentary group of the MP (reference category is the Left Block) and the legislative term (reference category is the tenth legislature). Descriptive statistics for our dependent and independent variables are presented in table 1 and 2.

INSERT TABLES 1 AND 2 HERE

In terms of methodology, we adopt a case study approach that allows us to consider institutional features as constant variables, thus focusing mainly on the individual level of parliamentary activities[8]. As for statistical techniques, we

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8 The type of regime, electoral system and legislative rules (committee systems, tools available to MPs, etc.) are also considered determinants of productivity and powerful explanatory factors for aggregate activities of the legislature (government parties, party

use multivariate regression analyses to test the impact of the independent variables mentioned above on our five dependent variables. The number of parliamentary questions is right-skewed count data with problems of over-dispersion, i.e. the dependent variable's conditional variance is greater than the mean. A common solution to this problem is to fit a negative binomial regression model (see for instance Bailer 2011).

**Analysis**

Tables 3 to 5 present the results of the multivariate analyses respectively for our three dependent variables. In each table, model 1 and 2 estimate the impact of vulnerability and district magnitude separately, while model 3 introduces their interactions.[9]

INSERT TABLES 3 TO 5 HERE

The first notable finding is that electoral vulnerability displays in all three cases a positive impact on the number of signed questions (model 1). As expected by H1, Mps who were either closer to the bottom of the electoral list or entered parliament as substitutes are more active in terms of questioning. However, this impact loses statistical significance for questions directed to the MP's district. This may be interpreted as evidence that only certain types of questions are valued as electorally rewarding. District-centred questions might not provide Mps with enough visibility to climb list rankings and get closer to safer positions. The Portuguese electoral system provides little incentives to build a political career on constituency service. On the other hand, the

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opposition, etc.). However, the impact of macro-institutional characteristics is not a topic considered in this study.

9 Table 4 and 5 substitutes *mandates in parliaments* with *mandates for the same district.*

significant effect of vulnerability on the number of regional (or "multi-district") questions might originate from the attempt of Mps to take issue with government programs, which have increasingly a regional scope.

Our second hypothesis concerns the impact of district magnitude. Results are fairly consistent across our three model configurations: as district magnitude increases, the number of questions decreases, all else equal. This goes in the direction of previous electoral studies (Shugart 2005) showing that MPs from smaller districts face greater incentives to be active (H2). In big districts, one MP has to face a stronger competition to attain the attention of the party selectorate. Each additional question is likely to be less determinant for his/her electoral fate.

On the other hand, following André et al (2015), we also checked for the interaction between district magnitude and vulnerability. The expectation is that increased vulnerability should lower the negative effect of district magnitude on questioning activity. Vulnerable MPs from big districts should be comparatively more active because, by doing so, they increase the chances of their party gaining more votes and, simultaneously, they create a reputation for themselves (Riera 2011). Indeed, the impact of vulnerability on the number of parliamentary questions is positive and statistically significant at a conventional 95 percent confidence level for all questions and region-centred questions (Figure 2 and 4) when magnitude is above 30 (namely for the two big districts of Porto and Lisbon). Once again, vulnerable MPs, all else equal, do not seem to have incentives to invest in district-related questions.

INSERT FIGURES 2 TO 4 HERE

Turning to our covariates related to the MP's characteristics, our findings show that a position in the local or national party board (*party leadership*) is associated with a lower level of questioning activity. However, this result is statistically significant only when the DV is the number of regional questions. This means that party service linked to districts leads to focus more on legislators' constituencies, while party leaders are associated to questions with a more general character. This may be explained not only as the attempt to pursue a personal vote by showing higher levels of interests in their respective districts, but also as the more intense intra-party competition for middle-level party elites. The level of specialisation, as captured by the *number of committee* memberships held by each MP is, as expected, positive. Strangely, this effect is statistically significant only when accounting for district-related questions. No matter the fitted model, previous or current experience as local or regional administrator (*local experience*) is positively and statistically correlated with the number of questions. This suggests that the expertise acquired during the mandates and the protection of interests is associated to a higher number of questions (not only local). Finally, *number of mandates for the same district* appears as one of the most significant predictors for the number of district questions. Remarkably, the effect is negative, so the longer the history of the MP as representative of the district, the less he/she contributes to submit district-related questions. This finding might capture the activity of candidates originally chosen by the party for their deep ties with the territory, but whose allegiance progressively shifted to the party selectorate rather than to their constituency. Overall, these findings confirm previous studies showing that the relationship between individual legislators and their

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constituencies (e.g. they looked at the impact of MPs' attitudes with regard to their role) is at best very weak.

Moving to our control variables we find interesting results for our four variables. The first is *mandates in parliament*: the estimated effects are negative and significant at a .05 level for model 2 and 3 in table 3. The second is whether the MP belongs to the government or to the opposition. Legislators belonging to the incumbent party are less active, while MPs in the opposition display by far higher levels of activity. The second significant factor related to MPs' questions is related to party type. All the dummy variables achieve statistical significance with the exception of the CDS-PP. Interestingly, the coefficients for the two main parties (PS and PSD) show a negative relationship with the number of questions, indicating that MPs belonging to these parties are generally less active than other members of the Parliament.  This may be due to the fact that the majority of deputies included in the lists of the two main parties are elected in a safe position, thus they do not have incentive to propose a high number of questions. This result is also interesting because it runs counter to MP's opinion on the greater autonomy of deputies granted through the 2007 parliamentary reform. Previous studies have found that members of smaller groups did not see this reform as a positive move due to the fact that individual deputies ended up gaining more visibility while giving them less incentives to make their work known to citizens. Our results provide another picture insofar as the legislative work is concerned and this can be related to the pressures that these parties have both in terms of inter-party and intra-party competition. Finally, the third variable that displays a significant impact on the overall number of questions is the number of legislature. In both the XI and XII legislatures legislators display a positive impact relative to the X

legislature. This result suggests a learning process on the part of individual legislators. While in the X legislature the 2007 reform did not display significant changes in the number of dimensions related to the Parliament functioning (Filipe 2009), MPs may have learnt to use this new instrument and gain more visibility. In other words, our findings indicate a learning process through which MPs have become more familiar with this tool.

**Conclusion**

The relationship between citizens and legislators is a complex and multi-dimensional one. A number of studies have examined how electoral institutions influence MPs' behaviour. Our study confirms that electoral systems shape the style and content of political representation. This effect emerges not only with regard to intra-party dynamics (vulnerability), but also in terms of party competition. In particular, our study provides evidence about the link between electoral systems and MPs' productivity. Overall, the increase of parliamentary questions in a strong party-based parliament indicates that individual representation is important also in a monolithic party system characterized by a growing distrust towards parties and an increasing distance between parties and voters.

Our preliminary results speak in favour of the argument that electoral vulnerability shapes MPs behaviour in the Parliament, increasing the overall number of questions proposed by individual legislators. This effect, which had already been observed in other national cases, is also at play in the "least-likely" Portuguese case. The results provide support that in closed-party list electoral system, the position of MPs in the list and the incentives provided by the electoral system exert an important impact on MPs' behaviour. Furthermore, variation in district magnitude – one of the main motivations to look at the Portuguese case – is as expected negatively associated with an active par-

liamentary profile. Under a closed-list electoral system, the greater the district, the smaller the incentives for an individual candidate to stand apart from his/her competitors. Yet, in line with recent comparative work we find that this effect is mediated from the degree of electoral vulnerability.

This study indicates that using the analysis of parliamentary performance at the aggregate level has definite limits when it comes to detecting the strategic mechanisms behind the activity of individual legislators. More comparative research is needed in order to examine the determinants of MPs' productivity, especially with regard to the impact of electoral institutions. Alternative research strategies can help detect varying effects of institutional or individual-related variables. It would be interesting, for example, to take into account data related to the popularity of MPs in their constituencies and to see how well-known are top candidates within the district compared to more vulnerable MPs. In addition, an interesting topic for future research is the impact of candidate selection on MPs' behaviour and activities, especially the choice of marginal candidates in more competitive districts. Besides electoral incentives, it seems that the strategic component is crucial if we aim to understand party-voter linkage and the individualization of political representation.

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# Tables and figures

Table 1: Descriptive statistics - Dependent variables

| Statistic | N | Mean | St. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Questions* | 609 | 17 | 32 | 0 | 236 |
| Questions to MP's district* | 609 | 5 | 12 | 0 | 106 |
| Questions to MP's region* | 609 | 7 | 14 | 0 | 111 |

\* Mean per legislative term

Table 2: Descriptive statistics - Independent variables

| Statistic | N | Mean | St. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vulnerability | 609 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 0.04 | 2.5 |
| District Magnitude | 609 | 23.2 | 16.5 | 2 | 48 |
| Party leadership | 609 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 |
| N. of committees | 609 | 2.1 | 0.8 | 0 | 5 |
| Local experience | 609 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 |
| Mandates for the same district | 609 | 2.2 | 1.5 | 1 | 7 |
| Mandates in parliament | 609 | 1.9 | 2.4 | 0 | 12 |
| Age | 609 | 46.7 | 10.3 | 25 | 71 |
| Opposition party | 609 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 |
| Female | 609 | 0.3 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 |

Table 3: Results - All questions

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 1.43*** | 2.48*** | 2.37*** |
| | (0.30) | (0.30) | (0.35) |
| Vulnerability | 0.46*** | | −0.04 |
| | (0.13) | | (0.20) |
| District Magnitude | | −0.02*** | −0.03*** |
| | | (0.00) | (0.01) |
| Vulnerability*Magnitude | | | 0.01 |
| | | | (0.01) |
| Party leadership | −0.17 | −0.11 | −0.12 |
| | (0.10) | (0.10) | (0.10) |
| N. of committees | 0.09 | 0.11 | 0.10 |
| | (0.06) | (0.06) | (0.06) |
| Local experience | 0.31** | 0.32** | 0.29** |
| | (0.10) | (0.10) | (0.10) |
| Mandates in parliament | −0.04 | −0.06* | −0.05* |
| | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) |
| Age 36-49 | −0.07 | −0.19 | −0.14 |
| | (0.13) | (0.13) | (0.13) |
| Age >=50 | −0.14 | −0.29* | −0.23 |
| | (0.14) | (0.14) | (0.14) |
| Opposition party | 1.50*** | 1.51*** | 1.52*** |
| | (0.10) | (0.11) | (0.10) |
| Female | −0.19 | −0.16 | −0.15 |
| | (0.11) | (0.11) | (0.11) |
| CDS-PP | −0.08 | −0.21 | −0.11 |
| | (0.24) | (0.24) | (0.24) |
| PCP | 0.58* | 0.43 | 0.50 |
| | (0.26) | (0.26) | (0.26) |
| PS | −1.82*** | −2.04*** | −1.97*** |
| | (0.22) | (0.22) | (0.22) |
| PSD | −1.36*** | −1.66*** | −1.58*** |
| | (0.21) | (0.21) | (0.21) |
| 11 Leg. | 0.79*** | 0.77*** | 0.79*** |
| | (0.12) | (0.12) | (0.12) |
| 12 Leg. | 1.26*** | 1.22*** | 1.24*** |
| | (0.12) | (0.12) | (0.12) |
| AIC | 3816.08 | 3787.05 | 3784.85 |
| BIC | 3886.67 | 3857.63 | 3864.27 |
| Log Likelihood | -1892.04 | -1877.52 | -1874.43 |
| Deviance | 690.88 | 686.59 | 685.50 |
| Num. obs. | 609 | 609 | 609 |

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

Table 4: Results - All questions directed to the MP's district

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 0.45 | 1.14*** | 1.53*** |
| | (0.30) | (0.29) | (0.35) |
| Vulnerability | 0.16 | | −0.51* |
| | (0.13) | | (0.21) |
| District Magnitude | | −0.02*** | −0.03*** |
| | | (0.00) | (0.01) |
| Vulnerability*Magnitude | | | 0.02** |
| | | | (0.01) |
| Party leadership | −0.13 | −0.12 | −0.12 |
| | (0.10) | (0.10) | (0.10) |
| N. of committees | 0.20*** | 0.19** | 0.18** |
| | (0.06) | (0.06) | (0.06) |
| Local experience | 0.34** | 0.31** | 0.31** |
| | (0.10) | (0.10) | (0.10) |
| Mandates for the same district | −0.11** | −0.10** | −0.10** |
| | (0.04) | (0.03) | (0.03) |
| Age 36-49 | −0.07 | −0.17 | −0.14 |
| | (0.13) | (0.12) | (0.13) |
| Age >=50 | −0.25 | −0.36** | −0.33* |
| | (0.13) | (0.13) | (0.13) |
| Opposition party | 1.21*** | 1.21*** | 1.21*** |
| | (0.11) | (0.11) | (0.11) |
| Female | −0.16 | −0.10 | −0.09 |
| | (0.11) | (0.10) | (0.11) |
| CDS-PP | −0.46* | −0.46* | −0.40 |
| | (0.23) | (0.22) | (0.23) |
| PCP | 1.20*** | 1.14*** | 1.16*** |
| | (0.24) | (0.23) | (0.24) |
| PS | −1.47*** | −1.61*** | −1.57*** |
| | (0.21) | (0.21) | (0.21) |
| PSD | −1.10*** | −1.23*** | −1.22*** |
| | (0.20) | (0.20) | (0.20) |
| 11 Leg. | 0.82*** | 0.81*** | 0.82*** |
| | (0.12) | (0.12) | (0.12) |
| 12 Leg. | 1.12*** | 1.08*** | 1.07*** |
| | (0.12) | (0.12) | (0.12) |
| AIC | 2672.02 | 2641.93 | 2638.47 |
| BIC | 2742.61 | 2712.52 | 2717.89 |
| Log Likelihood | -1320.01 | -1304.96 | -1301.24 |
| Deviance | 646.48 | 636.23 | 635.87 |
| Num. obs. | 609 | 609 | 609 |

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

Table 5: Results - All questions directed to the MP's region

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 0.58 | 1.65*** | 1.79*** |
| | (0.33) | (0.31) | (0.37) |
| Vulnerability | 0.41** | | −0.32 |
| | (0.14) | | (0.22) |
| District Magnitude | | −0.02*** | −0.04*** |
| | | (0.00) | (0.01) |
| Vulnerability*Magnitude | | | 0.02* |
| | | | (0.01) |
| Party leadership | −0.33** | −0.28** | −0.28** |
| | (0.11) | (0.11) | (0.11) |
| N. of committees | 0.04 | 0.06 | 0.05 |
| | (0.06) | (0.06) | (0.06) |
| Local experience | 0.31** | 0.30** | 0.28** |
| | (0.11) | (0.11) | (0.11) |
| Mandates for the same district | 0.00 | −0.01 | −0.01 |
| | (0.04) | (0.04) | (0.04) |
| Age 36-49 | −0.10 | −0.25 | −0.20 |
| | (0.14) | (0.13) | (0.14) |
| Age >=50 | −0.14 | −0.34* | −0.27 |
| | (0.15) | (0.14) | (0.14) |
| Opposition party | 1.18*** | 1.20*** | 1.22*** |
| | (0.12) | (0.11) | (0.11) |
| Female | −0.15 | −0.09 | −0.09 |
| | (0.12) | (0.11) | (0.11) |
| CDS-PP | −0.12 | −0.19 | −0.10 |
| | (0.26) | (0.24) | (0.25) |
| PCP | 1.17*** | 1.03*** | 1.08*** |
| | (0.27) | (0.25) | (0.26) |
| PS | −1.64*** | −1.84*** | −1.77*** |
| | (0.23) | (0.22) | (0.23) |
| PSD | −0.98*** | −1.24*** | −1.18*** |
| | (0.23) | (0.21) | (0.22) |
| 11 Leg. | 0.83*** | 0.81*** | 0.83*** |
| | (0.13) | (0.12) | (0.13) |
| 12 Leg. | 1.14*** | 1.09*** | 1.10*** |
| | (0.13) | (0.13) | (0.13) |
| AIC | 2872.20 | 2834.06 | 2830.82 |
| BIC | 2942.79 | 2904.65 | 2910.23 |
| Log Likelihood | -1420.10 | -1401.03 | -1397.41 |
| Deviance | 644.14 | 633.36 | 631.91 |
| Num. obs. | 609 | 609 | 609 |

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

| Distrito | Deputados | Mapa |
|---|---|---|
| Lisboa | 47 | |
| Porto | 39 | |
| Braga | 19 | |
| Setúbal | 18 | |
| Aveiro | 16 | |
| Leiria | 10 | |
| Coimbra, Faro, Santarém e Viseu | 9 | |
| Madeira e Viana do Castelo | 6 | |
| Açores e Vila Real | 5 | |
| Guarda e Castelo Branco | 4 | |
| Beja, Bragança e Évora | 3 | |
| Portalegre, Europa e Fora da Europa | 2 | |

Figure 1: Distribution of seats across districts (elections 2015) https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circulo_eleitoral
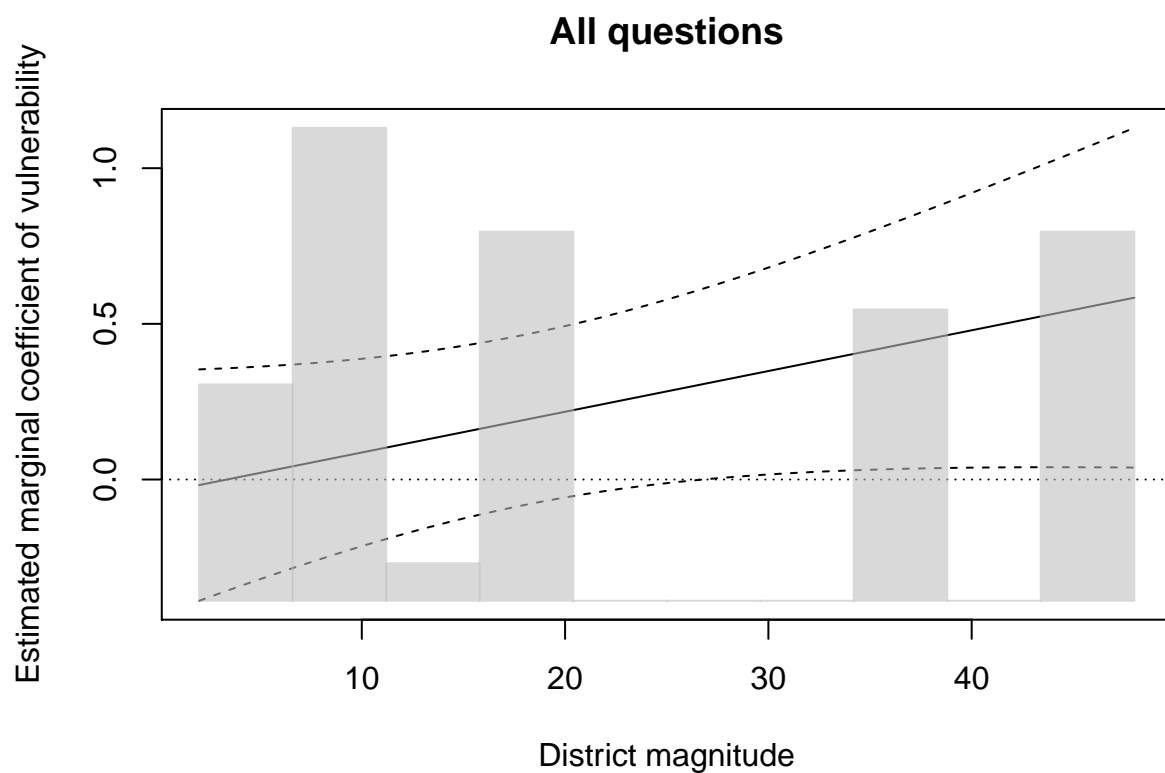
Figure 2: Relationship between vulnerability and questioning for different levels of district magnitude (All questions). Histograms illustrate the distribution of MP according to district magnitude
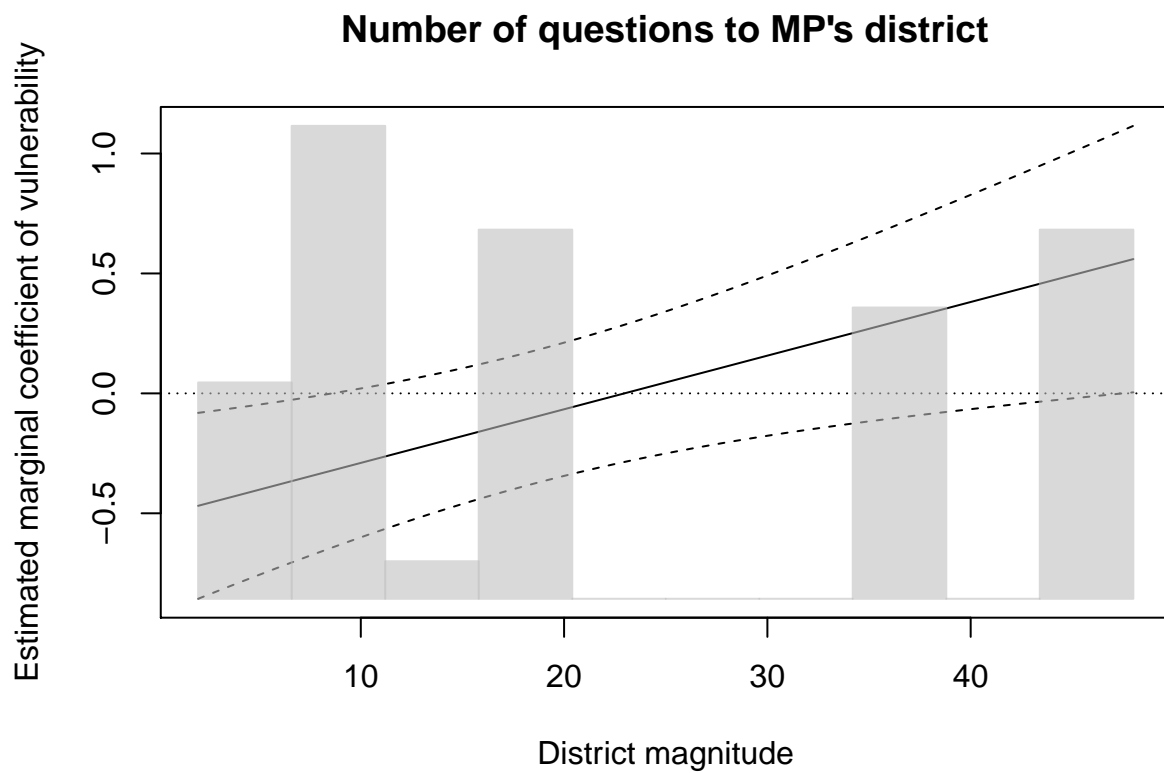
Figure 3: Relationship between vulnerability and questioning for different levels of district magnitude (Number of questions to MP's district). Histograms illustrate the distribution of MP according to district magnitude
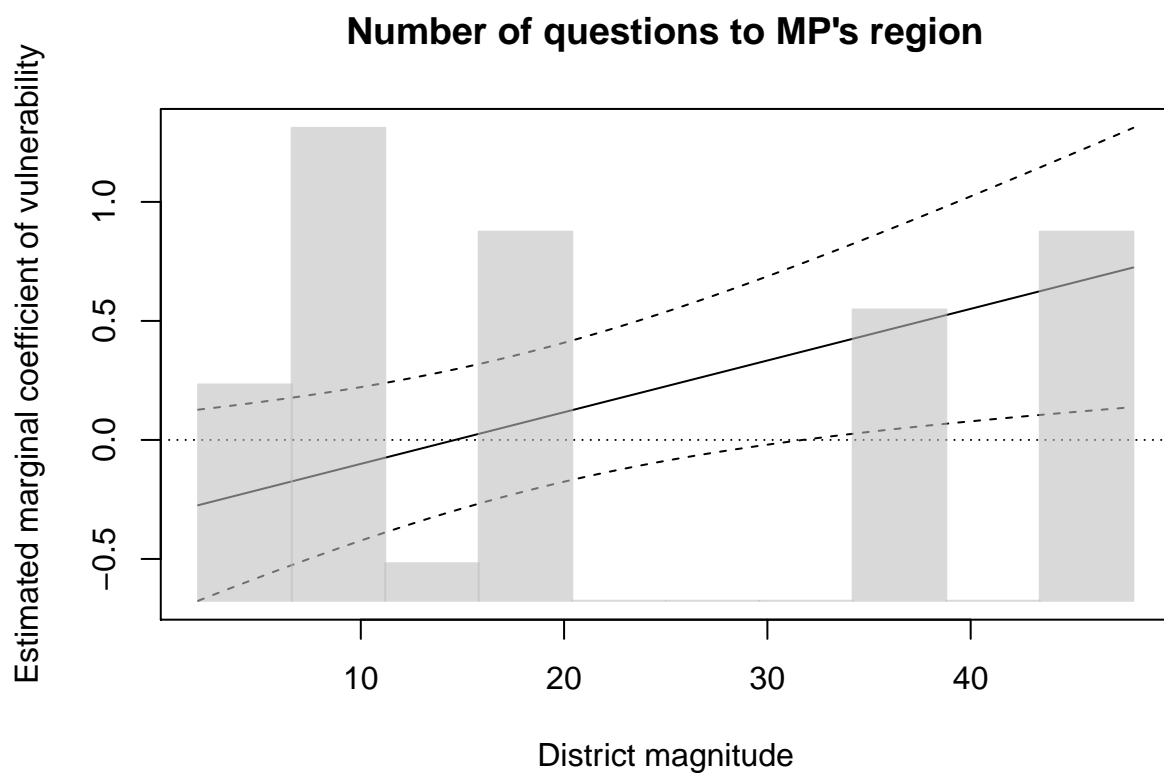
Figure 4: Relationship between vulnerability and questioning for different levels of district magnitude (Number of questions to MP's region). Histograms illustrate the distribution of MP according to district magnitude

# Annex A

Perguntas ao governo

*Thu Jun 23 19:33:13 2016*
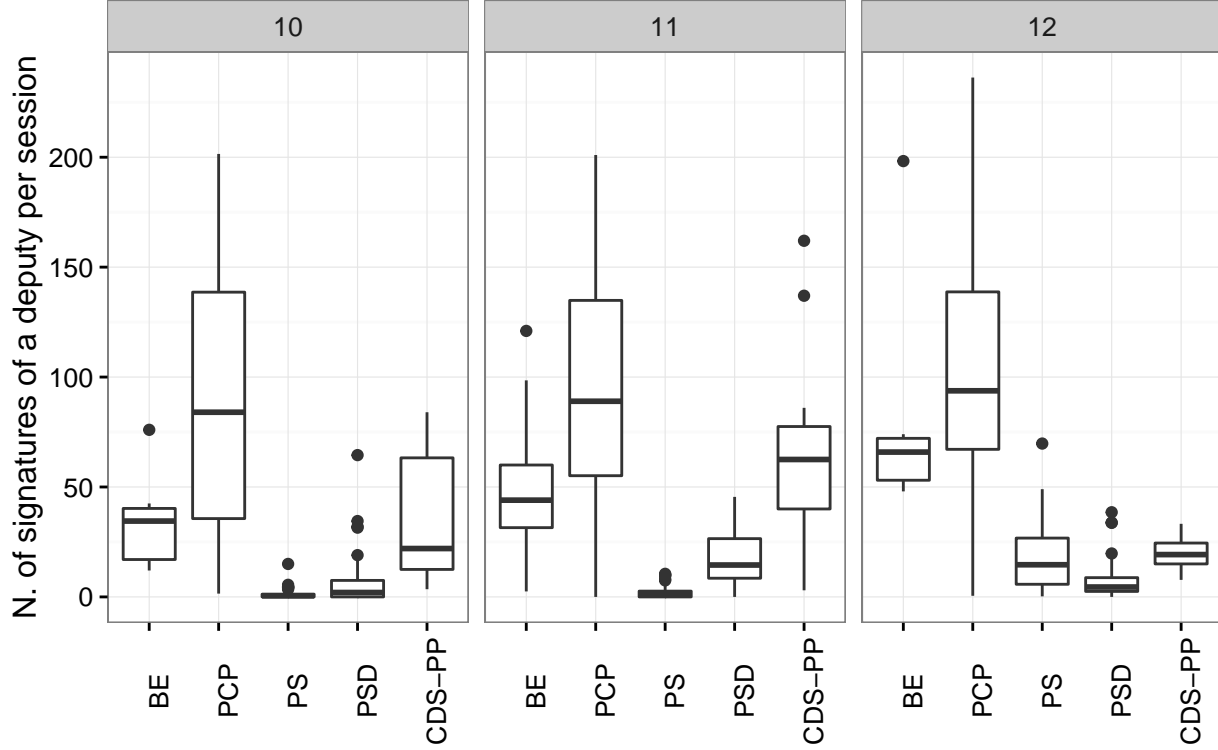
## Frequency of signatures per author

There is no procedural limit to the number of questions a deputy can sign. As a result, the distribution of signatures across MPs varies extensively. There are extreme cases such as Paula Santos (PCP), who submitted 945 questions during the XII legislature, almost 18 questions per month. Others do not sign any question at all, although it has become more rare in the last legislature. Looking at our sample of deputies active in parliament for at least 80% of the legislature, in the last legislature the PSD is the only party where 4 of its deputies (3.7%) were not involved in questioning. Parties show similar distributions of signatures across time. This supports the view that signing written questions is not left entirely to the entrepreneurship of individuals or group of individuals and it is regulated by party elites. A general trend characterising all parties is the increase of the median number of signatures.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on average number of questions a deputy sign in a session

| Legislature | Party | Mean | St Dev | Max | Median | MPS no questions | % of the total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | BE | 33.9 | 22.0 | 76 | 34.5 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 10 | PCP | 86.6 | 67.2 | 202 | 84.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 10 | PS | 1.0 | 1.9 | 15 | 0.5 | 48 | 39.7 |
| 10 | PSD | 6.6 | 10.7 | 64 | 2.0 | 19 | 25.3 |
| 10 | CDS-PP | 37.5 | 31.8 | 84 | 22.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 11 | BE | 50.2 | 32.8 | 121 | 44.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 11 | PCP | 96.4 | 62.4 | 201 | 89.0 | 1 | 7.7 |
| 11 | PS | 2.0 | 2.6 | 10 | 1.2 | 28 | 28.9 |
| 11 | PSD | 17.5 | 12.2 | 46 | 14.5 | 2 | 2.5 |
| 11 | CDS-PP | 61.5 | 37.0 | 162 | 62.5 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 12 | BE | 83.5 | 57.1 | 198 | 65.9 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 12 | PCP | 105.2 | 66.7 | 236 | 93.8 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 12 | PS | 17.6 | 14.5 | 70 | 14.6 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 12 | PSD | 6.7 | 6.8 | 38 | 4.5 | 3 | 2.8 |
| 12 | CDS-PP | 20.2 | 6.9 | 33 | 19.2 | 0 | 0.0 |

The same data can also be inspected through a boxplot

# Figure 1. Distribution of signatures per session in each legislature



## Frequency of signatures per question

Another way to look at these data is taking the single question as unit of observation and analyse the distribution in the number of signatories. Here PCP and BE differ from the other parties (not considering the small PEV) in that more than half of their questions are still sponsored by just one MP.1 On the other hand, especially in the last legislature, the three mainstream parties had an average of 4/5 deputies signing up a question. Overall, the proportion of co-signed questions has slightly increased over time.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on number of signatures per question

| Legislature | Party | Mean | SD | Max | Median | % more than 1 author |
|---:|---|---:|---:|---:|---:|---:|
| 10 | BE | 1.0 | 0.16 | 2 | 1 | 2.8 |
| 10 | PCP | 1.2 | 0.46 | 4 | 1 | 20.5 |
| 10 | PS | 2.1 | 1.94 | 13 | 1 | 44.1 |
| 10 | PSD | 1.6 | 1.06 | 8 | 1 | 36.0 |
| 10 | CDS | 1.8 | 0.75 | 5 | 2 | 60.7 |
| 11 | BE | 1.3 | 0.58 | 4 | 1 | 23.7 |
| 11 | PCP | 1.4 | 0.66 | 4 | 1 | 29.0 |
| 11 | PS | 3.0 | 2.24 | 11 | 2 | 59.2 |
| 11 | PSD | 3.7 | 3.31 | 21 | 2 | 71.9 |
| 11 | CDS | 2.7 | 1.78 | 15 | 2 | 78.1 |
| 12 | BE | 1.3 | 0.84 | 23 | 1 | 27.3 |
| 12 | PCP | 1.6 | 0.94 | 17 | 1 | 43.1 |
| 12 | PS | 3.8 | 3.93 | 26 | 3 | 65.0 |
| 12 | PSD | 4.7 | 4.64 | 33 | 3 | 77.4 |
| 12 | CDS | 4.1 | 3.82 | 24 | 3 | 73.7 |

Figure 2 plots this distribution. The y axis was rescaled to allow appreciate variation for small numbers of questions.

## Figure 2. Distribution of signatures per question in each legislature
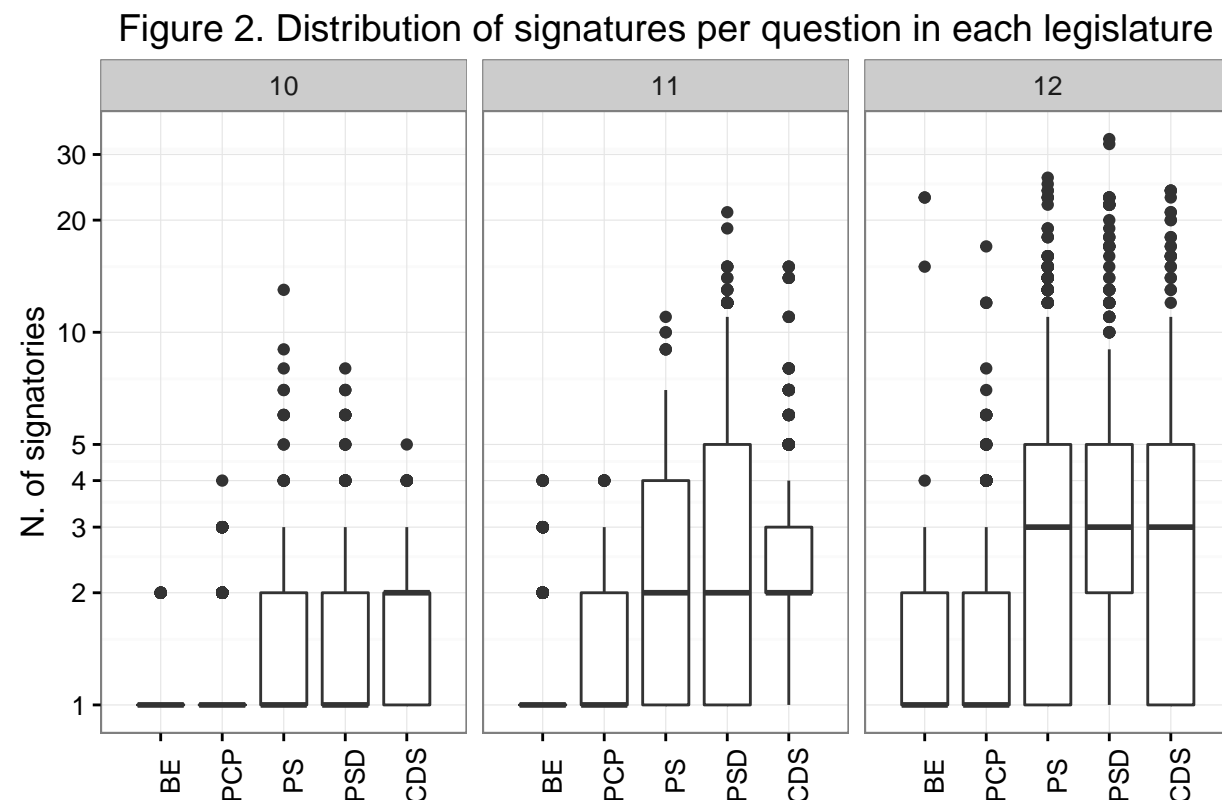


These results hint at a different division of labour at the level of parliamentary group, mainly due to the ties to the cabinet (majority or opposition) and the size of the parliamentary group. Especially in the first two legislatures under consideration, questioning had a lot of weight in the agenda of MPs from small opposition groups (PCP, BE and CDS-PP). They invested a lot of resources into written parliamentary questions. With the exception of the CDS-PP (where a few members undersigned almost the totality of questions), most of these questions had only one sponsor. In comparison, the average number of signatures for the median MP belonging to bigger parties is far smaller (between 2 and 17.5). What is more, it is rather ordinary in these groups to share responsibility for a particular question. Part of the reason why MPs of small parties ask on average more questions than MPs from big parties stems from their interpretation of the parliamentary role. The PCP and BE are relatively small parties which have always remained in the opposition. Their way to put pressure on cabinets and influence the political agenda is by investing in the questioning activity.