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EXPLAINING COOPERATION OVER CONSTITUENCY CASEWORK BETWEEN MEMBERS OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PARLIAMENTS

1. Introduction

‘People still come to me in large numbers with various problems’, long-serving Labour MP Ann Clwyd points out. ‘Sometimes these are problems that ought to be dealt with by the Councillors or the AM. It is difficult to turn a constituent away, although I do try to channel them to the appropriate elected member’ (Bratberg, 2011, p. 470). Dealing with the problems of individual constituents has long been a central component of political representation (Eulau and Karpis, 1977). Individuals and groups across the globe seek assistance in their dealings with public agencies, and elected representatives across a wide variety of cultures and institutions try to help them (Loewenberg and Patterson, 1988; Cain *et al.*, 1987). Representatives devote a significant and increasing share of their time to constituency casework (Norton and Wood, 1993). But little is known about how representatives respond to misdirected constituent inquiries in the context of multiple levels of elected government, even though legislative and/or executive competences for public policy are divided or shared between regional and central governments in a growing number of democracies.

Constituents frequently do not know who deals with what and misdirect their queries. In a recent survey MPs in the UK Parliament estimated that more than half of the queries they receive are better dealt with by the local council or the devolved assemblies (Russell and Bradbury, 2007). Queries on matters outside their jurisdiction present elected representatives with something of

a puzzle: they may choose to take them up regardless, or to redirect them to the elected representative at the appropriate level of government. The choices they make have important consequences for the extent to which constituency service in multi-level democracies is characterised by cooperation between national and regional legislators. Unveiling patterns of cooperation across levels of government not only furthers our understanding of how political representation operates in multi-level democracies in a way which has gone unappreciated in previous research; it may also matter to our evaluation of the quality of constituency service. For while provision by multiple representatives may enhance voter choice and stimulate competition between them that is beneficial to service in some cases, previous researchers have raised concerns. Russell and Bradbury (2007: 114) noted that ‘there is a danger of poor accountability if members pursue cases outwith the competence of their own institution, and citizens lose sight of who is accountable for what’. Equally, it is questionable how expert representatives will be in dealing with misdirected inquiries, how well they will know the institutions they are contacting on behalf of their constituents, and how receptive those institutions will be in responding to them. This suggests that multi-level democracies may allow for a more informed response only if members of national and regional parliaments each respond to queries within their jurisdiction and redirect queries outside their jurisdiction.

Previous research in Germany, Canada and the UK has suggested that it is uncommon for elected representatives to redirect misdirected constituent inquiries, in particular to representatives of other parties (Patzelt, 2007; Franks, 2007; Russell and Bradbury, 2007). Generally, however, the lack of a theoretical prospectus for the study of cooperation over redirecting misdirected inquiries and the dearth of systematically collected comparative data have hampered research in this field. As a result we know little about how and why the extent of cross-level cooperation over constituent casework varies. This article seeks to develop the

comparative study of cooperation over redirecting constituent inquiries in multi-level democracies both theoretically and empirically.

The argument proceeds in five steps. Section two develops a theoretical framework for explaining cross-level redirection of misdirected constituent inquiries, combining demand and supply factors. Section three presents the data collected as part of the PARTIREP cross-national survey of national and regional legislators in seven European multi-level democracies (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). We find that patterns of competition are more common than patterns of cooperation, in particular patterns of cross-party cooperation – though cooperation is not as uncommon as previously anticipated. The key findings presented in section four demonstrate how demand and supply factors shape these patterns of cooperation over redirection as representatives make rational choices whether or not to redirect misdirected inquiries. Section five further theorises and investigates to whom inquiries are redirected and why to representatives of particular parties. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for the study of political representation in multi-level democracies in general and legislative behaviour in particular.

2. Theorising cooperation over redirecting misdirected constituent inquiries

Though their roles are mostly *preference* roles, the role of ‘good constituency member’ is one that many representatives take up and one that many constituents respond to (Searing, 1994; Norris, 1997). As a result representatives across a wide range of institutions spend a sizeable part of their time dealing with constituents’ inquiries. Good constituency members make themselves available to individuals and groups requesting assistance. They organise frequent

surgeries and advertise their services, soliciting further cases and seeking to establish a sound record of responsiveness (Cain *et al.*, 1987). They do so for electoral reasons as service responsiveness of this kind signals their commitment to constituents' day-to-day concerns, builds trust, and wins them electoral support (Eulau and Karps, 1977; Heitshusen *et al.*, 2005; but see Norris, 1997). They also provide constituency service for non-electoral reasons, including a sense of duty that it is part of their representative responsibilities, and out of a sense of worth in being able to help constituents (Searing, 1994). Many representatives also recognise that it is through taking up constituents' problems that they learn first-hand where defects in existing legislation and public policy might lie (Norton and Wood, 1993).

However, as an increasing number of polities have developed into multi-level democracies citizens frequently direct their inquiries for help to elected representatives irrespective of whether their level of government is responsible for the policy or service which is the subject of the inquiry (Russell and Bradbury, 2007). This raises the question of how representatives across different levels of government will respond. What we currently know suggests that if they do not forward misdirected inquiries they will in some way deal with them themselves. There is the third option of discarding misdirected inquiries altogether but first, it is questionable whether representatives would be prepared to explicitly admit it, and second in any case it is not likely given what we know about representatives' electoral and duty-bound motivations for dealing with casework. One existing single country study of constituency representation across multi-level jurisdictions suggests that representatives either conduct misdirected inquiries themselves or forward and never discard (Bradbury and Mitchell, 2007: 139-142). Equally, Loewen and MacKenzie's experimental study (2012) found no differences in response rate between inquiries within and outside representatives' jurisdiction. While representatives no doubt do bin some inquiries we assume there will be no systematic pattern

to this. Hence, we address the extent to which representatives direct misdirected inquiries to the appropriate representative at the other level of government or effectively compete by responding to such inquiries themselves.

Previous studies on modes of interaction in the legislative arena have concentrated on executive-legislative relations (King, 1976; Andeweg and Nijzink, 1995; Granovetter, 1973; Fowler, 2006), contrasting for instance the *non-party mode*, between the cabinet and MPs representing Parliament; the *intra-party mode*, between MPs of the same party; and the *cross-party mode*, between backbenchers of different parties representing shared sectoral interests (King, 1976). But multi-level democracies introduce new modes of interaction we know little about across different levels of government, and which may vary as parties and party systems differ between national and regional levels of government, as well as between regions (Deschouwer, 2003).

The article starts from the proposition that patterns of cooperation and competition over misdirected casework inquiries are shaped by a combination of demand and supply factors. First, in considering demand we need to address the fact that elected representatives face an uneven burden in terms of caseload (Johannes, 1980). Their availability may boost demand (Cain *et al.*, 1987), but irrespective of their efforts some elected representatives are contacted by hundreds of constituents per week, whereas others are hardly contacted at all. Previous studies have gauged demand for service responsiveness on the basis of district population. Because constituents' inquiries are frequently about social welfare benefits, housing, and immigration (Young *et al.*, 2005), greater demand has also been expected in districts that have more need of them, where there is lower income, higher unemployment, and larger non-white populations (Johannes, 1980; Freeman and Richardson, 1996; Norris, 1997). However,

irrespective of the origins of demand, it may be expected that the higher it is the more representatives may be willing to reduce their workload by focusing on inquiries relating to their own level of government and redirecting misdirected inquiries. The more inquiries elected representatives receive each week, the more they will forward misdirected inquiries to members of the legislature concerned. If this proves to be the case it also helps to confirm the assumption that representatives make a binary choice between forwarding and dealing with misdirected inquiries themselves; if forwarding actually drops as workload increases we would have to reconsider whether this reveals discarding inquiries to be a significant form of behaviour related to casework overload.

Hypothesis 1: The greater the demand representatives face, the more they will forward misdirected inquiries to a representative at the other level of government

Secondly and perhaps more importantly, patterns of cooperation and competition emerge as a result of supply side factors as shaped by the structure of opportunities. This approach derives from recruitment and legislative career studies where the structure of opportunities denotes the offices open to ambitious politicians and the rules and customs that define the opportunities for winning them (Schlesinger, 1994). In particular, the structure of opportunities is determined by positions' *availability*, *accessibility*, and *attractiveness* (Borchert, 2011). In a similar vein, we may theorise that the availability, accessibility, and attractiveness of contact points for forwarding misdirected inquiries shapes cooperation over casework. First, the availability of contact points denotes the number of targets to which elected representatives may forward misdirected inquiries. Second, the accessibility of contact points highlights the fact that some contact points are easier to connect to than others. Finally, the idea of attractiveness introduces the point that elected representatives may benefit more from forwarding misdirected inquiries

to some contact points than to others. While the availability of points of contact can be objectively observed, the accessibility and attractiveness of contact points may be expected to differ depending on the position and preferences of different elected representatives (Borchert, 2011, p. 123).

From this prospectus we may derive a number of propositions. First, the likelihood of cooperation over casework is shaped by the number of contact points that are available to elected representatives for forwarding misdirected inquiries. It is important though to distinguish between points of contact within the party and between parties. Previous research in the UK noted that forwarding inquiries is much more common among MPs of the same party (Russell and Bradbury, 2007). This is consistent with broader research that suggests that party organisations have adapted to the multi-level nature of modern democracies (Deschouwer, 2003; Hopkin, 2003; Fabre, 2008). This suggests that cross-level cooperation in one's own party may be expected to increase with the number of contact points in the party, i.e. the number of co-partisans elected to the regional legislature in the case of a national legislator; and the number of co-partisans elected to the national legislature in the case of a regional legislator. Meanwhile, the propensity of representatives to pass on casework requests to members of other parties is expected to decrease as the number of contact points in one's own party grows. Only in the absence of co-partisans do representatives turn to members of other parties.

Hypothesis 2a: Representatives are more likely to forward misdirected inquiries to members of their own party as the number of contact points in their own party increases.

Hypothesis 2b: Representatives are more likely to forward misdirected inquiries to members of other parties as the number of contact points in their own party decreases.

Second, in addressing the accessibility of contact points we need to account for the importance of the structure of multi-level government itself. The structure of opportunities approach suggests that the scope of shared rule in multi-level democracies will be key in affecting patterns of cooperation and competition over misdirected inquiries across different levels of government. Shared rule was first identified by Elazar (1987) and measures the extent of shared powers over law making, executive control, fiscal control, and constitutional reform (Hooghe *et al.*, 2008). When jurisdictions are blurred and responsibilities shared contacts across different levels of government are institutionalised and cooperation more frequent. Therefore, we expect regional and national legislators' incentives to pass on misdirected inquiries to grow stronger when jurisdictions are shared and contact points more accessible. Though we cannot rule out entirely the alternative intuition that elected representatives only pass on inquiries that are indisputably outside their jurisdiction and that, as a result, both members of the regional and national parliaments will take up the issue when jurisdictions are shared, we believe it will be outweighed by the increased accessibility shared rule offers.

Hypothesis 3a: Representatives are more likely to forward misdirected inquiries to co-partisans or members of other parties as the scope of shared rule grows.

In addition, the accessibility of contact points reflects elected representatives' prior career trajectories. Not only are there more political offices to run for in multi-level democracies than in unitary states but career patterns are also more diverse (see Borchert and Stolz, 2011). Some have longstanding careers in one institution; others doggedly move up the hierarchy of offices from local to regional and then national levels of government; whilst a minority move backwards and forwards between different levels of government (Borchert, 2011). Such career trajectories are important because we expect that representatives who have moved to another

level of government are likely to have retained at least some good contacts, including over casework, among their former colleagues, making cooperation with them more likely.

Hypothesis 3b: **Representatives** who have previously served at the other level of government are more likely to forward misdirected inquiries than those **representatives** who have not.

Finally, cooperation over constituent casework is also expected to be constrained by its attractiveness or by what representatives stand to gain from cooperation over redirecting constituent inquiries. Elected representatives famously strive for policy, office, and votes (Strøm, 1997). Elected representatives will choose to cooperate only when doing so helps them obtain their goals, or at least does not prevent them from obtaining them. This leads to three propositions. First, we expect that future ambitions not unlike prior career trajectories will shape cooperation over casework. For example, Smith (2003) found that US state legislators frequently widen their focus of representation when their ambition is to win a seat in Congress. In anticipation of serving in another legislature elected representatives will seek to establish contacts in their future workplace, including over casework (see Schlesinger, 1994).

Hypothesis 4a: **Representatives** who seek to serve at the other level of government are more likely to forward misdirected inquiries than those **representatives** who do not.

Second, and more importantly, it has long been established that a reputation of service responsiveness wins votes (Cain *et al.*, 1987; Norton and Wood, 1993). By the same reasoning **representatives** most in need of electoral support will not cooperate over redirecting casework, but will rather want to claim credit for serving constituents wherever possible (Buck and Cain, 1990). This notion of personalised electoral competition is shaped by the electoral institutions.

This is precisely because the incentives generated by single member plurality differ from those fuelled by proportional representation systems. In single-seat districts elected representatives bear the sole responsibility of representing the district, whereas in proportional representation systems the responsibility is shared by many representatives. With each additional representative the costs for voters of monitoring their actions increases, thereby encouraging shirking and free-riding on the part of representatives (Bowler and Farrell, 1993). Recent research has therefore argued in favour of substituting the simple dichotomy between majoritarian and PR electoral formulae with a focus on district magnitude, a more fine-grained indicator of electoral incentives. Competition is candidate-centred in small districts and becomes more party-centred as district magnitude grows (Wessels, 1999). The time that representatives spend doing casework has been demonstrated to decrease in linear fashion as districts grow in magnitude (André and Depauw, 2013), a finding confirmed for both national and regional representatives serving in multi-level democracies (André *et al.*, 2014). In a similar vein, representatives' propensity to redirect casework inquiries can be expected to become more common as district magnitude grows and the electoral competition they face becomes less personalised. At the same time, though, what motivates and energises representatives to seek such personalised electoral support is their vulnerability to defeat (Norris, 1997). Those representatives facing the most competitive constituency contests are least likely to pass up opportunities for claiming credit over service responsiveness; and hence they will not cooperate in redirecting misdirected constituent inquiries. However modest the bonus to be had over casework, it can make the difference between (re)election and defeat (Norton and Wood, 1993).

Hypothesis 4b: Representatives are more likely to forward misdirected inquiries as district magnitude grows.

Hypothesis 4c: **Representatives** are more likely to forward misdirected inquiries as constituency contests grow less competitive.

Overall, how representatives in multi-level democracies choose to deal with misdirected constituent inquiries has plausibly been related to a combination of demand factors and the structure of opportunities, in particular the availability, accessibility, and attractiveness of points of contact. We now turn to the data that underpins our analysis.

3. Data

Data on cooperation between national and regional **legislators** over forwarding misdirected inquiries have been collected as part of the cross-national PARTIREP survey hosted by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The PARTIREP project surveyed both regional and national **legislators** in seven advanced industrial democracies across Europe that – either through federal design or as a result of institutional reform – constitute multi-level arenas of representation. They comprise Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The seven differ in particular with regard to shared rule characteristics, as measured by Hooghe et al. (2008). The scope of shared rule ranges from low (Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom) to high (Austria, Belgium, and Germany). In Austria, Belgium, and Switzerland all regional legislatures were included.¹ The selection of regional legislatures, reported in table 1, balances regions from the east and the west in Germany; from the north and the south in Italy; and includes autonomous regions in Spain with various regionalist traditions. The regional selection further takes into account variation in size and party control. Asymmetries in regionalisation result in one more special case: the United Kingdom. MPs representing constituencies in

Scotland and Wales operate in multi-level democracies in a manner that those representing constituencies in England do not.

In the PARTIREP survey national legislators were asked, ‘Are there members of your regional parliament – in your party and of other parties – with whom you have very good contacts? And have they been helpful politically to pass on individual voters’ requests for help on matters that are decided in the regional parliament?’ The same questions were then asked of regional legislators regarding national legislators. The overall response rate was about one in four, totalling 1,737 responses.² As such the overall response rate is comparable to projects of a similar scope (see Bailer 2014).³ The exact number of responses in each country can be found in table 1.

Cross-national and partisan differences in response rate make the question of representativeness of critical importance. However, Duncan indices of dissimilarity are within an acceptable margin (Deschouwer *et al.*, 2014). Deviations from the population amount to no more than 7 per cent with regard to the level of government, 4 per cent with regard to ruling and opposition parties, and 2 per cent with regard to gender. Moreover, differences in responses reflect variations in the constitutional structure of the countries, as well as the choice to focus on a limited number of regions in Germany, Italy, and Spain. More caution might be advisable for those countries with low return rates, in particular Italy and the United Kingdom. Partisan differences in response rates are below 10 per cent in Austria, Belgium, and Germany and below 16 per cent in Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Deviations are typically due to the accumulation of differences across a large number of parties; in Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom deviations among the two main parties account for no more than 10 per cent.

Therefore weights were added by parliamentary party group in each parliament and data from each national/regional level were given an equal weight of 100 in the overall data set.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 further reports for each country in the selection the proportion of national and regional **legislators** who forward misdirected inquiries either to a co-partisan, or to members of other parties. As expected, misdirected inquiries are forwarded more frequently to a co-partisan than to members of other parties, but the extent of co-partisan forwarding is noteworthy. 62.1 per cent of **representatives** report forwarding inquiries to **representatives** in their own party at the other level of government. This high number adds further evidence to the view that party organisations have adapted to the multi-level nature of many modern democracies (Hopkin, 2003; Fabre, 2008) and have typically sought to manage competition and encourage cooperation over casework among their **representatives** across levels of government. By contrast, only 12.8 per cent of representatives pass on misdirected requests to members of other parties. Cross-party cross-level cooperation over casework is particularly uncommon in Italy and the United Kingdom, thereby corroborating earlier research (Russell and Bradbury, 2007) and at the same time demonstrating the United Kingdom to be distinctive. On the other hand, cross-party cross-level cooperation is more common in Austria and Germany. There is no clear pattern of either regional or national **legislators** forwarding inquiries to each other more frequently. Individual differences outweigh differences between countries and levels of government. Overall, because cross-level cooperation over redirecting constituent inquiries between representatives within parties is about five times more common than cooperation with members of other parties, we prefer to estimate the likelihood of both separately.

4. Explaining cooperation over redirecting constituent inquiries

Whether, or not, national and regional legislators forward misdirected inquiries either to a co-partisan or alternatively to members of other parties are dichotomous indicators best modelled using logistic regression. To take into account the hierarchical nature of the data, two-level random intercept models will be used, or we risk underestimating the standard errors.⁴ To improve the parameter estimates penalized quasi-likelihood (PQL) iterative estimation with a second-order linearization is used. The null models demonstrate that the intra-class correlations are modest but significant. Key explanatory variables include representatives' caseload (demand) and factors that tap into the structure of opportunities, namely the availability, accessibility, and attractiveness of points of contact. The operationalisation, and summary statistics, of the independent variables are presented in the appendix. Table 2 reports the parameter estimates and measures of model fit.

[Table 2 about here]

Representatives across the seven multi-level democracies face important differences in caseload that shape their propensity to forward misdirected inquiries. Constituent inquiries are most numerous in Spain and the United Kingdom. The average British or Spanish legislator deals with 35 to 40 requests for assistance per week, whereas Swiss legislators hardly get any. Italian and Belgian legislators deal with 16 to 18 inquiries per week, while Austrian and German legislators get about half as many. The relative sizes of caseloads appear to correspond to what we might have expected from the previous comparative literature on constituency service (see Norton and Wood, 1993; Patzelt, 2007; Lundberg, 2007). However, individual-level differences

outweigh country-level differences. In any single country some representatives report receiving over 50 inquiries per week, whereas others do not receive any. We did indeed find that this uneven burden generates incentives for representatives to forward misdirected inquiries, in particular for those facing hefty caseloads. Table 2 firmly supports hypothesis 1. As caseloads grow, regional and national legislators increasingly seek to offload at least part of the work by passing on misdirected inquiries. The data does not support an alternative idea that representatives' propensity to redirect cases to co-partisans and non-partisans alike is a curvilinear function of their caseload, which might suggest that representatives start to discard inquiries as workload increases. They first and foremost pass on misdirected inquiries to members of their own party at the other level of government. The likelihood of redirecting inquiries to a co-partisan increases by 8 per cent when the number of casework requests increases from 2 to 20 – i.e. the interquartile difference.⁵ However, caseloads do not affect cross-party cooperation in the same manner – only if a co-partisan is not available do representatives forward misdirected inquiries to another party. The interquartile difference (from 2 to 20 inquiries per week) increases the likelihood of forwarding inquiries to members of other parties merely by 2 per cent. The latter effect is smaller in size and significant only at the 90 per cent level.

More importantly, patterns of cooperation, and competition, across different levels of government are shaped by the institutionally defined structure of opportunities. First, table 2 underlines the importance of the availability of contact points. The more points of contact that are available, the more frequently misdirected inquiries are forwarded. In particular the more contact points representatives have in their own party, the more likely they are to forward misdirected inquiries to a co-partisan and the less likely they are to pass on inquiries to members of other parties, confirming hypotheses 2a and b. Increasing the number of contact points from

1 to 20 raises the likelihood of cross-level cooperation over casework among co-partisans by 15 per cent. By contrast, a similar increase in the number of contact points in **representatives'** own party reduces the likelihood that inquiries are forwarded to members of other parties by 6 per cent. The more contact points **representatives** have in their own party at the other level of government, the less likely they are to pass on misdirected inquiries to members of other parties.

Second, the data suggest that the more accessible contact points are the more likely **representatives** are to forward inquiries to co-partisans or members of other parties. On the one hand, where shared rule characterizes the structure of government, cooperation across different levels of government is more common – hard-wiring particular connections by their very frequency. As a result misdirected inquiries are forwarded more frequently, confirming hypothesis 2. The alternative suggestion was that only inquiries that are indisputably outside **representatives'** jurisdictions will be forwarded, but the evidence does not support this contention. Shared rule increases the probability of forwarding constituent queries both to a co-partisan (model 1) and to members of other parties (model 2). The effects are both statistically significant and substantively large. In conditions of maximum shared rule the predicted probability of a **representative** forwarding misdirected inquiries to a co-partisan is 20 per cent greater than in conditions of minimum shared rule; the predicted probability of a **representative** forwarding inquiries to members of other parties 10 per cent greater.

At the same time, prior career trajectories also affect the accessibility of cooperation among former colleagues. However, while hypothesis 3a is strongly confirmed hypothesis 3b is only partially confirmed. National **legislators** who previously served in the regional legislature retain good contacts with at least some of their former colleagues in other parties. But intriguingly while they forward misdirected inquiries to members of other parties, more often than national

legislators who have not served in the regional legislature, they do not forward misdirected constituent inquiries more often to co-partisans. Equally, regional legislators who previously served in the national legislature – though they are fewer – similarly cooperate more often over casework with members of other parties than regional legislators who haven't, but do not cooperate more often with co-partisans. Previous experience markedly increases the likelihood of redirecting casework requests to members of another party by 4 per cent, but does not add to explaining intra-party cooperation. It could be argued, of course, that elected representatives who have served at the other level of government have become expert in dealing with inquiries relevant to it and therefore are inclined to conduct misdirected inquiries themselves. But the data certainly do not support this idea of a negative relation.

Third, we can confirm that the attractiveness of contact points also shapes cross-level cooperation. Depending on at which level of government representatives want to be at some point in the future, cross-level cooperation is more or less attractive to them. Regional legislators who seek to serve in the national legislature in the future are more likely to forward misdirected inquiries to their future colleagues in other parties, as are national legislators who seek to serve in one of the regional legislatures. The likelihood of forwarding misdirected requests is 8 per cent higher for representatives who see their future at the other level of government than for those who do not. However, again hypothesis 4a is only partially corroborated. We have already established that representatives know co-partisans quite well, even at the other level of government; and know to whom to forward misdirected inquiries. They frequently meet at party conferences and local party meetings. While prior career trajectories and future ambitions may shape cross-party cooperation in multi-level democracies, they have no apparent additional effect on passing on misdirected inquiries to a co-partisan.

Finally, the attractiveness of cooperation over casework is shaped by representatives' electoral reasons for engaging in constituency service. However, the evidence is mixed. On the one hand, we do not find support for hypothesis 4b, that is, for patterns of cooperation to be shaped by the candidate-centred or party-centred nature of electoral competition. The probability of cross-level cooperation over casework neither increases, nor decreases as a result of district magnitude.⁶ On the other hand, electoral competitiveness does affect individual representatives' decision to forward misdirected inquiries, confirming hypothesis 4c. The more competitive the race an individual representative is in, the more reluctant he or she is to forward misdirected inquiries to members of other parties, though not to a co-partisan. Representatives who feel that their re-election can go either way are 7 per cent less likely to cooperate over casework with colleagues from rival parties. They prefer to claim sole credit for their service responsiveness when the electoral bonus to be had from constituency service can make the difference between re-election and defeat.

5. Explaining with whom cooperation over misdirected constituent inquiries occurs

We know that constituent inquiries are infrequently redirected to members of other parties at the other level of government but if they are, to which party are they forwarded? In order to address the question, a stacked data matrix is used. In this data matrix each representative has multiple lines, one for each party in the legislature to which (s)he may, or may not, pass on inquiries. Needless to say, only representatives who pass on misdirected inquiries to members of other parties are included. Looking at the (in)frequency of cross-level cooperation in the seven multi-level democracies five points are particularly striking. First, cross-level cooperation over casework occurs between the main party families, between liberals, social

democrats, and Christian democrats. Not only are these parties represented in most of the legislatures in the selection, they also cooperate in a higher proportion of the cases where they are represented. Figure 1 illustrates that social democrats, for instance, forward inquiries to Christian democrats in up to 60.5 per cent of the cases where both parties are represented in the legislature (if they forward inquiries at all). Christian democrats cooperate with liberals in 51.4 per cent of cases where both parties are represented and with social democrats in 36.3 per cent. Second, Conservatives are represented in but a handful of legislatures, but where they are, they tend to cooperate with social democrats, Christian democrats, and liberals. Third, Greens cooperate most often with social democrats and Christian democrats – although they are few in number and caution is advisable in interpreting these findings. Fourth, regionalist parties are a diverse family, but they more often forward misdirected inquiries to social democrats and Christian democrats. Fifth, few representatives cooperate with the far right outside Austria, where the FPÖ has not been side-lined as other far right parties have been.

[Figure 1 about here]

In seeking to explain the party to which misdirected inquiries are forwarded, we argue that the structure of opportunities again is key. The availability, accessibility, and attractiveness of particular points of contact – that is, representatives in parties – govern the choices representatives make. First, it may be expected that the more representatives there are available in a particular party, the more likely representatives are to forward inquiries to this party. In other words, the larger a party is, the more members there are to forward inquiries to and the more likely representatives of other parties are to forward inquiries to any one of them.

Hypothesis 5: The likelihood that representatives forward misdirected inquiries to members of a particular party increases with that party's size.

Second, some points of contact are more accessible than others. In particular, ideological proximity leads to cooperation between the two parties being hard-wired into their daily operations. Social networks of any kind, including friendship, work, or marriage, occur at a higher rate among 'similar' people in terms of age, education, or race (for an overview of this homophily principle see McPherson *et al.*, 2001). Even if inquiries from constituents are frequently devoid of ideology (see Norton and Wood, 1993), good contacts will be formed among elected representatives who share an outlook on society, its main challenges, and the way ahead. Faced with misdirected inquiries, they will choose to forward them to a party that is ideologically close. For instance, previous research has demonstrated the importance of ideological proximity to bill co-sponsorship (Talbert and Potoski, 2002; Crisp *et al.*, 2004). But even over casework that is non-ideological, cooperation is more likely among representatives of adjacent parties: representatives will be reluctant to pass on queries from particular subconstituencies to members of other parties that may look unfavourably on them. They are equally reluctant to present bitter adversaries with an electoral bonus however uncertain. In this sense, ideological proximity can be understood to affect not only the accessibility of points of contact, but also to translate into their attractiveness.

Hypothesis 6: The likelihood that representatives forward misdirected inquiries to members of a particular party increases the closer that party is in ideological space.

Finally, cooperation over forwarding inquiries to representatives from one party may be more attractive than cooperation with another. A key consideration is asymmetries in government

participation in multi-level democracies – parties that govern in one region, but not at the central level, for instance – which result in differences in access to government. Government access is frequently critical to the redress of grievances (see Ashworth and Mesquita, 2006; Norton, 1982). For this reason, **representatives** –in particular those whose own party is in opposition– are likely to choose to forward misdirected inquiries to ruling parties (at the relevant level of government) and obtain for their constituents enhanced access at the other level of government. By contrast, there are parties, in particular on the far right, with whom cooperation may be costly for **representatives** (for a similar argument with regard to coalition formation, see Strøm *et al.*, 1994). **Representatives** can be expected not to forward inquiries to **representatives** of far right parties if doing so will result in public disapproval and will jeopardise their relations with other parties. For example, Belgian political parties agreed in 1992 to exclude Vlaams Belang from all kinds of cooperation.

Hypothesis 7a: The likelihood that **representatives** forward misdirected inquiries to members from a particular party increases if that party is in government.

Hypothesis 7b: The likelihood that **representatives** forward misdirected inquiries to members from a particular party decreases if that party is a far right party.

In conducting our analysis, again whether or not **representatives** forward inquiries to members of a particular party can be treated as a dichotomous variable. As a result logistic regression is used on the stacked data matrix. Analogous to the first analysis, two-level random intercept models are used as party contacts are nested within **representatives**. The likelihood of inquiries being redirected is then explained by including characteristics of the party with whom contacts may be formed in these regression analyses. These comprise its size, ideological proximity, whether it is part of the government, and whether it is a far right party. The operationalisation

and summary statistics of these variables are reported in the appendix. The estimated regression coefficients and robust standard errors are presented in table 3.

[Table 3 about here]

The results show that opportunity structures also shape representatives' choices of the parties to whom they forward misdirected inquiries. First, cooperation over casework is determined by the availability of points of contact. Representatives are more likely to forward inquiries to members of larger parties than to those of smaller parties, confirming hypothesis 5. Inquiries may be passed on to any representative in the party and the likelihood of contacts being formed with the party therefore increases with each additional representative in the party. The probability of inquiries being forwarded increases by about 14 per cent when the number of seats the party holds increases from 2 to 34 – i.e. the interquartile difference.

Second, the accessibility of points of contact affects representatives' choice of the parties to whom they are prepared to redirect casework. The likelihood that representatives cooperate over casework with representatives of a particular party is constrained by the ideological distance between the two parties. Social networks of any kind are more likely to be formed among the likeminded and contacts among representatives are no different. Model 3 demonstrates that national and regional legislators are more likely to cooperate over casework with legislators from the parties that are close to them on the left-right continuum. The further the party is removed from their own position, the less likely they are to pass on misdirected constituent queries to them. The effect is strong: a one-point difference on the left-right scale decreases the likelihood of cooperation by 9 per cent; a three-point difference by 21 per cent; and a five-point difference by more than 31 per cent. Because of missing data on the party

positions the number of cases is reduced in this model. But model 4 confirms that the reduction of cases does not alter, but rather corroborates our findings. Models 3 and 4 report similar effects for all variables, irrespective of the inclusion of ideological proximity in the models. We can therefore be confident that ideological distance constrains cooperation over casework.

Third, representatives' decisions are based on the attractiveness of contact points. Representatives stand to benefit more from cooperating with representatives from a party in government. As a result they are almost three times more likely to forward misdirected inquiries to representatives from a party in government than to an opposition party, confirming hypothesis 7a. Redress of grievances is frequently only within the grasp of those who have privileged access to the government. By contrast, inquiries are not redirected to far right parties any less frequently than to members of other parties. Cooperation is particularly common with the Austrian FPÖ, but even in the other countries the lower frequency of cooperation with far right parties does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Of course, their ideological distance to parties of the far right sufficiently explains many representatives' lower propensity to cooperate with them.

6. Conclusion

Elected representatives across the globe are asked to assist constituents in dealing with public authorities and spend considerable time dealing with their inquiries. Casework is a key component of their representative function. Multi-level democracies come with the promise of increased service responsiveness – *provided* that members of national and regional parliaments each respond to queries within their jurisdiction and redirect queries outside their jurisdiction.

The evidence presented here from seven European multi-level democracies suggests that patterns of competition are more common than patterns of cooperation over casework. Six in ten representatives pass on misdirected constituent inquiries to members of their own party; whereas only one in eight forwards queries to members of other parties. We find that a theoretical approach that emphasises a combination of demand and supply factors, in particular a structure of opportunities, and hypothesises how representatives rationally respond to those factors, goes a long way to explaining how and why cross-level cooperation over redirecting constituent inquiries then varies.

Representatives are most likely to forward inquiries when on the one hand there is a real need to effectively deal with hefty caseloads that can quickly deplete a representative's resources; and on the other hand when there are plenty of contact points available, particularly of representatives within their own party. Forwarding also increases when representatives' strategic preferences coalesce with the accessibility and attractiveness of those contact points. This is particularly so as the scope of shared rule grows; where representatives' previous experience includes serving at the other level of government or where they aspire to do so in the future with a key effect on co-operation with representatives of other parties. On the other hand the more electorally competitive constituency contests are the less likely representatives are to forward misdirected inquiries. The availability, accessibility, and attractiveness of contact points further indicate which particular party representatives inquiries will be forwarded to: in particular to representatives of large parties, parties that are ideologically close, and parties in government.

The analysis confirms the underlying strong inclination for representatives to provide constituency service and to deal with even misdirected constituent inquiries in the context of

multi-level government. This sustains the need to address concerns over the quality of constituency service in such systems, notably over blurred lines of accountability and over the effectiveness of constituency service. That said, the results indicate that there has been a significant level of intra-party adaptation which has facilitated forwarding to co-partisans in a majority of cases, reflecting broader observations within the party adaptation research literature of efficient and effective state-wide party adaptations to multi-level government. Because of party competition even across levels of government one has to be realistic about just how much co-operation over forwarding misdirected inquiries one should expect between representatives of different parties. Nevertheless, we can see that institutional reformers can have an impact even on this by developing multi-level government with higher levels of shared rule, and by encouraging flexible approaches to career development, which facilitate representatives moving between levels of government.

This article has addressed the understudied issue of interactions between representatives across different levels of government in multi-level democracies (Granovetter, 1973; Fowler, 2006). It provides a theoretical prospectus for further inquiry into the extent of cross-level cooperation over redirecting constituent inquiries and explaining how and why cooperation varies. This research agenda needs to be complemented by qualitative research as it is clear that as well as seeking to measure the extent of co-operation and competition over misdirected casework we need to problematise what co-operation and competition mean. Earlier research on Scotland and Wales in the UK suggested the possibility of large variation in behaviours including: joint representative offices which facilitate immediate redirection of inquiries; forwarding that may mean copying the other representative in while still dealing with the inquiry; harmonious agreement between representatives at each level to each deal with whatever inquiries that came their way; or even proactive casework competition seeking to attract constituents away from

the representative at the other level (Bradbury and Mitchell, 2007, Bradbury 2007). Equally, recent interviews in Belgium suggest that some parties have strict divisions of jurisdiction to prevent turf wars among their representatives. “Some are very protective of the matters they deal with”, one Belgian national legislator told us. “Especially rookies get very nervous when another legislator fails to pass on inquiries within their assigned jurisdiction.”⁷

Qualitative and experimental methods could also explore what kind of constituent requests are being forwarded. Are they requests that require further fact-finding or intervention, and do representatives respond to simple inquiries themselves? Are they requests that promise little electoral gain, or even a public backlash? Are they requests for something that representatives are unable to, or must not, obtain for them? And do constituents receive a more informed answer as a result? Future research should also focus on the impact of the structure of opportunities on other forms of cross-level cooperation. Notably, studies of representation, and studies of legislative behaviour in particular, frequently fail to account for the multi-level nature of a great number of polities that representatives work in. In this ‘multi-level’ game, we should take seriously the assumption that actions and strategies in one arena affect ‘the way the game is played’ in another arena (Tsebelis, 1990, p. 248). In pursuing this broader research agenda we may hope to further our understanding of how multi-level democracies shape, and reshape, patterns of representation.

Notes

¹ Political parties are absent from the cantonal legislature of Appenzell-Innerrhoden; it was not included for this reason.

² Between March 2009 and January 2012, all members of the selected legislatures were contacted at least three times, employing a variety of methods: MPs typically received an

introductory letter and e-mail inviting them to participate by web-based survey. They further received at least two online reminders (excluding ‘hard’ refusals) and the option was offered to them to fill out a print questionnaire or to be interviewed. A final invitation was by telephone in many countries.

- ³ Response rates ranged from 18 to 85 per cent in the EPRG project (<http://www.lse.ac.uk/government/research/resgroups/EPRG>); from 4 to 43 per cent in the PIREDEU project (www.piredeu.eu); and from 18 to 66 per cent of parliamentary candidates in the CCS project (www.comparativecandidates.org). Studies among congressional candidates obtained response rates approaching one in three (www.votesmart.org and ces.iga.ucdavis.edu).
- ⁴ To justify the use of multi-level analysis, the two-level models presented in table 2 were tested against single-level models using likelihood ratio tests. The null hypothesis that the variance at the parliament-level does not differ from zero could be rejected at the one per cent level.
- ⁵ To compute predicted probabilities, continuous variables are set to their mean values and dichotomous variables are fixed at zero.
- ⁶ Replacing district magnitude by the dichotomous indicator contrasting single-member plurality system to PR systems does not alter this conclusion.
- ⁷ Interviews with members of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives were conducted within the scope of the ERC INFOPOL project.

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