

Who brings home the pork? Parties and the role of localness in committee assignments in mixed-member proportional systems

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Abstract

The assignment of seats to specialized standing committees is a most consequential choice in legislative contexts. Distributive theories of legislative organization suggest that electoral incentives to cultivate personal votes result in the self-selection of legislators to committees best suited to please their constituents and, thus, to secure reelection. However, these theories discard the partisan basis of European parliaments and therefore fail to adequately assess the politics of committee assignments in these particular contexts. This article aims to explore the significance of distributive theories for the German case in differentiated ways and on the basis of a new and rich data set including statistical data for five legislative terms (1983, 1987, 1998, 2005, and 2009). It argues that in partisan assemblies, political parties might develop an interest in distributive politics themselves and might assign distinct types of legislators to distinct committees to seek personal votes contingent upon distinct electoral incentives. Particularly, we argue that Germany's mixed proportional system provides incentives to parties to assign legislators with profound local roots to district committees best suited to please geographic constituents.

Keywords

committee assignments, electoral systems, Germany, legislative organization, political parties

Distributive theories of legislative organization in partisan contexts

Specialized standing committees serve as means to effectively scrutinize governments and deliberate legislation (Mattson and Strom, 1995). The question of who gets to serve on what committee is thus an important one to the functioning of the broader democratic system. Distributive theories of legislative organization provide influential answers to this question. They envision committee assignments to result from legislators' efforts to seek personal votes contingent upon electoral context. Specifically, they envision legislators who are nominally elected in single-member districts to seek committee assignments that allow to deliver electorally rewarding particularistic benefits to geographic constituents. Assignments to district committees such as transportation are seen as most sought after

opportunities in this regard. District committees enjoy jurisdiction on geographically targeted infrastructural policies that allow building broad-based electoral coalitions independent from partisanship and also provide a most plausible basis for credit claims made by individual legislators (Mayhew, 1974; Shepsle and Weingast, 1987; Weingast and Marshall, 1988).

Distributive theories of legislative organization result from evidence that predominantly relates to the US

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American case. The question of their applicability to European contexts remains dubious to students of legislative politics. This skepticism is mainly motivated by the role of cohesive and disciplined parties in European assemblies. Here, legislators are said to join teams, to behave in disciplined ways, and to focus on national policy debates rather than individually catering to geographic constituents (Sieberer, 2006; Thomassen, 1994; Uslaner and Zittel, 2006). As a result, committees are assumed to function as arenas for partisan conflict controlled by parliamentary parties, staffed by partisan legislators, and designed to deliver national policies to national coalitions of voters.

In this analysis, we argue against an irresolvable contradiction between distributive theories of legislative politics and partisan contexts. We rather argue that contingent upon electoral context, parties themselves might be inclined to assign distinct legislators to district committees to deliver particularistic geographically targeted policies to win votes. To explore this argument and to further elaborate on how and why electoral rules affect committee assignments, this article offers a systematic analysis of committee assignments under Germany's mixed system. In this analysis, we argue that the proportional nature of Germany's mixed system leads parties to assign legislators that are locally well connected to district committees to facilitate particularistic policies to enhance their national vote share.

With our analysis, we aim to contribute both to recent efforts to apply established theories of legislative organization to European contexts (Bowler and Farrell, 1995; Hansen, 2010; McElroy, 2006; Mickler, 2013; Stratmann and Baur, 2002; Yordanova, 2009, 2013; Whitaker, 2011) and to research on the behavioral effects of electoral institutions (André et al., 2015; Carey and Shugart, 1995; Crisp et al., 2007; Martin, 2011). In light of the few available analyses on distributive legislative politics in partisan contexts, we do not aim at a general theory on the interactions between party strategies and electoral incentives, but rather build our analysis from the German case and discuss its more general implications in our concluding remarks.

Political parties and the process of assigning committee seats in the Bundestag

In the first step of our analysis, we first turn our attention to the functions of committees in the Bundestag and then to how political parties control committee assignments. Our argument is based upon distinct assumptions with regard to these questions that we need to spell out and confirm in this section.

Committee autonomy in policy making is an important prerequisite for distributive politics in US Congress. This allows members to legislate on particularistic benefits and to logroll for consent among each other. Committees in European parliamentary systems in general and in the German Bundestag in particular are by no means autonomous to similar degrees. By default, they rather function as

arenas for partisan conflict. Consequentially, in parliamentary systems, it might be governments rather than committees that function as sources of particularistic policies (Suiter and O'Malley, 2014; Zittel, 2014).

There are two reasons that suggest that committees might nevertheless functionally matter for particularistic policy making in parliamentary systems. First, they might not directly legislate particularistic benefits but they certainly influence ministerial departments that do so. In this function, they are able to serve as effective lobbyists for their causes vis-à-vis ministerial departments. Second, committees differ in their jurisdictions in systematic ways (e.g. Yordanova, 2009). Some are special as their jurisdictions particularly allow targeting geographic constituents and providing infrastructural benefits. The so-called district committees plausibly enjoy a larger degree of autonomy from party political concerns since the policy matters they deal with are less salient in terms of national policy debates.

The much-cited research of Stratmann and Baur (2002) on the issue stressed for the German Bundestag the existence of district committees that allow to "channel funds to the home district." The Committee on Transportation, Building and Urban Affairs in the 17th Bundestag is one concrete example in this regard (Stoffel, 2014; Stratmann and Baur, 2002). It drafts national plans specifying where motorways, streets, and bridges will be built or repaired as part of the national budget (*Bundesverkehrswegeplan*). These public works projects allow members of the committee to direct federal funds to their electoral districts to support local enterprises and the local economy. Stratmann and Baur (2002) also placed the Committee on Tourism and the Committee for Agriculture into the district committee category. The latter participates in allocating significant amounts of subsidies to farmers (e.g. *Agrarexportförderung, Grünland Milchprogramm*) and also to rural areas for infrastructural developments (e.g. *Gemeinschaftsaufgabe Verbesserung der Agrarstruktur und des Küstenschutzes*).

Stratmann and Baur (2002) contrast district committees to party committees that focus on larger national policy issues. Due to their jurisdiction, party committees are more likely to function as arenas for partisan types of conflict. They predominantly deal with universal types of legislation that either regulate the behavior of all citizens or that distribute or redistribute benefits among broader social groups such as the rich and the poor. The Labor and Social Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag provides one example in this regard since it legislates on social policies that among others decide on the volume of transfer payments to distinct groups such as the unemployed. Procedural committees form an important third committee type that includes the committees on Petition and on Electoral Integrity and Rules (*Wahlprüfung und Geschäftsordnung*). Both share purely organizational jurisdictions that concern electoral and legislative processes.

Partisan control over the assignment of committee seats is an important observational implication for the partisan basis of committee politics. To what extent do parties control committee assignments in the German case? In the closing section of their analysis, Stratmann and Baur (2002: 513) speculate about the relative significance of self-selection in the Bundestag. However, the case-specific literature on the issue rather suggests to perceive committee assignments as an interactive process dominated by party and partisan concerns. The following paragraphs are designed to provide a short summary on this process.

In the Bundestag, committee seats and chairs are first distributed in proportion to the strength of the parliamentary parties (Edinger, 1992; Röper, 1998). The parliamentary party groups then allocate “their” committee seats among their members. In the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Free Democratic Party (FDP), and Christian Social Union (CSU), this step is coordinated by the chief whips of the parliamentary parties. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) puts a special panel on the assignment of committee seats in charge of this process, which underscores the federal nature of the party.¹ This panel is made up of the chief whip and the chairs of the regional (state) subgroups. The latter are important gatekeepers in the allocation of assignments to their delegation and also oversee a fair representation of their groups in all committees. In all party groups, the final decision on committee assignments first requires the agreement of the parliamentary party leadership (*Fraktionsvorstand*), and then by majority vote the agreement of the whole party group (*Fraktionsversammlung*) (Schüttemeyer, 1998; Ismayr, 2012).

The assignment process just sketched does not imply a unidirectional top-down relationship between party leadership and ordinary members. Instead, Ismayr (2012: 168) characterizes this process as a lengthy and conflict ridden one in which leaderships in all parties aim to be responsive to the demands of ordinary members. This involves surveying members on their preferences prior to seat allocation and also sometimes lengthy informal negotiations during this process. In these negotiations, the parties’ main sociological groups (Mickler, 2013) and the chairs of the policy task forces function as important mediators (Ismayr, 2012: 168).

Negotiations on seat allocation can result in severe conflicts, especially in large party groups where each legislator will generally receive only one assignment as a full member. A few informal, commonly agreed upon rules are instrumental in minimizing these conflicts. As a common practice, committee members are able to keep their assignments after reelection if they wish to do so (Kaack, 1990). Each committee is also made up of an equal number of deputies. If legislators wish to take a seat on a new committee, having served as a deputy in the previous term generally helps their cause.

Independent of all efforts to accommodate the preferences of individual legislators and to restrict conflict on the

basis of informal rules, in the end, party leaderships control committee assignments since they possess the capacity to “convince” legislators and to even severely sanction failure to cooperate. The special role of party leadership is emphasized by its right to withdraw legislators from committees even during the legislative cycle (Edinger, 1992; Patzelt, 2000: 30). A most recent and most dramatic example concerns the removal of one of the most prominent and outspoken opponents of the *European Stability Mechanism* strategy within the CDU from the Budget committee (Willsch, 2015: 204–206.).

Despite the partisan basis of committee assignments in the Bundestag, we do envision distributive politics at the margins. This results from our assumption that parties themselves for electoral reasons might facilitate personal vote-seeking efforts via particularistic policy making. Specifically, we expect two distinct observational implications. First, we expect parties to take district committees as opportunities to cater to local constituents and to pursue particularistic policies. Second, we expect parties to single out those individuals who are most motivated and able to perform this task in loyal ways. We hypothesize that under mixed-member proportional (MMP) rules, parties will particularly select legislators with strong local roots. The next section further elaborates on the theoretical basis of these two assumptions.

Committee assignments under MMP rules

District committees provide opportunities for parties to cater to geographic constituents by assigning the right legislators to the right committee. This raises questions on the type of legislator parties might be willing to assign to district committees and on their electoral reasons for doing so. In the following section, we argue that Germany’s MMP system provides incentives to parties to assign local legislators with profound local roots to district committees to boast their party vote.

The literature on constituency campaigning provides evidence on the extent and strategies of party-driven geographic representation under plurality rule (Denver et al., 2003; Fisher et al., 2016). It shows that parties pay selective attention to winnable districts and especially offer extra help to marginal candidates to win the extra percent needed. In these cases, the motivations of vote-seeking parties fall in line with the motivations of vote-seeking legislators. The latter will cater to geographic constituents in ways loyal to their party since they wish to please both their selectorates (parties) and electorates (districts).

Mixed systems combine a plurality tier with a proportional tier of election. In the Bundestag, approximately half of all legislators are elected on the basis of a nominal (candidate) vote in 299 single-member districts. The rest is elected on the basis of a party vote in 16 multimember districts that resemble the German states under proportional

rule and on the basis of closed party lists. The so-called mandate-divide literature envisions the plurality tier to result in behavioral strategies that are close to those ones adopted in pure plurality systems (e.g. Klingemann and Wessels, 2001; Lancaster and Patterson, 1990). According to Stratmann and Baur (2002), Germany's mixed system particularly provides incentives to parties to adopt a dual personnel strategy and to assign nominally elected members (district winners) to district committees and incumbents elected via party lists to party committees. The underlying rationale is that geographically targeted policies suited to please local constituents might help district winners to win reelection and, thus, to secure nominal mandates for their parties. In turn, partisan policies discussed and enacted in party committees are assumed to help list winners to boast the party vote and to get reelected. Consequently, committee assignments are considered to provide opportunities for electoral gains in the respective tier of the mixed-member system.

Our analysis sides with critics of the mandate-divide literature (e.g. Manow, 2013, 2015) and hypothesizes more complex committee politics that might result from the German mixed system. We argue that the proportional nature of Germany's mixed system accounts for interaction effects between the two tiers of election and thus for unique personnel strategies that aim to assign local instead of electorally competitive legislators to district committees to boast the party vote. This argument flows from the comparative literature that emphasizes different types of mixed systems and also distinct behavioural effects related to each one of these types.

The distinction between mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) and MMP systems is of major relevance for our argument. In MMP systems such as the German one, the list tier compensates parties, on a national basis, for deviations from proportionality that arise from the allocation of nominal-tier seats via plurality rule (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001). Thus, it is the list vote that determines the overall allocation of seats in the Bundestag, implying that it is this vote that parties should primarily focus on. Parties' nominal-tier seat totals are subtracted from the allocation they receive in the list tier to maintain proportionality, and thus parties are normally unable to win additional seats simply by increasing their nominal votes.² In contrast, in MMM systems list seats are allocated in parallel to the nominal-tier seats, rather than in a compensatory manner. Only in the MMM variant, as used for instance in Japan, are there technically two truly independent tiers of election functioning on the basis of two different electoral systems (Pekkanen et al., 2006).

Prior to the 2013 election, the compensatory nature of the German mixed-member system technically was disturbed by surplus mandates (*Überhangmandate*). Parties receive surplus seats if they manage to win more nominal-tier seats than what would be their proportional

entitlement based on list votes (Behnke, 2007). These surplus seats were not compensated by additional seats to other parties, and thus disturbed the predominant role of the list vote in the process of vote-seat allocation (Farrell, 2001). However, although the number of surplus seats had been increasing since 1990 (Behnke, 2007), until recently they remained a small enough part of the overall picture that they do not undermine the notion that the electoral system is fundamentally compensatory (Gschwend, 2004).³ Thus, for our sample of elections, we are safe in saying that list votes are the most important determinant of seat allocation (unlike in MMM systems).

The so-called contamination theories focus on the behavioral implications of MMP systems at the party and voter levels (Cox and Schoppa, 2002; Ferrara and Herron, 2005; Gschwend et al., 2003). We particularly draw from one classical argument made by "contamination theorists" that emphasizes a spillover from the multiparty competition characteristics of PR to the nominal-tier context (Ferrara et al., 2005). According to this argument, political parties violate Duverger's law and run candidates even in hopeless nominal contests since they expect a mobilization effect and thus electoral payoffs for the party vote.⁴ It is exactly this rationale that also provides support for the assumption that parties aim to utilize and help candidates with a strong local profile in their efforts to please geographic constituencies. The underlying expectation is that fierce electoral competition at the nominal tier driven by local human faces well connected with local level interests helps their vote share at the party tier.⁵ On the basis of this assumption, local legislators are seen as a strong asset from the party's perspective independent of their mode of election.⁶

The distinct strategies of German parties that we theoretically substantiated above can be further clarified in light of a related and crucial observable implication. This concerns the frequent practice of dual candidacy that stresses the fact that nominally elected legislators have no monopoly on geographic representation (Saalfeld, 2005) and that parties consciously aim to link the incentives resulting from the proportional tier with the plurality tier (Lundberg, 2006; Schweitzer, 1979; Zittel, 2014; Zittel and Gschwend, 2008). In the 2005 federal election, for example, 1050 candidates (45%) ran in both a nominal district and on the party list. Only 434 candidates (18%) ran solely in one of the 299 electoral districts, while 862 (37%) competed only on their party's list (Zittel and Gschwend, 2008). Among those candidates elected, the percentage of dual candidacies is even higher. Manow (2007) reports an average of around 80% of MPs who were dually listed in recent elections. Because of the frequency of dual candidacies, most German legislators combine a national with a local focus.

We shall conclude our theoretical considerations on the politics of committee assignments in Germany with some final qualifications. A party's interest in assigning legislators with a strong local focus to district committees

independent of their mode of election is dependent on whether voters cast straight tickets. To be sure, split-ticket voting is on the rise in German elections. Nevertheless, more than 75% of German voters still cast a straight ticket in federal elections (Gschwend et al., 2003; Schön, 1999; Huber, 2014). This reinforces the parties' perceptions that running strong local candidates and helping legislators with strong local orientations to please their local constituencies will translate into increasing list-vote shares and thus gains in parliamentary seats.

Furthermore, a party's interest in supporting legislators with a strong local focus is dependent on whether parties are driven by vote-seeking motivations in their committee assignment choices. We do not dispute that parties follow other collective goals in the process of assigning committee seats such as recruiting ministerial aspirants, providing incentives to cooperate to prevent agency loss, or seeking good policies. However, in this analysis, we do not aim to explain all variance in committee assignments but rather aim to uncover traces of distributive politics even in parliamentary democracies. Also, votes are a prerequisite for pursuing other goals and thus should not be absent from the minds of party officials.

The argument made in this section on the effects of MMP systems on the strategies of political parties to assign committee seats can be summarized by the following thought experiment that we will conclude with. Consider a local candidate of a particular party who managed to increase his or her vote share in the nominal tier from 25% to 35%. Consider now a local candidate that managed to increase his or her nominal vote share from 49% to 51%. If we wish to predict which one of these two candidates would be most likely to be assigned to a district committee, we would pick the first candidate, notwithstanding that this candidate lost the nominal-tier race, while the second candidate won. If contamination theories hold true, large swings in vote shares at the nominal tier should translate into large swings at the list tier and thus into increases in parliamentary seats. Legislators who manage to deliver these results to their party should receive its utmost attention. The following empirical analysis is devoted to test this prediction.

Data, indicators, and hypotheses

We now turn to a description of our data and to how we operationalize our key variables. We first focus on how we measure localness and how exactly we operationalize committee types. We then discuss how we operationalize the relevant electoral incentives that we wish to test, what our controls are, and what type of analysis we use on the basis of which kinds of hypotheses.

Measuring legislators' localness

In order to assess differences in legislators' localness, we are able to draw from a new set of pooled statistical data on

Table 1. The localness of German MPs.

Variables		%	N
Local biography	Born in district	10	208
	Went to school in district	6	131
	Resident of district	36	749
Index: LocalBio (0 = weak; 3 = strong)	0	55	1136
	1	30	613
	2	13	269
	3	3	56
Local politics	Member of local parliament	47	970
	Mayor of city (in district)	12	238
Index: LocalPol (0 = weak; 2 = strong)	0	40	824
	1	51	1060
	2	9	190

candidates in the German Federal Elections of 1983, 1987, 1998, 2005, and 2009. Our data set contains 2953 legislator observations (assignments), for 1337 unique legislators of all major parties (CDU, SPD) and minor parties (CSU, FDP, Alliance 90/The Greens [Green Party,] and the Left Party).⁷

The available data contain five empirical indicators that we use to measure the localness of legislators. We conceptually distinguish these indicators on the basis of two different dimensions: biographical and political localness. We consider these two dimensions as distinct for two main reasons. First, biographical ties that involve to be born in the district, to having gone to school in the district, and to reside in the district forge emotional closeness. This should particularly increase individual *motivations* to take care of local problems and to represent geographic constituents. Second, political ties to local communities that involve having held previous elected offices at the district level, guarantee first-hand knowledge of local affairs, and also lasting professional and social contacts. This should particularly increase individual *abilities* to take care of local problems, but also to mobilize volunteers and voters in election campaigns. This is why especially this second aspect of localness should be most valuable to political parties (André et al., 2014; Shugart et al., 2005). Our assumptions are that legislators should be emotionally closest to their districts if they are born there, went to school there, and live there.⁸ Additionally, we assume that those legislators are politically closest to their districts that held or hold multiple elected local offices. Table 1 summarizes the distributions for the two variables that we use to measure biographical and political localness.

The descriptive findings in Table 1 demonstrate significant individual level differences with regard to both of our localness measures. Our index measuring biographical localness indicates that a majority (55%) of the legislators in our data share no local biographical roots whatsoever

Table 2. Types of committees in the German Bundestag, 1983, 1987, 1998, 2005, 2009.

Assignments		N	%	
Policy committees	District	Agriculture	132	4.47
		Transportation and housing	206	6.98
		Tourism	45	1.52
	Party	Budget	190	6.43
		Foreign affairs	182	6.16
		Interior	174	5.89
		Defense	161	5.45
		Finance	166	5.62
		Legal affairs	157	5.32
		Labor and social affairs	177	5.99
		Economics	168	5.69
		Family affairs/youth/women/health	233	7.89
		Education, research, and technology	176	5.96
		Environment	106	3.59
		Economic development	113	3.83
		Human rights	52	1.76
		Media and telecommunications	78	2.64
		European Union	97	3.28
		Sports	60	2.03
		German relations/unification	83	2.81
Procedural	Electoral integrity	70	2.37	
	Petition	127	4.30	
Total		2953	100	

compared to 3% that are biographically deeply rooted in their districts. In between these extremes, we see moderate levels of variance. Similarly, our index on political localness demonstrates a fair share of variance ranging from 40% of legislators that never held an elected office at the local level to 9% that held an elected office in the executive (mayor) and in the legislative (city council).

Committee types in the Bundestag

Our dependent variable that measures committee types builds upon the distinction between policy committees that we split up in district-related committees and partisan committees on the one hand and procedural committees on the other. Table 2 provides an overview on how the legislator observations (assignments) in our data set are distributed across these committee types.

The typology documented in Table 2 sides with Stratmann and Baur (2002) on the composition of the district category. The Committees on Agriculture, Transportation and Housing, and Tourism are clearly those ones that most exclusively share jurisdiction on programs that allow targeting local constituents.⁹ There are other committees with jurisdictions on particularistic programs such as the

Defense Committee that takes choices on military deployments. However, this is only a small part of the overall committee jurisdiction and also pales in light of the national implications of defense policy.

In the following analysis, we estimate which legislators get assigned to district committees as full members compared to legislators that receive no assignment to district committees as full members. This question results in important choices while constructing the dependent variable for our analysis that we will lay out in the remainder of this section. First, this means that we conflate procedural and party committees. The main reason for this lies in our research question and our interest in testing distributive theories of legislative organization in partisan contexts. We are not interested in exploring different reasons for assigning legislators to these three different types of committees. We rather wish to understand whether something is special about those legislators that are assigned to district committees compared to the rest of legislators that receive no assignments to district committees.¹⁰

A second coding choice relates to the type of committee membership that enters our analysis. Legislators either can join committees as full or alternate member. In practice, each committee in the Bundestag is composed of approximately 20 to 40 full members and an equal number of alternate members. Similar to Stratmann and Baur, we include only full committee members since only those legislators enjoy full participation rights in committee procedures especially voting rights. Furthermore, this allows to better replicate Stratmann and Baur and to test our hypothesis against the one stressed by these authors.¹¹

Third, we analyze initial assignments only rather than taking fluctuations in committee assignments during legislative terms into account.¹² Initial assignments should best mirror the strategic considerations of parties.¹³ Fourth, our estimation is based upon legislators per legislative term rather than legislator observations (assignments) as documented in Table 2 or unique legislators. In each legislative term, each legislator can be initially assigned to more than one committee, and multiple assignments are particularly prevalent for members of small parties. In these cases, we coded legislators assigned to at least one district committee as “district,” even if they also held a party and/or procedural committee assignment. This reduces the number of cases we work with to 2074, which either fall into the “district committee” category or into the “non-district committee” category. The distribution across these categories is as follows: 17% ($N = 344$) of all observations are assignments to district committees and 83% ($N = 1730$) of all observations are assignments to non-district committees.

Legislators' modes of election, electoral margins, and controls

To test our argument, we need to include in our analysis the *mode of election*, which is of primary importance in

Stratmann and Baur's (2002) analysis. About 50% ($N = 1044$) of all our observations in the final data set are related to legislators elected in the nominal tier (coded as 1), whereas the rest of the observations are related to legislators elected in the list tier.

We test for one further electoral incentive that might matter for political parties in their desire to please local constituents independent from the mode of election. Parties might assign legislators that ran for nominal votes in *marginal districts* to district committees to help them winning the few extra percent needed to carry the district.¹⁴ We calculate the margin variable in the following way: We took for legislators who lost district races their differences in vote shares to the respective district winners. For nominally elected legislators, we took the differences in vote shares to the respective best losing candidates in their districts.

In light of the German party system and our previous observations on the process of committee assignments in this country, we control for the *size of party*. According to Stratmann and Baur (2002), small parties do not have many chances to win nominal-tier seats¹⁵ and thus should not pay special attention to assigning seats in district committees. Consequently, Stratmann and Baur (2002) disregard small parties from their analysis. However, in light of our previous considerations, we argue that small parties should care about district committees and thus should pursue personnel strategies similar to large parties and recruit local legislators to district committees. Consequently, we included small parties but added a dummy to control for party size (members of the Greens, Left, and FDP are coded as 1); 22% of our observations ($N = 449$) are related to legislators representing small parties.¹⁶

We also control for *seniority* as measured in the number of legislative terms served. We suspect legislators to develop increasing policy expertise in the course of parliamentary socialization and thus to become more valuable for parties to be assigned to policy committees. The average seniority in our data set is 2.9 legislative terms. Last but not least, we control for *gender* since research on the consequences of descriptive representation emphasizes a relationship between gender and the allocation of committee seats (e.g. Friedman, 1996). Our data set includes 23% female legislators.

Hypotheses and type of analysis

The previous theoretical and empirical considerations lead us to the following hypotheses that we aim to test in the next section of the article.

H1: Legislators with local biographies should be more likely to receive a committee assignment, which will enable them to please their local constituency independent of their mode of election.

Table 3. The relationship of "localness" and committee type in bivariate perspective.

		District		Cramer's V
		No	Yes	
Mode	List	42	8	0.028
	Nominal	41	9	
LocalPol	Weak	35	5	0.126
	Moderate	42	9	
	Strong	7	3	
LocalBio	0	47	8	0.074
	1	24	6	
	2	10	3	
	3	2	4	

Note: Cell entries are percentage points.

H2: Legislators with local political ties should be more likely to receive a committee assignment that will enable them to please their local constituency independent of their mode of election.

We will test these hypotheses in the following on the basis of a logistic regression model since we are interested in whether legislators are either assigned to a district committee or the rest of committees and whether their localness is able to explain assignments to district committees. Our data set contains information for the same legislator for different legislative periods. Thus, we have repeated observations over time for some legislators. We assume that those observations are independent across legislators but not necessarily within the same legislator. We account for this interdependence by clustering the standard errors accordingly.

The politics of committee assignments in the Bundestag

Table 3 provides a quick bivariate overview on the relationship between the localness of legislators, their modes of election, and the type of committees they were assigned to. It tentatively supports our main theoretical expectations. It demonstrates that legislators with moderate or strong local political roots are more likely to be assigned to district committees compared to legislators with no local political roots. Table 3 also looks at the effect of legislators' biographical ties to their district on committee assignments. This again suggests a weak effect in the expected direction. Legislators with biographical ties to their districts are more likely to be assigned to district committees.

Table 3 also supports our argument on the role of the mode of election. It shows that the number of nominally elected legislators assigned to district committees hardly

Table 4. Predicting committee assignments in the *German Bundestag*.

	District committee (= 1)
Mode of election (1 = nominal)	0.11 (0.16)
Local biography	0.20** (0.09)
Local politics	0.47*** (0.12)
Legislative terms	-0.09** (0.04)
Small party (= 1)	-0.13 (0.23)
Margin	1.14* (0.60)
Female (= 1)	0.10 (0.17)
Constant	-2.13*** (0.22)
Log-Lik.	-907
Observations	2074
Number of different MPs	1347
Percent correctly predicted	83

Note: Clustered standard errors (by MP) in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

differs from the number of legislators elected via party lists and assigned to district committees.

In the following, we aim to see to what degree the previously demonstrated bivariate relationship holds in a multivariate model that includes our control variables and also our two electoral variables, namely electoral margin and mode of election. The results of this step are presented in Table 4. They corroborate the findings of our bivariate analysis. The variables that tap into legislators' localness both point into the expected direction and are significant at least at the 0.05 level. Legislators with strong political and biographical ties are more likely to be assigned to district committees even if we control for alternative electoral explanations and additional control variables. Furthermore, Table 4 also corroborates the results of our bivariate analysis with regard to the effects of the mode of election on committee assignments. The relationship points into the direction expected by prior research but fails to show significance. Nominally elected legislators are not more likely to receive assignments to district committees if we include our localness measures in the model. We will further explore this issue below by looking into effect sizes.

Table 4 shows an effect of our second variable on electoral context, namely the margin of victory or defeat. However, this effect is statistically significant only at the 0.1 level and also points into the direction that is opposite to the standard expectation: Marginal legislators are less likely to be assigned to district committees. This further supports our argument on the crucial role of local legislators as

instruments for parties to boast list votes compared to district winners or competitive district contenders.

Our findings hold if we control for additional variables, especially legislators' seniority. This variable produces the expected negative effect on our dependent variable. The likelihood to be assigned to a district committee decreases with increasing seniority. Senior members seem to be of special value for parties as policy experts or caretakers of the institution and thus are less likely to be assigned to district committees. This effect is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, most importantly, this does not contradict the positive effects of our two localness variables on the likelihood to be assigned to district committees.

In order to explore the size of the demonstrated effects in our model we estimate average marginal effects. Our strategy to get an average marginal effect is as follows. Based on our model, we calculate the difference of two predicted probabilities for each observation in the estimation sample when assuming our key variable of interest, say mode of election, changes from the maximum, that is "1" (*nominally elected*), to the minimum, that is "0" (*elected through party list*). For all other variables, we use the values actually taken on by each observation in our data (aka "observed value approach"). After calculating the marginal effect for each observation in this way, we compute the average across those marginal effects to obtain the average marginal effect in the sample. In order to account for the uncertainty in our model predictions, we draw simulations from a multivariate normal distribution with a mean vector represented by the estimated coefficients of our logit model and a covariance matrix represented by the estimated variance-covariance matrix of our logit model (King et al., 2000). The estimated size of the average marginal effects together with their 95% confidence interval is provided in Figure 1. The dashed line indicates an effect size of 0, that is, as long as the confidence intervals intersect with this line, we cannot consider the estimated effect as systematically different from zero.

Figure 1 demonstrates on the one hand the small to zero effects of the two variables related to the electoral system level. This further stresses that standard explanations on the role of electoral incentives for the personnel strategies of political parties cannot be verified in our analysis. Particularly, the mode of election makes almost no difference for legislators' committee assignments. In contrast, we observe a very different picture when evaluating the average effect of prior experiences in local electoral politics. Legislators who previously held multiple elected offices at the local level, that is, that score "2" on our related index, are in our sample on average about 15% points more likely than legislators who lack any local political ties to get assigned to a district committee. This represents the strongest effect that we find in our model. It indicates that localness is highly instrumental in motivating legislators to pursue district committees and also in making political parties to consider them.

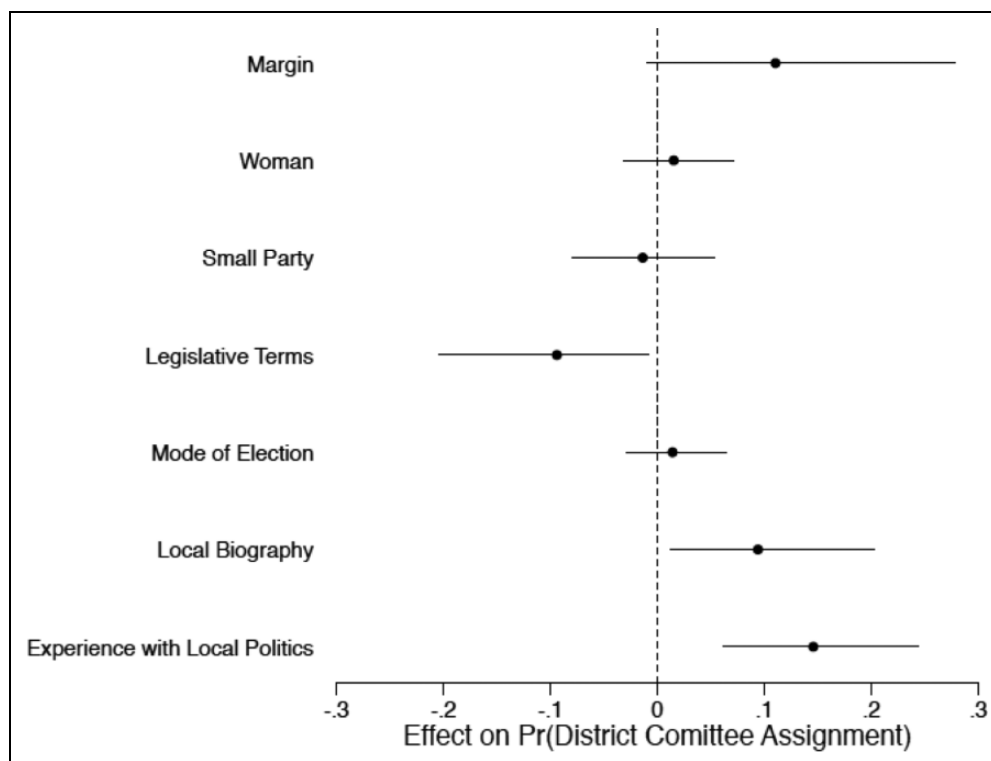


Figure 1. Average marginal effects of predictors of district committee assignment.

It is important to note the difference in effect size between political and biographical localness. The second variable has weaker effects on parties' committee assignment choices. Legislators with strong biographical roots to the district they ran in, that is, that score "3" on our related index, are in our sample on average only about 10% points more likely than legislators who lack any biographical ties to their districts to get assigned to a district committee. However, even this effect is notable and statistically significant. It further corroborates our key argument that in partisan settings under Germany's mixed proportional system, parties perceive locally well-connected legislators as effective instruments to cater to geographic constituents.

Conclusion

Our analysis stresses the role of legislators' localness for their committee assignments independent from the mode of election in Germany's mixed electoral system. We are able to demonstrate that legislators with strong political and biographical ties to their district are more likely to be assigned to district committees that allow to please the local constituents. Furthermore, we show that political ties take center stage compared to biographical ties and produce a larger effect on our independent variable. Strikingly, we are not able to find any effect of legislators' modes of election. Nominally elected legislators are not more likely to be assigned to district committees compared to legislators elected via party lists. This finding

is robust across the five legislative terms that we look at ranging from 1983 to 2009.

We interpret our main finding as the result of a personnel strategy by which German parties deploy their legislators to posts that would help their vote-seeking goals best under mixed proportional rules. In Germany's MMP system, seats are predominantly won by how well parties do at the national level in obtaining party-list votes. However, parties also run candidates in single-seat district contests, comprising about half of the seats. Our argument is that parties deploy local legislators to district committees to exploit their above average potential to mobilize extra votes in the nominal tier since these are expected to spill over into—or contaminate—the list tier. Assigning those legislators to district committees should be designed to motivate them accordingly and to facilitate their activities in this regard. German parties are most interested in obtaining contamination benefits on their list vote by helping candidates in the nominal tier with a visible potential to further this interest.

Despite our focus on the German case, we consider any candidate-centered but nevertheless proportional electoral system susceptible to the politics of committee assignments outlined in this article. Electoral systems that allow voters to take choices on candidates provide incentives to political parties to take advantage of individual level talent and to target geographic constituents on the basis of locally well-connected legislators. These legislators link parties with local political contexts to better mobilize voters. In times

of electoral de-alignment in Western European democracies, these resources might be of increased importance.

Electoral incentives are not the only factors that might affect committee assignments. Studying them in isolation is nevertheless important. The distinct strategies that result from their influences should have larger systemic implications, for instance, with regard to intraparty politics. If parties assign local legislators to district committees, the likelihood of using the pork barrel increases significantly, as legislators who sit on district-focused committees use their influence at all levels of the legislative process to press for particularistic benefits. These demands and activities constitute a paradox parties might be faced with. Under MMP rules, parties act under special incentives to utilize legislators with local roots to cater to geographic constituents. This, however, might result in a type of independence that could raise challenges to party unity and that might increase the need for active leadership interventions. Because of these crucial ramifications for intraparty politics, it is most important to keep a close eye on committee assignment processes and the impact of electoral incentives on this process.

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Notes

1. The Christian Democratic Union and the Christian Social Union form one party group in the German Bundestag.

Each party, however, receives committee chairs depending on its overall share of seats and independently allocates these seats among its members in coordination with its “sister party group.”

2. The only exception here is when a given district victory results in an additional seat beyond the party’s entitled share, based on list votes. This results in the so-called surplus seats (*Überhangmandate*), which we address below.
3. The number of surplus seats increased from an average of 2.75 between 1949 and 1990 to 16 in 1994. It went down to five seats in 2002 but increased again to 16 seats in the Bundestag elected in 2005. Declining turnout and the increasing fragmentation of the German party system are major and lasting factors behind this development (Behnke, 2007). The increasing relevance of surplus mandates should provide incentives to German parties to not ignore the nominal vote and to support “real winners” rather than any “locals” who might help the party to boast list votes. We, however, argue that given the relatively recent increase in the number of surplus mandates, this has not been a major factor in the past. The last Kohl Government (1994–1998) provides the only example so far for a decisive impact of surplus seats, since it rested on a parliamentary majority that would not have existed without surplus seats.
4. For a more differentiated version of this argument distinguishing between three different mechanisms of contamination, see Ferrara et al. (2005: 68–69).
5. In this case, the direction of spillover goes both ways. PR competition spills over into the nominal tier on the one hand because the latter is dominated by the expectations of political parties aiming to increase a proportional share of their vote. The vote choices of voters spill over from the nominal tier to the list tier because increases in the share of the nominal vote translate into gains in the list vote.
6. Note that under an MMM system, candidates with local appeal would be desirable for parties even if there were no spillover (contamination). Under MMM, every additional seat that a party wins in the nominal tier increments its overall seat total. However, under MMP systems as in Germany, the logic for localness would be almost nonexistent without an expectation of spillover effects, because the compensation mechanism of MMP means that any additional nominal-tier seat won is simply one less list seat won (excluding districts that generate overhangs, which we address below).
7. The data rely on three sources. All the biographical variables are hand-coded based on the information provided in the respective *Kürschner’s Volkshandbuch* of each legislative period. Given that this information is based on self-reports by legislators that sometimes vary across legislative periods, we coded a certain characteristic as present for all legislative periods if it is mentioned at least once. Thus, if a legislator reports that she was mayor of a city in the district in one legislative period but not in others, we still code this legislator as mayor of a city in the district at some point of his or her career. We assume that legislators might

sometimes either forget or resent personal information strategically. But if it is reported once, it belongs to the official biographical record of the legislator. The committee variables were coded on the basis of the study by Vierhaus and Herbst (2002) and internal documents provided by the German Bundestag (*Parlamentsarchiv*). All other variables are based on the data provided by the Office of Federal Returning Officer.

8. In order to code whether those localness indicators apply to a particular legislator, we hand-coded the respective city if mentioned in which the legislator went to school, was born, as well as the name of the community the legislator was previously mayor or member of the local parliament. We then used official classification information from the Federal Statistical Office to be able to map every community into one electoral district.
9. We mapped the following specific committees as district committees: Defense; Food, Agriculture and Forestry (1983, 1987, 1998); Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (2005, 2009); Transportation (1983, 1987); Transportation, Building, and Housing (1998, 2005); Transportation, Building, Urban Affairs (2009); Regional Planning, Building, Urban Development (1983, 1987).
10. We also replicate our analysis documented below with a nominal dependent variable using three categories, hence estimating a multinomial logit model. The substantive conclusions are the same.
11. This decision is not a crucial one as our results stay substantively the same even if we include alternate members into the analysis.
12. We operationally define “initial assignment” as an interval of 60 days after the first session of a newly elected Bundestag rather than a particular day. This is a consequence of observable differences across legislative terms in the time span that it takes to organize the Bundestag contingent, for example, upon the length of coalition negotiations but also upon differences across parties to name their committee members and thus differences across committees to convene for their first session.
13. We further test how consequential this assumption is for our results. Again, our results remain robust even when we include all other committee assignments that occur within a respective legislative period.
14. With this modeling choice, we reduce our estimation sample to legislators who compete in a district. Hence, we omit pure list candidates. However, the latter type is extremely rare in the Bundestag and the number of cases we lose is, thus, small.
15. As always, there are exceptions to this rule: In 2005, the Greens won one district in Berlin and the Left won three districts in Berlin.
16. This choice obviously is not neutral to our model and also to possible outcomes. By including small parties, we introduce a set of actors into the analysis that has no choice to either assign nominally elected legislators or party list legislators to district committees. There just are almost no nominal

legislators in small party groups. Consequently, we potentially downplay the role of the electoral context in explaining the strategic behavior of parties. However, at the same time, we allow to better gauge the role of localness in committee assignments and our related assumption that parties do not differ in that regard despite differences in size. We checked the results reported below and found only minor differences between analyses that included or excluded small parties. In particular, there is no systematic effect of mode of election within the sample of large-party legislators from CDU/CSU and SPD.

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