

Homestyle From a Distance

Representation and Constituency Emphasis in the European Parliament

Jeffrey Ziegler
Washington University in St. Louis

Overview

Electoral systems represent a powerful institutional consideration for politicians because they frame the manner in which voters select winning candidates. Electoral characteristics, such as ballot structure, create *personal voting seeking incentives* that ultimately shape the manner in which politicians compete for votes and interact with constituents (Duverger, 1954; Rae, 1967; Taagepera & Shugart, 1989; Cox, 1997). We hypothesize that ballot structures which reinforce personal interactions between representatives and citizens result in homestyle practices that entice legislators to attend less roll-call votes in the European Parliament (EP). Yet, when Members of the EP (MEPs) attend plenary sessions, they are more likely to engage in personally rewarding behavior such as participating in floor debates.

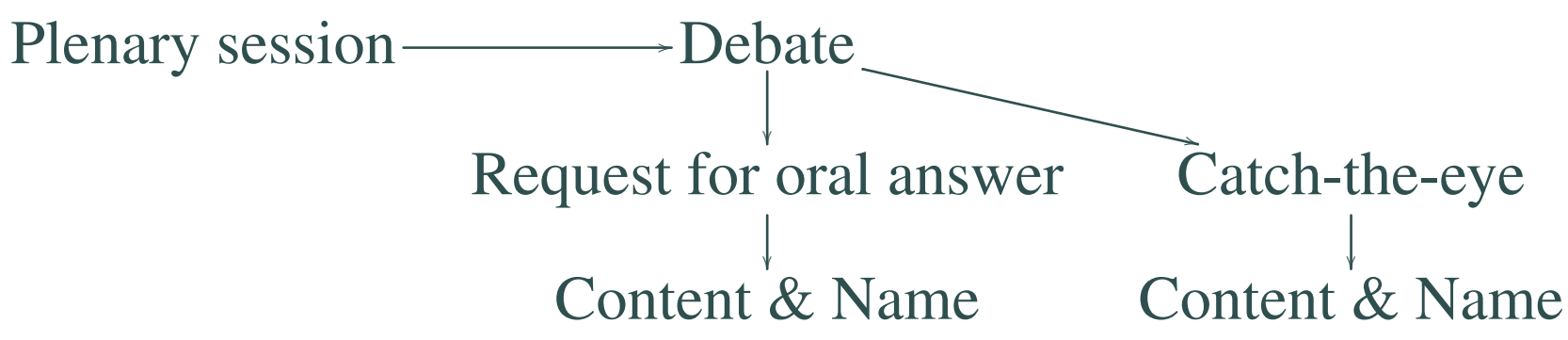
Main Objectives

The primary concern with this section of the project is to determine which MEPs are most likely to participate voluntarily during plenary sessions in an effort to gain visible, personalized attention. To do so, we first determined which activities MEPs could claim personal political recognition for during debates throughout the 7th EP (2009-2014). Such actions include:

- *Submitting a question for oral response to the Commission*: Highlight an area of concern apart from one’s party group.
 - *Invoke the "catch-the-eye" procedure*: Allows MEPs to breakaway from party group talking points and discuss more personal opinions on floor during debate session.
- In contrast, an example of "party focused" behavior includes:
- *Relay party message*: MEPs speak in a debate on behalf of their party.

Materials and Methods

The content of plenary debates are found within session minutes. To obtain the content of submitted documents and debate speeches, one must first identify when a debate has occurred. Once a debate is catalogued within the minutes, the script identifies if any requests for oral answer are submitted, and if so, the contents and author are pulled. Next, the script establishes whether an MEP invoked the catch-the-eye procedure, and if so, it gathers the content of their speech.



Date	Catch-the-eye	Debate
Thursday, 17 April 2014	Spyros Danellis	4. Shipments of waste ***I (debate)
Thursday, 17 April 2014	Sen Kelly	19. Infringements of competition law (debate)
Thursday, 17 April 2014	Theodor Dumitru Stolojan	19. Infringements of competition law (debate)
Wednesday, 16 April 2014	NA	20.European long-term investment funds(debate)

Table 1: Example of csv-output

Example of debate content

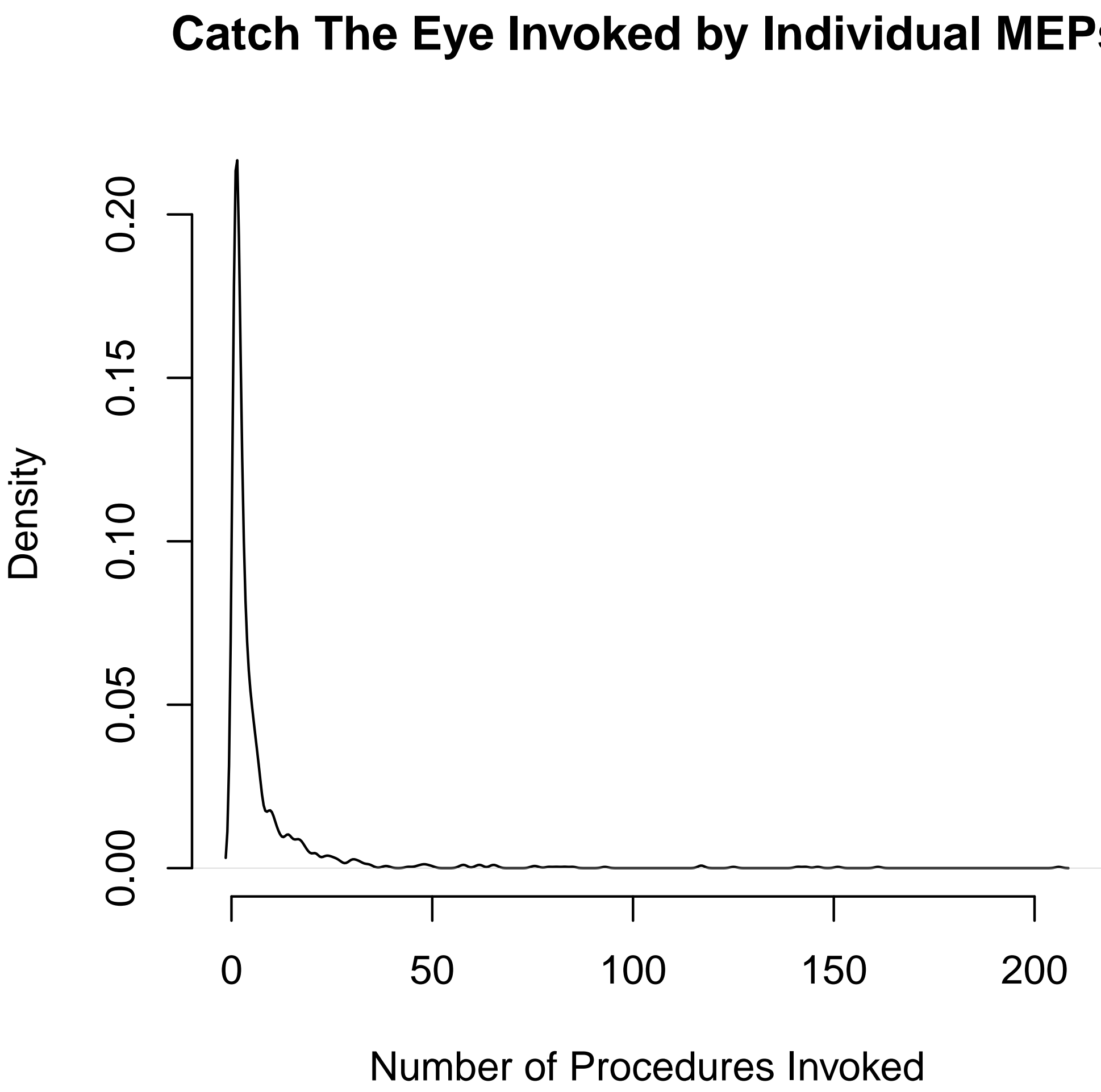
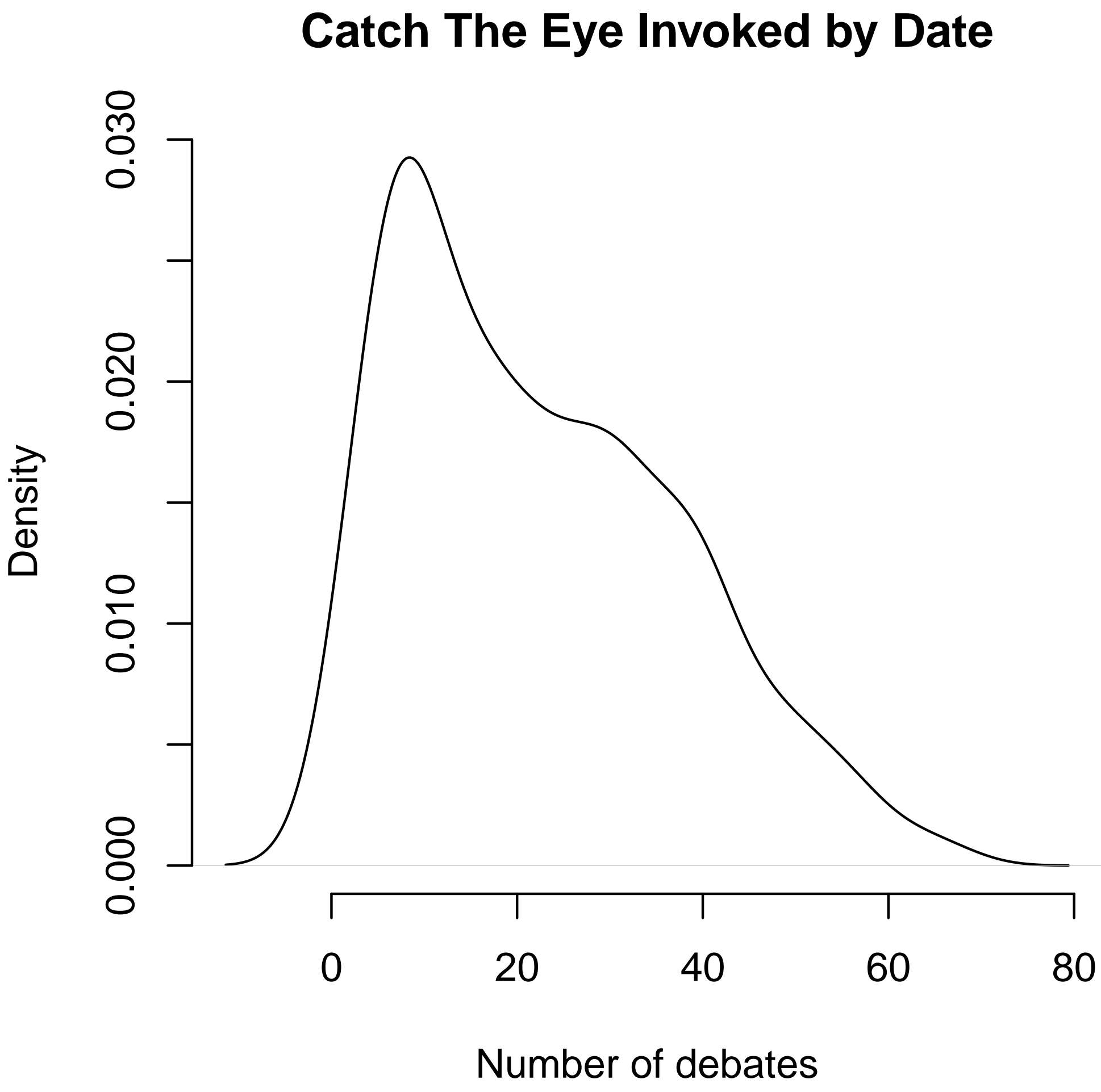
4. Shipments of waste ***I (debate) CRE Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 1013/2006 on shipment of waste [COM(2013)0516 - C7-0217/2013- 2013/0239(COD)] - Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. Rapporteur: Bart Staes (A7-0069/2014)
Bart Staes introduced the report.
The following spoke: Janez Potonik (Member of the Commission).
The following spoke: Karl-Heinz Florenz, on behalf of the PPE Group, Marusya Lyubcheva, on behalf of the S&D Group, Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy, on behalf of the ALDE Group, Anna Rosbach, on behalf of the ECR Group, Sabine Wils, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group, Jaroslav Paka, on behalf of the EFD Group, Judith A. Merkies and ?sa Westlund.
The following spoke under the 'catch-the-eye' procedure: Spyros Danellis.
The following spoke: Janez Potonik and Bart Staes.
The debate closed.
Vote: minutes of 17.4.2014, item 9.8.
Last updated: 3 June 2014Legal notice

Example of catch-the-eye procedure

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). - Mr President, there is a principle in English civil law called ?to one who is willing, no harm is done?. In other words, you cannot sue if you put yourself in danger of loss or injury. These illegal immigrants were not kidnapped in their own countries by wicked Europeans who then brought them to Europe and incarcerated them for eighteen months or more. They chose to enter an EU country illegally and then avoided being repatriated. Presumably they are free to return to their countries of origin, but refuse to do so.

Results

The frequential distribution pertaining to the daily prevalence of the catch-the-eye procedure reveals its relatively persistent use. However, though the procedure is invoked regularly, we can see by the second figure that very few MEPs are habitual users of the catch-the-eye procedure and very rarely do so more than 50 times during a five year term.



Forthcoming Research

Moving forward, we will need to determine:

- How to approach the issue of text analysis. What elements of debates/speeches are most important to capture whether MEPs make an effort to gain personal "credit" or discuss their constituencies.
- Are there strategic motivations of using other types of procedures that could result in credit taking (ex. asking a question by *issuing a blue card* to another MEP who has the floor during a plenary speech).