



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Voters reward hard-working MPs: empirical evidence from the French legislative elections

Abel François¹  and Julien Navarro^{2,*} 

¹Faculté de Sciences Économiques et Sociales, LEM (UMR 9221), Université de Lille, Cité Scientifique, Villeneuve d'Ascq Cedex, France and ²ETHICS EA 7446, Université Catholique de Lille, Lille Cedex, France

*E-mail: julien.navarro@univ-catholille.fr

(Received 26 January 2019; revised 15 October 2019; accepted 18 October 2019)

Abstract

This paper studies the relationship between incumbent MPs' activities and their electoral fortune. We address this question in the context of the French political system characterized by an executive domination, a candidate-centered electoral system, and an electoral schedule maximizing the impact of the presidential elections. Given the contradictory influence of these three institutional features on the relationship between MPs' activities and electoral results, the overall link can only be assessed empirically. We test the effects of several measurements of MPs' activities on both their vote share and reelection probability in the 2007 legislative election. We show that MPs' activities are differently correlated to both the incumbents' vote shares in the first round and their reelection. Despite the weakness of the French National Assembly, several parliamentary activities, especially bill initiation, have a significant effect on MPs' electoral prospects.

Keywords: personal vote; parliamentary activities; constituency service; electoral connection; incumbents' reelection; French National Assembly

Introduction

The assumption that representatives are interested in getting reelected provides a solid basis for the study of legislative behavior. Reelection-seeking parliamentarians are indeed expected to act in view of maximizing their support in subsequent elections (Mayhew, 1974), while voters are expected to take the incumbents' performance into account when casting their vote (Ferejohn, 1986). There have been numerous publications documenting the impact of constituency-oriented activities on reelection (Norris, 1997; Wolak, 2017; Chiru, 2018). There is however less real-world evidence concerning the effectiveness of MPs' personal vote-seeking strategies through work *inside* the parliament (Papp and Russo, 2018). The purpose of this article is specifically to bridge this gap by asking whether MPs' behaviors and performance *within* the parliamentary arena are related to their chances of staying in office.

More precisely, our ambition is twofold. First, we question the plausibility of the hypothesis that incumbents' electoral performances are related to their past parliamentary activities. How likely is it that MPs' electoral results would depend not only on their party and ideological stances, but also on how active these MPs were during the previous term? We hypothesize that, all things being equal, hard-working parliamentarians receive more votes than the less active ones. This hypothesis is tested in one parliament where the electoral impact of parliamentary work is *a priori* uncertain, namely the French National Assembly. French MPs are elected through a candidate-centered electoral system, which theoretically allows voters to sanction or reward MPs individually. On the other hand, the National Assembly is usually seen as a weak institution where individual

work has a limited policy impact. Besides, the results of the legislative elections are generally interpreted as a mere confirmation of the presidential elections, not as a retrospective evaluation of the assembly's record (Dupoirier and Sauger, 2010). These contradictory characteristics make the French National Assembly a good test case to ask if, and to what extent, MPs can be held accountable, individually, for their parliamentary performance.

Second, this article seeks to contribute to the study of parliamentary representation by questioning *what* parliamentary activities matter for the reelection prospects of incumbents and *under what conditions*. The emerging literature on the electoral impact of parliamentary work tends to restrain itself to one indicator (bill initiation) or to one type of activity (legislative work). However, the functions of parliaments – from representation to control through deliberation and legislation – are manifold and, consequently, the diversity of MPs' activities is potentially unlimited. It is therefore necessary to investigate the effects of various activities and behaviors for individual careers as well as the effectiveness of various individual vote-seeking strategies. Concretely, this article tests the electoral consequences of a plurality of indicators reflecting the great variety of parliamentary functions and activities.

Our empirical analysis focuses on the reelection of French MPs for the 2007 legislative elections. The French case constitutes an excellent benchmark for the electoral impact of parliamentary activities because of its conflicting institutional characteristics, in particular a weak parliament, a candidate-centered electoral system, and the timing of the election. We bring evidence of the electoral benefits associated with hard work in the parliament, but we also uncover the contrasting effects of parliamentary activities. Not all activities are equally rewarding and, contrary to our expectations, leadership positions within the assembly do not increase incumbents' reelection probability. Our empirical analysis of French MPs' in-parliament records and electoral performances gives a nuanced picture of how electoral accountability mechanisms work in an executive-dominated democracy.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The next section reviews the literature on the electoral consequences of MPs' personal vote-seeking efforts; it also discusses the specificities of French political institutions. The third section introduces the data and methodology, while the fourth section describes the empirical findings. The article concludes in the fifth section with a discussion of the significance of this research.

Theoretical framework

The consensus in legislative studies is that MPs act to maximize their reelection chances (Mayhew, 1974). However, whether the voters reward the incumbents' efforts within the parliamentary arena remains unclear (André *et al.*, 2014: 242); this question relates to the debate on personal vote.

Electoral rewards for personal vote cultivation

A broad literature suggests that the performance of candidates in legislative elections does not exclusively depend upon their partisan affiliation. The personal vote, defined as 'that portion of a candidate's electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record' (Cain *et al.*, 1987: 9), is a major factor affecting electoral outcomes, even more so in the context of a growing personalization of politics (McAllister, 2007). Voters do not only vote for a party, they also express a preference for a person. In the French case, which is the focus of our study, voters' evaluation of candidates' personality and efficiency seems to affect their voting behavior (Brouard and Kerrouche, 2013).

Beyond specific personal traits, individual parliamentary activities have been hypothesized to increase the support that incumbent legislators receive. These include the legislators' home style (Fenno, 1978), their constituency service endeavors (Norton and Wood, 1990), pork-barrel favors in committees (Cain *et al.*, 1987), policy positions consonant with the constituency in roll-call

votes (Carey, 2009), and the choice of specific role models (Martin, 2010). These factors of personal vote have more to do with incumbents' efforts directly geared toward their voters and constituencies than with their overall efforts within the parliamentary arena. How the level and type of individual parliamentary work could enhance their reelection chances has not been the subject of much scrutiny (Volden and Wiseman, 2014: 199–200).

Through individual parliamentary activities, MPs may attempt to cultivate a personal vote amongst their voters and gain additional support from their party. This hypothesis lies on the assumption that the amount of work in the parliament gives the voters an indication of the incumbents' efforts to represent them. Although parliamentary activities have arguably little policy value, they are expected to allow MPs to gain visibility in their constituency and establish a reputation of being a responsive representative (Teuber, 2018). Showing one's willingness to change legislation by introducing bills may indeed prove efficient in increasing one's media presence and vote share (Bowler, 2010). The effect is amplified by the growing attention to parliamentary work and an increased number of parliamentary monitoring organizations benefiting from the development of the Internet (Edwards *et al.*, 2015).

There are many ways for MPs to cultivate a personal vote through parliamentary activity. The existing research remains limited and partially inconclusive. Because it tends to limit itself to one activity indicator, bill initiation generally speaking (Bowler, 2010), it is unable to establish what strategy, if any, is electorally successful. With the partial exceptions of Däubler *et al.* (2016) and Bouteca *et al.* (2019) for Belgian deputies and Navarro (2010) for members of the European Parliament, there has been no systematic attempt to compare the effects of different types of parliamentary activities.

Since MPs face time and resource constraints, they may be forced to choose between alternative activities (Blomgren and Rozenberg, 2012). These patterns of resource allocation reflect differences in the efforts MPs put into the pursuit of their various goals (Strøm, 2012). That MPs proposing very few (or no) bills are reelected does not necessarily mean that voters do not take the MPs' records into consideration: it might be that these MPs are rewarded because they did something else that the voters value more than bill initiation. It is thus crucial to compare the effects of different dimensions of parliamentary work, which may correspond to competing vote-seeking strategies and could 'compensate' for each other.

The uncertainty surrounding parliamentary roles renders the question of their electoral impact particularly relevant. What tasks MPs have to carry out in the accomplishment of their mandate remains partially undetermined. Both citizens (Bengtsson and Wass, 2010) and parliamentarians (Hall, 1998; Harden, 2015) have multiple (and sometimes contradictory) expectations about what MPs should do. Although they do not necessarily converge, the views of voters and those of MPs are not unrelated. In the contexts of the US and the UK, the citizens' representational preferences influence their approval of their representative: the citizens' job expectations condition the effects of members' legislative activities on their job approval (Grant and Rudolph, 2004; Carman, 2006). Taking France as a test case, the challenge for us is to assess the electoral consequences of different parliamentary practices.

Expected rewards of parliamentary activities in the French political context

France constitutes a pertinent case study because of the ambiguous expectations that its political institutions generate. The extent to which the individual activity of French MPs could affect their electoral fortune is not evident. There are three reasons for this: the voting system based on single-member districts, the weakness of the parliament, and the timing of the legislative election after the presidential one. We assume these features of French politics to have differentiated and opposite impacts on the personal vote.

Members of the National Assembly are elected through a single-member district system with a run-off election in every constituency where nobody wins a majority in the first round. This places France in an intermediary place for the degree of candidate-centeredness of its electoral system,

which should in principle facilitate an effective control of what MPs do (Farrell and McAllister, 2006). This system allows personal considerations to play a significant part in the voters' decisions. The latter is not as restricted as with a first-past-the-post system where the voters have, so to say, more incentive to vote strategically; on the other hand, the vote is much more personalized than in a closed-list system.

The French political system has other features that should diminish the chances that MPs' personal records have an effect on their electoral outcomes. The most obvious is the domination of the system by the executive. In France's semipresidential system, Parliament's powers are severely limited by the constitution and the National Assembly is considered one of the weakest in Europe (Kesselman, 2007). The Cabinet, rather than Parliament, is in control of the legislative process and can require priority for bills it wishes to promote. This second institutional element should reduce the personal dimension for an MP's reelection. Given the weakness of Parliament and consequently the lack of impact of MPs' activities, the voters should not take into account MPs' activities when they make their voting decision.

A third feature of French political life should also diminish the probability that the results of legislative elections vary according to MPs' individual merits: the timing of the presidential and legislative elections. Since 2002, the latter have been held immediately after the presidential elections. With the reduction of the mandate of the President from 7 to 5 years in 2000, it has become highly unlikely that they would not be organized the same year with the former following the latter. For this reason, the legislative election can be viewed as a mere confirmation of the presidential election (Evans and Ivaldi, 2017), which weakens the hypothesis of an electoral accountability mechanism for individual MPs.

To sum up, whereas the voting system should enhance the personal accountability mechanism, the other two major institutional characteristics – the weakness of the parliament and the timing of the election – are expected to deter it. Because of these contradictory assumptions, the net final influence of the parliamentary activities of MPs on their reelection cannot be theoretically predicted and rather begs an empirical approach.

Data and methodology

We rely on the French legislative elections to test the relationship between MPs' parliamentary activities and their electoral performance. In what follows, we discuss in detail the data selection, statistical methodology, measurement strategy, and choice of control variables.

The case of the legislative election of 2007

Our empirical work scrutinizes the legislative election of 2007 and the twelfth legislative term covering parliamentary activities from 2002 to 2007. In 2007, there were 554 incumbent MPs in metropolitan France.¹ Among them, 455 (82%) stood as candidates for a new mandate, of whom 379 (83%) were successful in being reelected. A large proportion of the incumbents – around one-fifth – had thus abandoned their mandate before the new election,² and the same proportion failed to be reelected. To be reelected therefore involves passing two consecutive tests successfully: to stand as a candidate and to receive enough votes in the electoral competition.³

There are two reasons why we focus on a unique election (and parliamentary term). First, at a technical level, data produced by the National Assembly regarding the individual activities of MPs is much more detailed during the twelfth legislative term than during the periods preceding or

¹The study does not include the 22 overseas constituencies because of their specificities. The same goes for the speaker of the assembly.

²This includes substitute MPs who became MPs during the course of the legislature but who often were not candidates in the 2007 election, as they left their seat to the initial MP.

³This observation has important methodological implications, which we discuss in the online Appendix A2.

following it. For example, after 2007, the services of the National Assembly stopped providing the number of reports by subcategory (either legislative or information reports) that each MP had written. The additional details available for the 2002–07 term enable us to gauge the effect of a greater variety of activities than would be possible with other terms. As a matter of fact, we will show that the different categories of reports do not have the same effect.

Second, the twelfth legislative term precedes the 2008 constitutional reform and the ensuing changes in the National Assembly Rules of Procedure that have significantly modified the workings of the assembly (Rozenberg, 2016). For example, the committees and the rapporteurs play a greater role in the legislative process at the expense of the plenary. Following the 2008 reform, the National Assembly has also gained the possibility to submit its bills to the Council of State and, consequently, the bills' success rate has increased significantly. In other words, it is virtually impossible to standardize the measure of MPs' individual activities across the legislatures preceding and following the 2008 constitutional revision, and this makes it impossible to include later periods in the same model.

In sum, the focus on the twelfth legislative term enables us to avoid two major drawbacks: the use of poor data on MPs' activities and the comparison of activities across different institutional contexts. That said, and beyond data availability, the findings on the 2002–07 legislature may have one additional advantage. While the 2008 reform left the main features of the French political system unchanged, it involved an increased autonomy of the parliament and more individual leeway for its members. If the connection between parliamentary activities and elections manages to pass the test of the 2002–07 term, it is likely to work in later terms as well.

Statistical methodology

Due to the specificities of the French electoral system, there are various possible measures of the incumbents' electoral performance. In theory, an incumbent candidate can face four alternative scenarios: reelection or elimination in the first round of the election, or, if going to the second round, defeat or reelection in this final round. Consequently, the electoral system enables assessing the electoral impact of legislative activities in both rounds of the election, and it is possible to take into account the electoral results through either the percentage of votes received or the final election outcome. In view of keeping the methodology as simple and efficient as possible, the subsequent analysis relies on two distinct measures of the electoral performance. The first measure is the percentage of votes received in the first round of the election (model 1 hereafter): this gives a fair idea of the electoral support the incumbents enjoy and is more informative than their score in the second round, which only some incumbents reach. Second (model 2 hereafter), the impact of parliamentary activities on the final outcome of the election is modeled by a binary variable indicating whether or not the MP is eventually reelected.

Since the dependent variables are not of the same type, we need two different statistical methods. We estimate collected votes through an ordinary least-squares method of estimation due to the linearity of the variable. By contrast, the probability of being reelected, measured by a binary variable, implies the usage of a logit model and a maximum likelihood estimation method. Beyond different dependent variables and estimation methods, we rely on the same specification described below.

The statistical analysis could face a potential selection problem related to the fact that only a part of the incumbents run again. We account for this by implementing suitable and alternative statistical methods that are detailed in the additional materials and show that the results are not altered by a potential selection bias.

Measures of MPs' activities

Following from the discussion above, our central hypothesis bears on the amount of work inside Parliament as a factor affecting electoral support for the incumbents. The aim is to assess which elements of parliamentary activity, if any, are related to electoral outcomes.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of parliamentary activity

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Written questions	215.01	428.96	0	4029
Per day	0.189	0.373	0	3.429
Oral questions	8.996	6.722	0	41
Per day	0.008	0.006	0	0.035
Information reports	0.84	3.01	0	49
Per day	0.001	0.002	0	0.042
Single-author bills	3.05	5.44	0	63
Per day	0.003	0.005	0	0.054
Co-signed bills	109.07	104.60	1	596
Per day	0.098	0.091	0.001	0.507
Successful bills	0.042	0.200	0	1
Legislative reports	1.88	3.17	0	43
Per day	0.002	0.003	0	0.037
Committee bureau	0.08	0.28	0	1
Committee				
Law	0.12	0.32	0	1
Culture and education	0.24	0.43	0	1
National defense	0.12	0.33	0	1
Economy	0.25	0.44	0	1
Foreign affair	0.13	0.33	0	1
Public finance	0.13	0.34	0	1

The indicators 'per day' are the count of each activity divided by the length (in days) of the MPs' mandates.

We therefore rely on a plurality of indicators reflecting the different means French MPs have to influence policy and to build up their personal reputation. Due to the diversification of the activities French MPs have to perform (Lazardeux, 2009), these means are varied (Kerrouche, 2006) and MPs display a great heterogeneity in their propensity to use them (Navarro *et al.*, 2012; François and Weill, 2016). Our first criterion in establishing the list of indicators is to grasp the plurality of Parliament's functions, namely linkage and representation, oversight and control, and policy-making (Kreppel, 2014). Both the voters and the parties can expect their representatives to perform – collectively and individually – these functions. Our second criterion is that the chosen indicators correspond to the most influential and visible aspects of parliamentary work, as least from the MPs' viewpoints. Our indicators of parliamentary activity can be clustered into two categories: quantitative indicators of in-parliament activities, on the one hand, and committee membership and leadership positions, on the other hand (Table 1).

The different types of questions to the government constitute the first indicators of parliamentary activity. Parliamentary questions do not necessarily serve the purpose of reelection (Lazardeux, 2005); however, about one-third of the MPs see them as a useful parliamentary instrument (Vigour, 2013). In fact, we must distinguish between written and oral questions, as they do not have the same purpose, policy impact, or visibility. Written questions (the first indicator) can be sent to the ministers at any time. Although they generally lack public visibility, MPs see them as a more useful tool than the oral questions (the second indicator), which are very short and can only be asked during the plenary sessions. The oral questions are covered live by the public television broadcaster, which guarantees a broad media coverage to this specific parliamentary activity despite their limited absolute number.

The third indicator corresponds to the number of 'information reports' produced by each MP. This type of report addresses a specific topic, for which Parliament wants to have in-depth information and for which one MP (or sometimes more than one) is appointed. As for the parliamentary questions, Table 1 displays a high level of interindividual variance.

The three last indicators of in-parliament activity are strictly related to the legislative process. Earlier studies treated the introduction of bills as a strategy for MPs to increase their

reelection chances (Bowler, 2010; Däubler *et al.*, 2016). In the French context, two categories of bills (*propositions de loi*) must be distinguished depending on how many MPs supported them: there is a distinct indicator for ‘single-author bills’ and another one for ‘co-signed bills’. The latter indicate how many bills introduced by other MPs have been co-signed by each MP. There are logically almost 10 times more co-signed bills than single-author bills.

The last indicator of legislative output – the number of legislative reports that each MP has been in charge of – also relates to the parliament’s law-making function. By contrast to the information reports, the scope of this type of report is more specific but it is directly a part of the legislative process. According to the MPs, to be a rapporteur is the single-most influential position in the law-making process (Vigour, 2013: 227).

For all these indicators, two types of measurements are possible.⁴ Indeed, although most MPs were elected in 2002 and completed a full 5-year term,⁵ some did not start their mandate at the beginning of the term.⁶ To reflect these different mandate durations, all measures of activities are divided by the total number of days as an MP, as in Table 1. Otherwise, we cannot compare the MPs as they carry out their parliamentary activities over periods of different durations. The rest of our analysis relies exclusively on this daily measurement, which better reflects the real degree of involvement in Parliament. This strategy means that we assume voters to be sensitive to their MP’s productivity rather than to their absolute volume of activity (i.e., their production). Indeed, a ‘per day’ measurement consists of the volume of production given the time resources. In contrast, working on the ‘raw’ measurement of activities would suppose that voters do not take into consideration the time available for MPs to do their job. We discuss this point more thoroughly in the additional materials provided with this article, where we show that voters are more sensitive to productivity than production and that the estimation results differ when using the raw volume of MPs’ activities (see Appendix A3 in the supplementary material).

Another time-related issue concerns the timing of the MPs’ activities. Unfortunately, we are unable to discriminate precisely MPs’ production over time. We must therefore assume that there is no strategic manipulation of the indicators by MPs over time and that the parliamentary work is rather smooth all along the legislature. In the Appendix A4 of the additional materials, we examine this question carefully and carry out some additional statistical analyses that confirm the limited effect of time and make us confident about the validity of the assumption.

Beyond the parliamentary instruments available at the individual level, our indicators capture the offices that the MPs hold within Parliament: such offices enjoy a good public visibility and are hypothesized to influence the incumbents’ careers (Hermansen, 2018). Committee membership in particular plays a positive role in the reelection of MPs in many countries (Golden and Picci, 2015). French MPs judge that committee work is the most important tool at their disposal and they regard committee chairs as particularly influential (Vigour, 2013). We therefore control for MPs’ membership in one of the six standing committees covering a broad policy domain. Although there is no official hierarchy between these committees and it is impossible to formulate strong theoretical predictions about their impact, there are cues suggesting that they have an unequal prestige and influence on the policy-making process, with the committee of budget (which has a general supervisory role) and the committee of laws being the most influential (Türk, 2005). We finally include a dummy variable for leadership positions within the standing committees as they can be expected to have a positive effect on incumbents’ visibility and electoral fortune despite their limited formal powers (Sieberer and Höhmann, 2017). Table 1 shows that 8% of the MPs have a leadership role in a committee.

⁴For all quantitative indicators of parliamentary work, the reference period runs from the beginning of the legislature in June 2002 until 31 December 2006.

⁵Precisely, 496 MPs out of 553 completed their mandate.

⁶According to the electoral law, an MP who dies or becomes a minister during the legislative term is replaced by a substitute MP. It is only in the other cases of vacancy (such as being elected for another office) that a by-election is organized.

Before analyzing their impact on incumbents' reelection, we observe that the main independent variables are only weakly correlated with each other. Whereas the amount of bills proposed and questions asked, respectively oral and written, have the highest correlation coefficients, 0.3 and 0.4, all other coefficients remain far below 0.2. Generally speaking, the descriptive statistics point to huge disparities for the indicators of parliamentary output, probably echoing a high variance of investment made by MPs.

Control variables

A number of control variables are added to the main explanatory factors.⁷ The first subset of control variables comprises personal characteristics describing the incumbent candidates, such as their age, gender, local roots,⁸ tenure (measured by the number of past parliamentary mandates), local mandates, local executive responsibilities,⁹ and ministerial experience; with the exception of tenure, all the variables are binary. The second subset corresponds to the dichotomous variables indicating MPs' partisan affiliations (the largest group in Parliament, the right-wing UMP Union pour un Mouvement Populaire group, is the reference variable). The last subset of variables contains information about the constituency characteristics, in particular the degree of electoral competition. Here the first variable indicates the margin of victory of the incumbent in the previous election (in 2002).¹⁰ The second variable is the money per registered voter spent by the incumbent during the electoral campaign. The next two variables serve to measure the competition intensity: the number of candidates in the first round of the election and the average campaign spending per registered voter of the other candidates. Finally, the unemployment rate in the department controls for the economic component of the vote.

Results

The empirical analysis broadly confirms the hypothesis of a relationship between the parliamentary activities and MPs' careers. In detail, the impact of MPs' personal parliamentary records varies depending on the type of parliamentary activity and on whether we consider the vote share or the reelection likelihood.

Effects of MPs' activities on the first-round vote share

As our variables of interest are defined per day, it is more suitable to compare and comment on the estimates' magnitude through elasticity that is computed at average observation. Moreover, we calculate the magnitude of the significant factor for an average MP who holds his or her mandate for 1144 days on average, in order to provide more intuitive results.

We begin with the votes in the first round of the election (model 1). The parliamentary questions – written and oral – have a highly significant and strong effect on the votes, but the effects diverge depending on the type of question. The written questions have a negative impact: a 1% increase in the written questions variable is associated with a decrease of 0.008% of the vote share. The impact of the oral questions is positive: an increase of 1% of the oral questions per day is associated with an increase of 0.03% of the vote share. As, on average, MPs ask 231 written questions and 6 oral questions during their mandate, an increase of 1 written (oral)

⁷Statistical description and sources of the variables are given in additional materials.

⁸We define a local candidate as a candidate born in the department of his/her constituency.

⁹We make a distinction between representative mandates in local assemblies and executive functions in local governments with the variables 'local mandates' and 'local government'.

¹⁰The victory margin is defined as the difference between the vote share of the winning candidate in the previous election (i.e. the incumbent in 2007) and that of the candidate who came second in the first or second round depending on which round was decisive in the MP's election.

Table 2. Influence of ‘per day’ measure of parliamentary output on MPs’ vote shares (first round) and reelection probability

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Vote share (first round)		Pr (reelected)	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Oral questions per day	176.3***	38.2	46.2	29.8
Written questions per day	-1.82*	0.69	0.28	0.24
Single-author bills per day	204.1**	58.2	67.1**	27.5
Co-signed bills per day	-2.66	2.29	-0.90	0.59
Legislative reports per day	-53.7	78.9	109.3***	29.8
Information reports per day	-31.0	53.2	59.8	47.2
Committee bureau	0.39	1.47	-0.80	0.71
Committee membership				
Law	-1.03	0.58	-0.72*	0.38
Culture and education	-0.78	1.20	-1.29***	0.20
National defense	-0.71	0.91	-0.68***	0.18
Economy		Ref		Ref
Foreign affair	0.73	0.49	0.46	0.62
Public finance	-1.10	0.68	-0.18	0.17
Age	-0.18*	0.073	-0.022**	0.011
Sex	0.087	0.20	-0.25	0.30
Local candidate	-0.49	0.45	-0.67***	0.13
Tenure	-0.11	0.22	0.30***	0.089
Local mandates	0.55	1.05	0.23	0.37
Local government	0.47	0.76	0.18	0.63
Former minister	1.32	0.79	-1.10***	0.36
Party : UMP		Ref		Ref
Communists	-13.4***	1.29	0.32	0.51
Other left	-9.68***	0.30	-1.04***	0.20
Other right	-16.4***	2.63	0.47	0.57
Socialists and associated	-6.54***	0.73	1.77***	0.11
2002 victory margin	0.30***	0.038	0.038***	0.0081
Spending per voter	3.15	2.73	0.69	1.08
Number of candidates	-1.50**	0.42	-0.29***	0.090
Others’ spending per voter	-755.9*	309.5	-94.1*	55.7
Unemployment rate	-0.12	0.29	0.11	0.12
Constant	76.3***	9.77	5.17***	1.45
Adj. R ² /pseudo-R ²		0.62		0.22

Number of observations = 455; ***, **, and * respectively mean different from zero at the 1%, 5%, and 10% threshold. The SEs are corrected by the cluster method to take into account unobserved heterogeneity associated with political groups.

question leads to a decrease (increase) of 0.002 (0.15) percentage point of an average MP’s share vote. This finding is consistent with earlier observations that written questions lack public visibility and are a way for MPs to obtain information, not to raise politicized matters or to foster electoral connection (Lazardeux, 2005). Electorally, the oral questions, which take place in the plenary sessions and are broadcasted on public television channels, are much more efficient.

Beyond the written and oral questions, the single-author bills have – unlike the co-signed bills – a strong impact on the votes obtained by incumbents. A 1% increase for this variable results in a 0.01% increase of the vote share. The average MP introduces 3.4 bills during his or her mandate; each additional bill is associated with a 0.2 percentage point increase in vote share. The voters clearly reward the MPs who can be identified as having taken the initiative for new laws. The overall magnitude of the MPs’ activities is illustrated by Figure 1, which shows the predicted vote share in the first round according to the three significant variables.

Contrary to our hypothesis, belonging to a committee’s bureau has no significant impact on the first-round vote share. Regarding committee membership, only the members of the foreign affairs

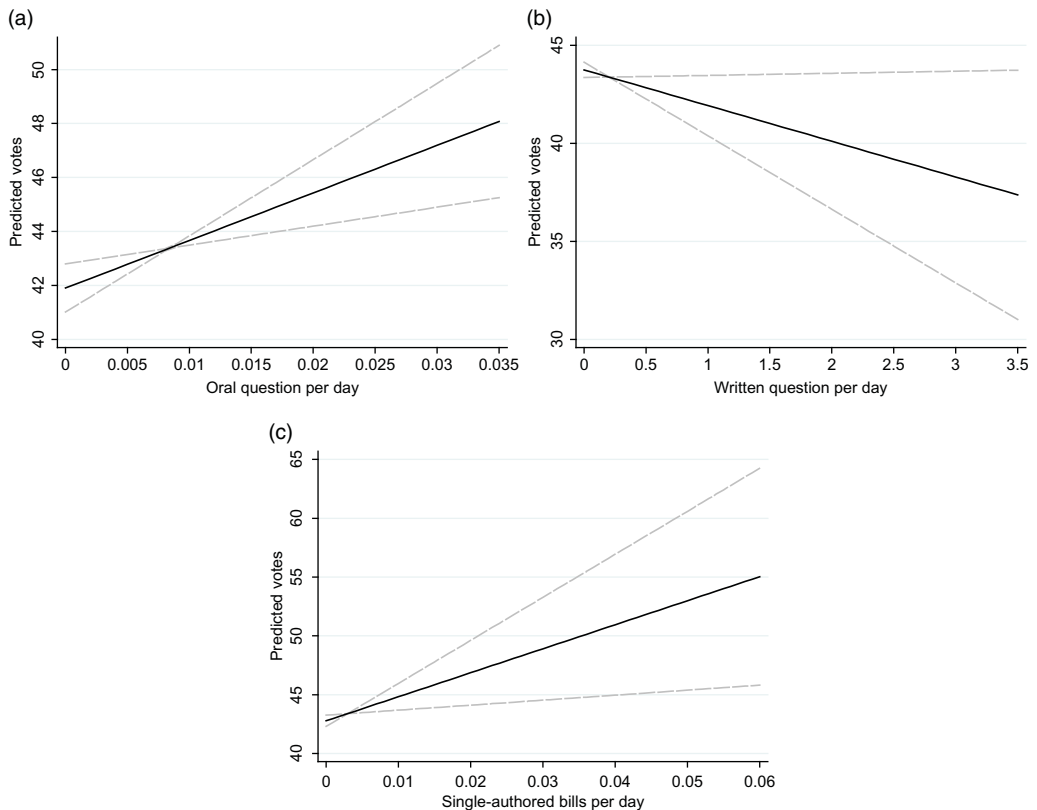


Figure 1. MPs' activities and predicted 1st round votes. (a) Effect of oral questions. (b) Effect of written questions. (c) Effect of single-author bills per day. The continuous line represents the predicted votes and the dashed ones the 5% confidence intervals.

committee benefit from an increased vote share compared to the members of the economy committee. These observations contradict the idea that internationally oriented activities are of little electoral value for the parliamentarians (Rozenberg, 2018).

In summary, the incumbents' vote shares are correlated to their work in Parliament. However, only some activities influence the vote share and, even though these influences are statistically significant, their magnitudes are limited.

Effects of MPs' activities on their reelection probability

Then, we focus on the final probability of reelection, which normally takes place in the second round of the legislative election, but sometimes occurs in the first one (model 2). The effect of parliamentary activities differs at this stage, compared to that of the first round.

Whereas three types of activities correlate significantly to the first-round results, only two have a significant impact on the final outcome of the election. Both types of parliamentary questions lose their explanatory power. Surprisingly, the number of legislative reports per day becomes significant and positive, with an average elasticity of 0.02, meaning that a 1% increase in legislative report production implies a 0.02% increase of the probability to be reelected. The single-author bills variable keeps its positive and significant impact. A 1% increase in bills per day leads to a growth of 0.02% of the reelection probability. As previously, we illustrate the impacts of MPs' activities on the predicted probability in Figure 2. As MPs produce on average

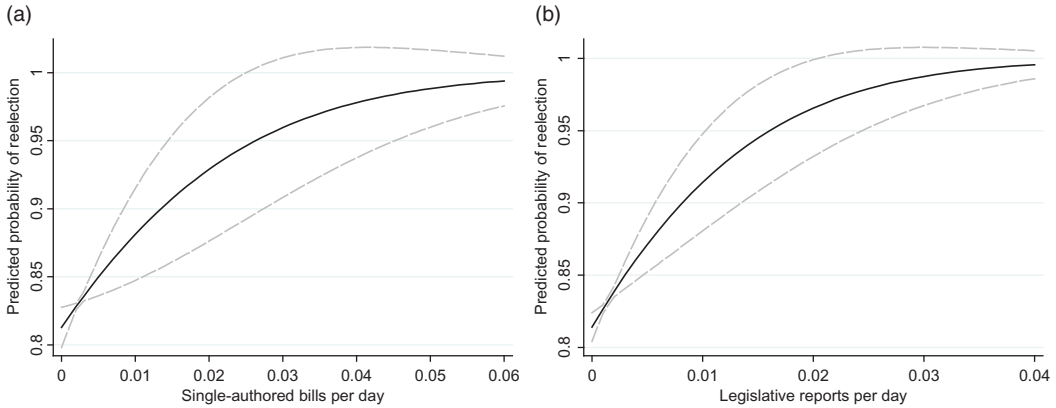


Figure 2. MPs' activities and reelection probability. (a) Effect of single-author bills per day. (b) Effect of legislative reports per day. The continuous line represents the predicted probabilities and the dashed ones the 5% confidence intervals.

3.4 single-author bills during their mandate (which lasts 1144 days on average), we observe that their probability of being reelected is, on average, about 0.84 and, if they double their production, their reelection probability reaches 0.86. The ratio is similar for the legislative report, starting from the average production, a twice increase shift in the reelection probability from 0.84 to 0.86.

Turning to committees, we observe that the members of the committees on 'law', 'culture and education', and 'national defense' have a lower probability to be reelected than the members of committees on 'economy' and 'foreign affairs'. There is, however, no clear underlying logic in this finding, as it is difficult to distinguish a rationale based on the MPs, the parties, or the voters behind it. As before, the administration of a committee does not increase the probability of reelection. While this type of leadership position can contribute to boost the career of some MPs, they are usually allocated following a seniority rule (Rozenberg, 2016: 29); MPs tend to reach such positions just before they decide to retire.

From this, we conclude that the reelection probability of the incumbents is also correlated to their work. While both first-round vote share and overall reelection probability are related to single-authored bills, the significance of other activities differs between the two election stages.

Ancillary estimation: successful bills

Finally, we conducted one additional analysis to assess the impact of successful bills (Table 3). The inclusion into our specifications of a dummy variable indicating that the MP had at least one single-author or co-signed bill successfully turned into law strengthens our findings. We therefore shift the perspective about the factor: from MPs' activities (with the measure of law proposed) to MPs' success (with the variable of laws passed). All 554 MPs in the dataset had co-signed at least one bill, but only 4% managed to validate a law. For the 344 MPs single-authoring a bill, the success rate reaches 6.4%. We rely on a binary variable that takes the value 1 if one or more of these legislative bills have been successful and 0 in all other cases. The detailed outcomes could be obtained upon request.

This additional factor has a positive and strongly significant effect (at least at 10% threshold) on both the proportion of votes in the first round and the reelection probability. Figure 3 shows the magnitude of the relationships. The predicted vote share of MPs without any successful bill is 43%, while with a successful bill it reaches 45%. The increase of probability is larger: from 0.8 without to 0.9 with. Since it is common in France for a law to be labeled by its initiator's name, the statistical

Table 3. Influence of parliamentary output on MPs' fortune, including passed laws

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Vote share (first round)		Pr (reelected)	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Law passed	2.08**	0.59	1.00***	0.25
Oral questions per day	176.5***	38.2	47.0	29.9
Written questions per day	-1.80*	0.74	0.26	0.25
Single-author bills per day	199.0**	61.7	66.3**	28.6
Co-signed bills per day	-2.11	2.15	-0.65	0.59
Legislative reports per day	-82.0	72.6	93.5***	28.4
Information reports per day	-21.0	55.0	58.3	48.7
Committee bureau	0.28	1.56	-0.86	0.76
Committee membership				
Law	-1.07	0.57	-0.73*	0.40
Culture and education	-0.76	1.22	-1.28***	0.20
National defense	-0.65	0.94	-0.66***	0.19
Economy		Ref		Ref
Foreign affairs	0.75	0.46	0.48	0.62
Public finance	-1.05	0.72	-0.19	0.16
Age	-0.18*	0.074	-0.021**	0.011
Sex	0.13	0.21	-0.24	0.30
Local candidate	-0.42	0.42	-0.66***	0.13
Tenure	-0.097	0.21	0.30***	0.090
Local mandates	0.58	1.04	0.25	0.37
Local government	0.52	0.80	0.19	0.65
Former minister	1.27	0.77	-1.11***	0.37
Party: UMP		Ref		Ref
Communists	-13.3***	1.25	0.33	0.51
Other left	-9.48***	0.31	-0.98***	0.20
Other right	-16.3***	2.61	0.50	0.57
Socialists and associated	-6.40***	0.70	1.81***	0.11
2002 victory margin	0.29***	0.038	0.037***	0.0078
Spending per voter	3.16	2.75	0.73	1.07
Number of candidates	-1.50**	0.42	-0.29***	0.092
Others' spending per voter	-749.0*	311.4	-94.8*	55.4
Unemployment rate	-0.12	0.29	0.11	0.12
Constant	75.8***	9.98	5.03***	1.44
Adj. R ² /pseudo-R ²		0.62		0.22

Number of observations = 455; ***, **, and * respectively mean different from zero at the 1%, 5%, and 10% threshold. The SEs are corrected by the cluster method to take into account unobserved heterogeneity associated with political groups.

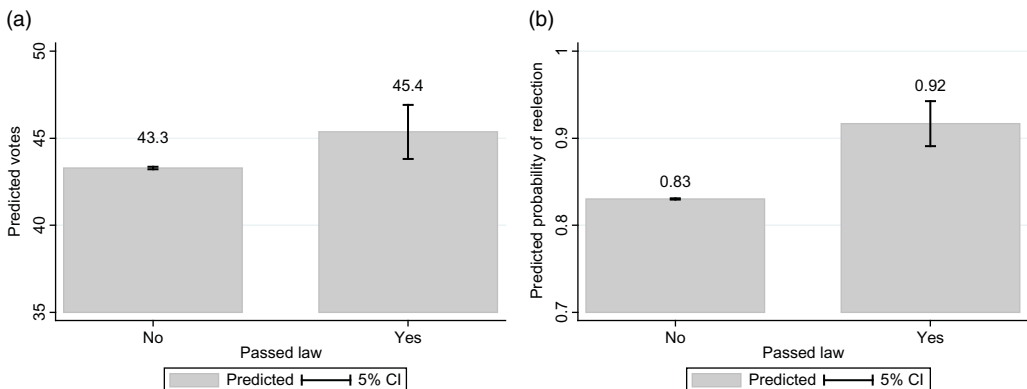


Figure 3. Successful bills and MPs' electoral fortune. (a) Effect on predicted votes (first round). (b) Effect on predicted probability of reelection.

effect of this additional variable suggests that incumbents are rewarded for having a law named after them. The effect may be twofold: on top of the personal visibility given by a law named after oneself, the successful bills also give an indication of the more general efficiency and political skills of their initiators, which the voters want to reward.

Additional comments

Our findings offer new insights on the electoral accountability of French MPs. Most indicators of activity are significant at some point and the impact is almost always positive, meaning that hard-working MPs are rewarded. The only exception is with the written questions. The latter have a negative effect on the percentage of votes in the first round. The written questions probably lack the public visibility and prestige that could make them electorally worthy, and they are easily accessible to all MPs. They seem to be left to the MPs short of the personal contacts that could save them the effort and the formality of a written procedure (Lazardeux, 2005).

Besides, the coefficients of most control variables have the expected sign, although some of them are not statistically significant (Table 2). A candidate's party logically has an impact on both the first-round votes and the probability to be reelected. An increase in the intensity of the electoral competition – measured by the number of candidates and the campaign spending of the other candidates – reduces both the vote share in the first round and the reelection likelihood. Contrary to what is often asserted in the literature (Costa and Kerrouche, 2007), holding a local mandate does not improve the electoral results. One other surprising outcome concerns candidates' local roots. To be a local candidate – that is, to be born in the department of the constituency – has no effect on the votes received in the first round and it diminishes the reelection probability: the coefficient is significant and has a negative sign in the estimation of reelection probability. The explanation may lie in the restrictive definition of the variable or in an electoral gain for national personalities supported by the newly elected President.

Conclusion

This article has analyzed the effectiveness of work inside Parliament as a vote-seeking strategy. Taking the French legislative elections of 2007 as a test case, we hypothesized that the incumbents' electoral results depend on their activities in the parliamentary arena. Our findings confirm this hypothesis: Even when controlling for a number of contextual and personal factors, an incumbent's parliamentary record has a significant impact on what happens afterwards. Almost all indicators of work in Parliament are significant at some point, and the effect is almost always positive, meaning that hard-working MPs are rewarded for what they did in Parliament.

This finding could well alter the way academics – as well as political actors – assess the impact of parliamentary activities, even more so in the French-specific context characterized by a weak parliament. The observed correlation between parliamentary activities and electoral outcomes brings support to the recent trend in the literature on the French Parliament to recognize a more significant role of the parliament and the parliamentary work that has been done before (Brouard *et al.*, 2013a). On the practical level, MPs may well have to revise their vote-seeking strategies. To this day, MPs who think that they are responsible for their reelection tend to be more locally oriented (Brouard *et al.*, 2013b: 153). We demonstrated that a greater activity at the national level also had the potential to boost one's chances to remain an MP, in the legislative term immediately preceding the 2008 constitutional reform. In the aftermath of this reform, which aimed to enhance the role of the parliament, it is likely that MPs have even more opportunities to increase their reelection chances by focusing on internal parliamentary work.

The statistical analysis also confirms that one may not rely on one single indicator of activity – in particular, bills – as a proxy for a wider measure of parliamentary work. Each distinct parliamentary task has its own logic and may bring differentiated electoral returns.

Our results contribute to a better understanding of fundamental accountability mechanisms in democratic systems (Pitkin, 1967; Manin, 1997). They show that, in the case under investigation, retrospective voting does not depend on the performance of incumbent majorities and governments, such as their economic performance (Healy and Malhotra, 2013). To some extent, the personal vote in legislative elections can be understood as a retrospective evaluation of the parliamentarians' overall activity within the legislative arena, and not only of their efforts to serve the specific interests of their constituencies. Of course, the electoral impact of legislative work is not massive, but it is real, and it probably hinges on the type of political and electoral system mediating the relationship between parliamentarians and voters in which the parliamentarians and voters evolve. Further comparative research is thus necessary to better explain the circumstances in which voters have the capacity and the willingness to hold their representatives accountable.

Supplementary material. To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773919000274>

Acknowledgements. The authors thank Zach Bastik, David Bounie, Thomas Däubler, Michael Holmes, Emiliano Grossman, as well as the participants of the workshop 'Science Po Quanti' at the Lille Catholic University (1/7/2016) and the journal's referees for their helpful comments and suggestions. The usual disclaimers apply. This work benefitted from ANR funding (grant number ANR-18-CE26-0004).

References

- André, A., S. Depauw and M.S. Shugart (2014), 'The effect of electoral institutions on legislative behaviour', in S. Martin, T. Saalfeld and K. Strøm (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bengtsson, Å. and H. Wass (2010), 'Styles of political representation: what do voters expect?', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 20(1): 55–81.
- Blomgren, M. and O. Rozenberg (eds) (2012), *Parliamentary Roles in Modern Legislatures*, London: Routledge.
- Bouteca, N., J. Smulders, B. Maddens, C. Devos and B. Wauters (2019), "'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work'? Exploring the connection between the parliamentary work of MPs and their electoral support", *Journal of Legislative Studies* 25(1): 44–65.
- Bowler, S. (2010), 'Private members' bills in the UK parliament: is there an "electoral connection"?' *Journal of Legislative Studies* 16(4): 476–494.
- Brouard, S. and E. Kerrouche (2013), 'L'effet candidat lors des élections parlementaires. L'exemple des élections législatives 2012 en France', *Revue Française de Science Politique* 63(6): 1113–1136.
- Brouard, S., O. Costa and E. Kerrouche (2013a), 'The "New" French Parliament: changes and continuities', in A. Cole, S. Meunier and V. Tiberj (eds), *Developments in French Politics* 5, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Brouard, S., O. Costa, E. Kerrouche and T. Schnatterer (2013b), 'Why do French MPs focus more on constituency work than on parliamentary work?', *Journal of Legislative Studies* 19(2): 141–159.
- Cain, B., J. Ferejohn and M. Fiorina (1987), *The Personal Vote: Constituency Service and Electoral Independence*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carey, J.M. (2009), *Legislative Voting and Accountability*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carman, C.J. (2006), 'Public preferences for parliamentary representation in the UK: an overlooked link?', *Political Studies* 54(1): 103–122.
- Chiru, M. (2018), 'The electoral value of constituency-oriented parliamentary questions in Hungary and Romania', *Parliamentary Affairs* 71(4): 950–969.
- Costa, O. and E. Kerrouche (2007), *Qui Sont les Députés Français? Enquête sur des élites Inconnues*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Däubler, T., T. Bräuninger and M. Brunner (2016), 'Is personal vote-seeking behavior effective?', *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41(2): 419–444.
- Dupoirier, E. and N. Sauger (2010), 'Four rounds in a row: the impact of presidential election outcomes on legislative elections in France', *French Politics* 8(1): 21–41.
- Edwards, A.R., D. de Kool and C. Van Ooijen (2015), 'The information ecology of parliamentary monitoring websites: pathways towards strengthening democracy', *Information Polity* 20(4): 253–268.
- Evans, J. and G. Ivaldi (2017), 'An atypical "honeymoon" election? Contextual and strategic opportunities in the 2017 French legislative elections', *French Politics* 15(3): 322–339.
- Farrell, D.M. and I. McAllister (2006), 'Voter satisfaction and electoral systems: does preferential voting in candidate-centred systems make a difference?', *European Journal of Political Research* 45(5): 725–749.

- Fenno, R.F.** (1978), *Home Style: House Members in their Districts*, Boston, MA: Little Brown.
- Ferejohn, J.** (1986), 'Incumbent performance and electoral control', *Public Choice* 50(3): 5–25.
- François, A. and L. Weill** (2016), 'Does holding a local mandate alter the activities of deputies? Evidence from the French Assemblée Nationale', *French Politics* 14(1): 30–54.
- Golden, M.A. and L. Picci** (2015), 'Incumbency effects under proportional representation: leaders and backbenchers in the postwar Italian chamber of deputies', *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 40(4): 509–538.
- Grant, J.T. and T. Rudolph** (2004), 'The job of representation in Congress: public expectations and representative approval', *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 29(3): 431–445.
- Hall, R.L.** (1998), *Participation in Congress*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Harden, J.J.** (2015), *Multidimensional Democracy: A Supply and Demand Theory of Representation in American Legislatures*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Healy, A. and N. Malhotra** (2013), 'Retrospective voting reconsidered', *Annual Review of Political Science* 16: 285–306.
- Hermansen, S.S.L.** (2018), 'Striving for influence: the effect of performance on candidate selection', *Party Politics* 24(4): 382–396.
- Kerrouche, E.** (2006), 'The French Assemblée nationale: the case of a weak legislature?', *Journal of Legislative Studies* 12(3–4): 336–365.
- Kesselman, M.** (2007), 'France', in M. Kesselman, J. Krieger and W.A. Joseph (eds), *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, pp. 91–145.
- Kreppel, A.** (2014), 'Legislatures', in D. Caramani (ed), *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 117–135.
- Lazardeux, S.** (2005), 'Une Question Ecrite, Pour Quoi Faire? The causes of the production of written questions in the French Assemblée Nationale', *French Politics* 3(3): 258–281.
- Lazardeux, S.** (2009), 'The French National Assembly's oversight of the executive: changing role, partisanship and intra-majority conflict', *West European Politics* 32(2): 287–309.
- McAllister, I.** (2007), 'The personalization of politics', in R.J. Dalton and H.-D. Klingemann (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Manin, B.** (1997), *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, S.** (2010), 'Electoral rewards for personal vote cultivation under PR-STV', *West European Politics* 33(2): 369–380.
- Mayhew, D.** (1974), *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Navarro, J.** (2010), 'Le travail parlementaire, un investissement payant ? Les élections européennes comme évaluation rétrospective du bilan des députés sortants', *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée* 17(4), 141–160.
- Navarro, J., N. Vaillant and F.C. Wolff** (2012), 'Mesurer l'efficacité des députés au sein du Parlement français : l'apport des techniques de frontières non paramétriques', *Revue Française de Science Politique* 62(4): 611–636.
- Norris, P.** (1997), 'The puzzle of constituency service', *Journal of Legislative Studies* 3(2): 29–49.
- Norton, P. and D.M. Wood** (1990), 'Constituency service by Members of Parliament: does it contribute to a personal vote?', *Parliamentary Affairs* 43(2): 196–208.
- Papp, Z. and F. Russo** (2018), 'Parliamentary work, re-selection and re-election: in search of the accountability link', *Parliamentary Affairs* 71(4): 853–867.
- Pitkin, H.** (1967), *The Concept of Representation*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Rozenberg, O.** (2016), 'Un petit pas pour le Parlement, un grand pas pour la Ve République. L'évaluation de la révision constitutionnelle du 23 juillet 2008', *Working Paper* 61, Paris: LIEPP.
- Rozenberg, O.** (2018), *Les Députés Français et l'Europe. Tristes Hémicycles ?*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Sieberer, U. and D. Höhmann** (2017), 'Shadow chairs as monitoring device? A comparative analysis of committee chair powers in Western European parliaments', *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 23(3): 301–325.
- Strom, K.** (2012), 'Roles as strategies. Towards a logic of legislative behavior'. In M. Blomgren and O. Rozenberg (eds), *Parliamentary Roles in Modern Legislatures*, London: Routledge, pp. 85–100.
- Teuber, F.** (2018), 'Why do legislators submit bills that are doomed to fail? Unraveling the paradoxes of non-government bill submission in Belgium from 1995 to 2010. PhD dissertation. Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain.
- Türk, P.** (2005), *Les Commissions Parlementaires Permanentes et le Renouveau du Parlement sous la V^e République*, Paris: Dalloz.
- Vigour, C.** (2013), 'French deputies and law-making: deputies' activities and citizens' perceptions', *Journal of Legislative Studies* 19(2): 219–245.
- Volden, C. and A.E. Wiseman** (2014), *Legislative Effectiveness in the United States Congress*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolak, J.** (2017), 'Public expectations of state legislators', *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 42(2): 175–209.