

**Career Ambitions and Legislative Participation:
The Moderating Effect of Electoral Institutions**

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Abstract

In multi-level political systems politicians have several possible career paths, as they can advance their careers at the lower (state) or higher (federal) level. We argue that the design of the electoral institutions influences how politicians respond to these incentives. Analyzing a unique dataset of both ‘stated’ and ‘realized’ career ambitions of Members of the European Parliament we find that those who seek to move from the European to the national level participate less in legislative activities than those who plan to stay at the European level. Furthermore, legislators who want to continue in the European Parliament participate more if they originate from party-centered than candidate-centered electoral systems. Finally, for MEPs who aim to move to the national level, participation is substantively lower amongst legislators from candidate-centered systems. These findings suggest that the responsiveness associated with candidate-centered systems comes at the expense of legislative activity, at least in low-salience legislatures.

Key words: Career ambition, electoral system, European Parliament, federal systems, legislative behavior

Introduction

In representative democracies, politicians are sometimes forced to choose between actions that will further their political careers inside a legislature or political party and actions that will be popular with the public, and hence increase their re-election chances. These choices are particularly complex in federal/multi-level systems, where politicians can pursue careers at either the state (lower) or federal (higher) level (see e.g. Hibbing 1986; Samuels 2003; Stolz 2003; Meserve, Pemstein and Bernhard 2010). A further intervening factor is the electoral system, which influences *inter alia* whether politicians have incentives to cater primarily to those actors who control candidate selection (either locally or centrally), or primarily to key voters in their constituencies (Sartori 1976; Shugart and Carey 1992; Hix 2004).

We investigate how electoral institutions moderate the relationship between career ambitions and legislative participation in a multi-level political system by looking at the career paths and behavior of the Members of the European Parliament (MEP). We posit that politicians seeking political career progression either at the lower or higher level adjust their legislative participation carefully to increase their chances of promotion at their preferred level of government. Such personal ambitions are moderated by the structural incentives of the electoral system. In a ‘candidate-centered’ electoral system, such as open-list proportional representation, legislators who want to be re-elected need to devote greater attention to their constituency regardless of which office they are seeking. Once a high profile has been established locally, this lowers the cost of transferring from one political arena to another. In contrast, in a ‘party-centered’ electoral system, such as closed-list proportional representation, legislators primarily need to be on good terms with their party leaders, who control candidate selection. The effect of career ambition on legislative participation thus varies across electoral systems. Politicians in candidate-centered systems are likely to be less willing to spend time on legislative activities regardless of their intention to pursue a career at a lower or higher level of government. In contrast, in party-centered systems, politicians who aim to further their career within their current legislature are likely to prioritize legislative activities, and spend fewer resources on constituency campaigning.

We test these propositions using original data on the career ambitions, stated and realized, of MEPs. We employ data from a survey of the MEPs to identify these politicians’ ‘stated ambitions’, and also use data on post-parliamentary careers to identify MEPs’ ‘realized ambitions’. The European Parliament is a useful laboratory within which to investigate these issues, because the same set of politicians in a single legislature are elected under different electoral systems in each European Union (EU) member state. Moreover, because the European Parliament is a low-salience legislature, a large proportion of

politicians harbor ambitions to return to national (lower-level) politics. Our findings show that these career ambitions cause politicians from candidate-centered electoral systems to prioritize spending time on *extra*-legislative activities, while the same ambitions cause politicians from party-centered electoral systems to prioritize activities within the legislature. This suggests that candidate-centered systems, which are generally seen to encourage politicians to be more responsive to voters, may also lower the quality of legislative decision-making, at least in low-salience legislatures.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. We first situate our contribution in the literature on career ambitions of politicians in federal systems, legislative behavior and electoral institutions, before presenting our theoretical argument and hypotheses concerning how electoral institutions condition the effect of career ambitions on legislative participation. We subsequently introduce the data and the methods we use in the analysis, before presenting the results. The conclusion discusses the wider implications of our findings.

Career Ambitions and Legislative Behavior

Legislators have different expectations about their future careers. Some may wish to remain for multiple terms in the same legislature, some will aspire for higher offices, while others may wish to leave politics altogether. There is an established literature on political careers, in particular in the context of the United States. Political careers in the US tend to be hierarchical, as politicians ‘graduate’ from the state level to the federal level, and state and federal levels of government provide different incentives and rewards for politicians (Schlesinger 1966). The experience from the state level makes members of the US Congress sensitive to local concerns. In contrast, Barrie and Gibbins (1989) find that politicians at the federal level in Canada typically lack experience from provincial politics, and increasingly so. While 25 per cent of Canadian MPs had provincial level experience in the 1880s, this declined to less than 7 per cent by the 1970s. Moreover, recent studies of political careers in federal systems have shown that while many politicians aspire to ‘move up’, others see their regional or state office functions as the main focus of their career (Stolz 2003; Scarrow 1997). Stolz’s (2003) comparative study of political careers in a range of Western democracies shows substantive variation across countries, but generally finds that the regional level is not a stepping-stone into national politics in most democracies. While in some systems there is evidence of an integrated career structure across territorial levels, in other systems the different levels represent quite separate career tracks.

Crucially, political science research has long argued that whatever the political ambitions of individual politicians, these ambitions affect the choices legislators make in their

current positions. As Schlesinger noted in his seminal book, *Ambition and Politics*, “a politician’s behavior is a response to his office goals” (Schlesinger 1966: 6). To ensure these goals, a politician must adapt his behavior to satisfy not only current constituents, but also potential future constituents: “our ambitious politician must act today in terms of the electorate he hopes to win tomorrow” (*ibid.*). A large literature has applied and extended the basic tenet of this “ambition theory” in the US context (see e.g. Black 1972; Rohde 1979; Kiewiet and Zeng 1993). Hibbing’s study (1986) of legislative behavior in the US House of Representatives, for example, confirms that politicians behave with an eye toward the constituency they hope to serve tomorrow. He demonstrates that representatives who want to trade constituencies change their behavior before the contest for the new constituency is held.

In multi-level systems in particular it is thus useful to distinguish between *progressive* ambition, which implies that the legislator seeks to leave her current legislature chamber and continue his or her political career at a another level of government and *static* ambition, which implies that she wishes to build a career within the legislature (see Schlesinger 1966; Samuels 2000, 2003). Depending on the specific institutional context, the predominant ambition among legislators may be static (seeking reelection) or progressive, seeking to move either ‘up’ from the state level to the federal level (e.g. in the United States) or ‘down’ from federal level to state/subnational level (e.g. in Brazil). Work by Samuels (2003) on legislative behavior in Brazil, for example, has shown that political ambition of Brazilian legislators focuses on the subnational (municipal and state) level (see also Leoni et al. 2004). But, in line with ambition theory, Samuels demonstrates that even while serving in the national legislature, Brazilian legislators act strategically to further their future extra-legislative careers by serving as ‘ambassadors’ of subnational governments.

Similarly, the European Union (EU) is a system of multi-level government where the national (state) level legislator is generally regarded as more prestigious than the European (federal) level. In line with ambition theory, recent work on career ambition in the European Parliament has shown that MEPs who aim to return to national politics are more likely to vote against their legislative party groups and oppose legislation that enhances the power of the EU’s supranational institutions (Meserve, Pemstein and Bernhard 2010). Using age as a proxy for career ambition, Meserve, Pemstein and Bernhard find that those with progressive career ambitions (younger) are more likely to vote against their European political groups than those with those (older) MEPs with static career ambitions (see also Hahn 1974). The key conclusion from this literature on political ambition and legislative behavior is that we cannot simply treat legislators as “single-minded reelection seekers” (Mayhew 1974) in their current positions, but that it is necessary to consider that for many their behavior will be

shaped by the long shadow of the specific constituency (level of government) they hope to serve in the future.

While the choice of arena may be driven partly by ambition, the actual competition for legislative seats is governed by specific rules, and we know from the vast literature on electoral institutions that these rules shape the behavior of candidates and parties (Cox 1997; Shugart and Carey 1992). Yet, scant attention has been paid to how electoral institutions moderate the interplay between career ambitions and legislative. In this paper, we develop and test a theoretical argument for how this relationship between ambition and behavior is conditioned by electoral systems, in particular in low-salience legislatures.

Legislative Behavior and Ambition: The Moderating Effect of Electoral Institutions

Electoral systems shape how politicians and parties campaign and how they behave once elected (e.g. Ames 1995; Haspel, Remington and Smith 1998; Stratmann and Baur 2002; Ferrara, Herron and Nishikawa 2005). In the context of the European Parliament, Hix (2004) has for example shown how legislative behavior in the European Parliament is influenced by electoral rules and candidate selection procedures. He distinguishes between electoral systems where candidates have incentives to cultivate a personal vote distinct from the party vote (such as open-list proportional representation or the single-transferable vote), and systems where there are few incentives for cultivating personal votes exists (such as closed-list proportional representation), labeling the former ‘candidate-centered’ systems and the latter ‘party-centered systems’.¹ Studies of campaigning have found similar contrasts between electoral systems. In candidate-centered electoral systems – where politicians compete for votes both across and within political parties – politicians are primarily motivated to raise their profile amongst their constituents. In contrast, in party-centered electoral systems – where parties compete for votes while politicians compete within parties for internal promotion – politicians are primarily motivated to pursue activities which will increase their chances of internal party promotion (e.g. Carey and Shugart 1995; Chang and Golden 2006). Despite these studies, little is known about how electoral institutions moderate the effect of career ambitions on legislative behavior.

We focus on one aspect of legislative behavior, namely legislative participation, rather than voting against the position of the legislative party. Participation can be regarded as a pivotal indicator of a legislator’s ‘valence’ (e.g. their quality, commitment, or diligence) (cf. Hix 2004; Meserve et al. 2010). Conversely, absenteeism and low involvement in legislative

¹ Hix (2004) also distinguishes between systems where candidates are chosen centrally by the national leadership and systems where candidate-selection is decentralized to local or regional parties or voters.

activities can be seen as a sign of shirking (e.g. Galasso and Nannicini 2011). Participation may also influence the reelection chances of legislators. However, the personal valence of politicians plays a less significant role in electoral competition for seats in lower salience legislatures, such regional or state-level legislatures, since the lack of media attention to these legislative bodies makes it far harder for voters to monitor and sanction the behavior of politicians in these legislatures. This is relevant in our context, as the hierarchy of career paths in the EU is reversed compared to many other multi-level systems, in that for voters, parties, and candidates, elections to national political office are more highly valued and highly salient than elections to European Parliament (Schmitt 2005; Hix et al. 2007). However, we know from the literature on career paths in multi-level systems that some politicians consciously choose a career in a low-salience legislature: such as a state-level legislature in the United States, Switzerland or Germany (cf. Squire 1993; Francis and Kenny 2000; Samuels 2003; Stolz 2003). The same is true for some politicians in Europe, who prefer to be elected to, and remain in, the European Parliament than seek a career at the national level. Nevertheless, the lower salience of state-level or European Parliament elections has implications for the engagement of politicians in these legislatures, since the mechanism of electoral selection and monitoring does not work as efficiently as in elections to highly salient legislatures (such as the US House of Representatives and the UK House of Commons).

So, what incentives do politicians in lower-salience legislatures face? And, how are these incentives shaped by electoral institutions? Consistent with the existing literature on careers and legislative behavior, we assume that legislators optimize their behavior in light of their career goals (Schlesinger 1966; Hibbing 1986; Samuels 2003; Meserve et al. 2010). There are competing demands on legislators' time, such as legislative work, constituency service, participation in public debates, and work in the party organization (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Moreover, because each of these activities matter more to some voters and candidate-selectors than others, legislators need to engage in the optimal combination of activities to maximize their chances of reaching their career goals. Specifically, for a legislator to be trusted with an office, she needs to make the case to the key gatekeepers to that office that she is capable of conducting the tasks of the office in an appropriate manner and in the interests of the gatekeepers.

Just as in other legislatures in multi-level systems, members of the European Parliament typically follow one of three career paths: some advance within the European Parliament itself, others see the European Parliament as a stepping-stone to a more coveted legislative or executive position in their home country, while a third group regard the European Parliament as a 'retirement home' from politics (Scarow 1997; Stolz 2003). The

key contrast is between the first two types of MEPs: those who have *static* ambitions and seek to build a career in Brussels, and those who have *progressive* ambitions seek a career ‘back home’. Politicians who seek a career in the European Parliament need to undertake tasks that are important to party leaders inside the Parliament, to increase their prominence within the institution. However, these politicians also need to please those who control their re-selection and re-election, who tend to be located at the national level. In contrast, politicians who seek to move to the national arena are less concerned with developing their prominence within the European Parliament. Instead, their key concern is to make it plausible that they are capable of conducting tasks associated with holding national office, such as being visible in the national media and cultivating ties with the national leadership in order to secure an attractive post if successful in entering national politics. Hence, the focus of these politicians will not be on pleasing those who control promotion inside the European Parliament or re-selection/re-election to the European Parliament. Instead, their primary interest is to cater to the gatekeepers of political office at the national level.

Here, the electoral institutions come into play. In the context of career incentives, the most important aspect of the electoral systems is the degree to which the ballot structure allows voters to determine the fate of individual candidates: that is where it is ‘candidate-centered’ or ‘party-centered’ (Hix 2004; Farrell and McAllister 2006; Farrell and Scully 2007). Candidate-centered systems are those where the ballot structure allows voters to choose between candidates from the same political party, as in the open-list proportional representation systems or under single-transferable vote. In contrast, party-centered systems are those where the ballot structure only allows voters to choose between pre-ordered lists of candidates presented by parties, as in the closed-list proportional representation systems.

In candidate-centered electoral systems, legislators who want to be elected need to develop their name recognition among voters in their constituency regardless of which office he or she is seeking to be elected. Once a political profile has been developed, this lowers the cost of transferring from one political arena to another. Career prospects in a candidate-centered electoral system therefore depend at least in part on the candidates’ ability to cultivate personal identification and support amongst the electorate, and hence there are fewer career benefits from hard work inside their current legislature. We should hence find little difference in legislative participation between legislators with static and progressive ambitions in candidate-centered systems.

Against these incentives to campaign rather than participate in the legislature, the political cost of not participating might also be higher in a candidate-centered electoral system than in a party-centered electoral system. However, this countervailing incentive is likely to be weaker in a low-salience legislature (such as a state-level legislature or the

European Parliament) than in a high-salience legislature, as it will be harder for voters to monitor non-participation in a low-salience legislature. As a result, for politicians elected under candidate-centered electoral institutions, any potential electoral cost of campaigning rather than participating, and hence appearing to shirk on ones responsibilities inside the legislature, would be heavily outweighed by the positive benefits of raising ones profile amongst the voters.

In a party-centered electoral system, in contrast, it is sufficient for the legislator to be on good terms with the local party leadership in order to keep his or her (Jones et al. 2002). In Europe, most EU states with party-centered electoral systems have the lists of candidates are drawn up by central party leaderships. Even in the two member states with party-centered systems and regional constituencies – France and the United Kingdom – the central party leaderships play a role in determining the order of the lists, for example by determining whether candidates can re-stand in the elections. In such contexts, where the party has considerable influence over the individual MEP, a legislator’s active involvement in parliamentary activities has a positive influence on his or her career prospects at the European level. The national party is more likely to want to re-select an MEP for a seat in Parliament if she has actively participated in the legislative activities. Equally, an MEP who has her heart set on a second term in Brussels is more likely to prioritize legislative activities inside the Parliament if she knows that the relevant gatekeepers are going to take notice. While the party leaderships will take notice of politicians’ activity levels, because of the low salience of European Parliament elections, voters are largely ignorant of the day-to-day activities of MEPs Parliament (Hobolt and Høyland 2011; Hobolt and Spoon 2012).

Hence, given that the career prospects of candidates hinge on the party leadership in party-centered systems, we would expect that those who have ambitions to stay at the European level to be far more engaged in the legislative activities. However, for politicians who would like to progress to the national level, they can spend time away from the legislature seeking to curry favor amongst their party leaders locally. In contrast, the career prospects of a politician in a candidate-centered electoral system depend to a larger extent on the candidate’s ability to cultivate personal identification and support amongst the electorate. Hence, regardless of whether a politician seeks to remain in the same legislature or progress to a higher salience legislature, there are fewer incentives for politicians elected in these systems to participate in legislative work in their current legislature. We therefore expect less distinct differences in the legislative participation between legislators with static and progressive ambitions in candidate-centered systems, and a clearer distinction between politicians with static and progressive career ambitions in party-centered systems.

This leads us to the following hypotheses about the moderating effect of the electoral system on the relationship between political ambition and legislative participation a low-salience legislature:

H1: Politicians who have static career ambitions and wish to stay in their current legislature (the European Parliament in the EU) participate more in plenary voting than politicians who have progressive career ambitions and wish to move to another legislative arena (the national level in the EU context).

H2: Politicians who have progressive career ambitions from candidate-centered electoral systems participate less in plenary voting than legislators with similar career ambitions from party-centered electoral systems.

H3: The difference between the legislative participation of politicians with static and progressive career ambitions is more pronounced in party-centered than in candidate-centered electoral systems.

In the next section, we discuss the data and methods that allow us to test these hypotheses.

Data and Empirical Estimation

As discussed, the European Parliament provides an ideal case for investigating these propositions, because multiple electoral systems operate within the same institutional setting. Although legislation on the uniformity of electoral procedures in European Parliament elections was enacted in 2003 (according to which all elections to the European Parliament shall be held under a proportional electoral system), there continues to be considerable variation in the ballot structure, district magnitude and candidate selection rules across EU member states.

A further strength of this study is that we examine the effect of our primary explanatory variable, *career ambition type*, using two unique indicators of both ‘realized’ ambitions (using data on MEPs actual careers) and ‘stated’ preferences (using survey data on MEPs’ future ambitions). In combination these measures provide a rigorous test of the effect of ambitions on legislative behavior. To achieve this, our empirical analysis focuses on 589 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who were elected to serve in the 5th (1999-2004) Parliament, since this allows us to obtain good quality data on *pre-EP* careers and

ambitions as well as *post-EP* careers.² In line with previous work, we distinguish between three types of career ambitious amongst MEPs: national, European, and non-political careers (Scarrows 1997). For data on post-EP careers (realized ambition), we conducted a broad online search, consulting a range of online resources, such as the official webpage of the European Parliament and national parliaments, webpages of European and national parties and individual politicians, complemented by *EU Who is Who*. We classified post-5th term careers as either (1) *National political career*; (2) *European political career*; or (3) *Non-political career*. The national political career category includes MEPs who went on to become members of the national parliament or members of the national cabinet at some point before 2009. The European political career category includes MEPs who remained members of the European Parliament or became European Commission. All others are classified as having a non-political career or retired. The distribution was as follows: 28.5 per cent (168) continued their career at the European level; 26.7 per cent (157) pursued a national career; and 44.8 per cent (264) pursued a non-political career or retired.

To capture ‘stated’ career ambitions we used survey data on MEPs collected by Hix, Scully and Farrell (2012). This survey was conducted during the first year of the 5th term. This allows us to compare stated and realized preferences for a subset of the MEPs who responded to the survey.

The survey question was as follows:

1.5. What would you like to be doing 10 years from now?

(Choose as many boxes as you wish.)

- Member of the European Parliament
- Chair of a European Parliament committee
- Chair of a European political group
- Member of a national parliament
- Member of a national government
- European Commissioner
- Retired from public life
- Something else, please specify:

174 MEPs answered this survey question, which constitute 27.8 per cent of the 626 MEPs. The respondents to this question were not significantly different from the population of MEPs on key variables (such as European political group, member state, or gender). We coded respondents who answered “Member of the European Parliament”, “Chair of a European Parliament committee”, “Chair of a European political group”, or “European Commissioner” as seeking a European level career. MEPs who answered “Member of a national parliament”

² Pre-EP career data are difficult to collect for European Parliaments prior to the 1999-2004 Parliament because of the limited availability of data. In addition, 2004 is a good cut-off for looking at post-EP careers, as this allows sufficient time for us to observe what former MEPs go on to do after the EP (as opposed to looking at the 2004-09 session, for example).

or “Member of a national government” were coded as seeking a national level career. Of the MEPs who responded to the survey, 24.1 per cent (42) would like a European level career, 21.3 per cent (37) a national level career. The remaining 54.6 per cent (95) were planning to either retire from public life or do something else.

The dependent variable in our models is *legislative participation*. We operationalize this as participation in plenary voting. Legislative participation is a prerequisite for MEPs serving the interests of the constituents. Valence considerations suggest that voters would also like their representatives to play an active role in the legislature to which they are elected, rather than to use their position in a legislature solely as a platform for their next career move (Stolz 2003). In the case of a lower salience legislature, such as the European Parliament, however, voters are unlikely to sanction parliamentarians on this basis, as they lack the necessary information to do so (Hobolt and Høyland 2011). However, national party leaderships (who have candidate-selection powers under party-centered systems) are more likely to monitor legislative participation than are voters, especially as plenary participation has been shown to be a strong predictor of access to agenda-setting powers inside the European Parliament, such as the allocation of legislative report writing in committees (Yoshinaka, McElroy, and Bowler 2010). Put simply, legislators who fail to show up for most plenary votes are not awarded reports.

To calculate legislative participation, we use data on votes in the European Parliament from Hix et al. (2007) by dividing the sum of Yes, No and Abstain votes by total number of votes of an MEP in the 5th Parliament. The descriptive statistics for legislative participation reveal some interesting patterns in the data. While the average MEP participated in 70 out of every 100 votes this varies significantly across political groups: At the low end of the participation scale were independent MEPs from the Technical Group of Independent Members, who on average barely participated in 50 out of every 100 votes. At the high end were members of the European Liberal Group (ELDR) who on average participated in more than 77 out of every 100 votes. There is some variation across countries. In 11 out of 15 member states is the mean level of participation higher amongst those with a realized European level career ambition than those with a realized national level career ambition. We also see that there is substantive variation across countries. The Dutch MEPs participated in 83 per cent of the votes on average, while did the Italian MEPs participated in less than 49 per cent of the votes. Amongst those seeing a European level career, the highest mean level of participation is for the Greek, with 96 per cent, followed by the Dutch with 89 and Austria with 86. The lowest levels are found amongst Irish and Italian MEPs with 57 per cent. Amongst those seeking a national level career, we find the highest level of participation amongst MEPs from Luxembourg and Austria with 89 and lowest amongst Greek and Italian

MEPs with average participation rates of 52 and 40 per cent. Importantly, we also find differences in participation depending on career ambitions. MEPs who continued an EU career after the 5th Parliament voted on average in more than 75 out of every 100 votes, while those who entered national politics after the European Parliament participated in just over 60 out of every 100 votes on average.

To test our second and third hypotheses, we need to operationalize the key moderating variable, namely the *electoral system*. The European Parliament (1999:15) identify four types of systems: single transferable vote (Ireland and Northern Ireland), fully open lists (Denmark, Finland, Italy and Luxembourg), flexible lists (Austria, Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium), and closed lists (France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and Great Britain). In this context, the most important distinction is between candidate-centered and party-centered systems, which concerns the degree to which the ballot structure allows voters to determine the fate of individual candidates. The first two groups identified by the EP can be classified as candidate-centered systems and the latter two as party-centered. While there are some differences in the particulars of the electoral rules between the EP and national elections, and on the specifics of the nomination process between parties, there are too few cases where the classification into candidate and party-centered systems were altered across the two types of elections for the period that we are looking at for us to be able to detect any effect of such differences empirically.

The next step is to estimate a fully specified model of legislative participation, which also accounts for a number of other factors that may explain MEPs legislative participation. Notably, we control for MEPs' previous political experience, using data from Hobolt and Høyland (2011). The variable *Experience (MP/Min.)* takes the value 1 if the MEP was a member of the national parliament of a minister in the national government prior to becoming an MEP. Similarly, the variable *Incumbent* captures whether an MEP had already served as an MEP at the beginning of the 5th term. As *Age* has previously been used as a proxy for career ambition (Meserve, Pemstien, and Bernhard 2009), we include this variable, measured as years since birth at the start of the 5th term. We also include Age^2 , to allow for a curvilinear effect. Since participation in plenary activities is a prerequisite for committee reports, and committee reports are a way of building the basis for a legislative career we do not include reports in the models as this is, at least partly, a function of participation (Yoshinaka, McElroy, and Bowler 2010). We do, however, control for loyalty to the political group, as the decision to participate as well as how to vote in a roll call is taken simultaneously. The distance to the party group is measured as the absolute difference in first dimension W-NOMINATE scores from the mean of the group. First dimension W-NOMINATE scores represent MEPs' locations on the main dimension of contestation on individual level recorded

votes (RCVs) in the plenary (Hix et al. 2006).³ We control for the distance to the mean score of an MEPs' European political group because MEPs who tend to be on the losing side within a group may be less motivated to continue their European level career than those who tend to find themselves on the winning side in a group. Furthermore, as this logic may operate across political groups, we also control for political group membership by distinguishing between the three main groups, PES, EPP and ELDR and the minor groups. The variable *minor group* takes the value one for MEPs not belonging to any of the three main groups. Descriptive statistics of the variables used can be found in the Table A1 in the Appendix.

Our choice of estimation method is guided by the structure of our data. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected from individual member states, normally as representatives for national parties. Once in Brussels/Strasbourg, the national parties form political groups. These groups are the main actors within the Parliament (Hix et al. 2006). Furthermore, our key moderating variable, electoral systems, varies at the country level, while much of the spoils from a European level career is allocated by political groups. However, both the number of countries and number (15) of political groups (7) are low, so it may not be appropriate to estimate multilevel models. Instead, we estimate fractional logit models with heteroskedastic and autocorrelation consistent standard errors to account to the structure of the data. The fractional logit model is particularly well suited for this problem as participation can only range from 0 to 1 (Papke and Wooldridge 1996). As no MEP can participate in more than 100 per cent of the votes, a standard linear model could provide misleading estimates for those with particularly high levels of participation. For both realized and stated preferences, we run three different models. In Models 1-3 we rely on realized career-ambitions, while Models 4-6 uses stated career-ambitions. Model 1 (4) includes only a categorical variable for career-ambition. Model 2 (5) adds party system and its interactions with different career ambitions. Model 3 (6) adds a set of controls.

Results

As an initial evaluation of the hypotheses, Table 1 provides summaries of t-tests of the differences in participation in voting across career ambitions and electoral systems using data on realized career ambitions.

[Table 1 about here]

³ While it is questionable to what extent W-NOMINATE scores capture the personal ideology of MEPs, and to what extent they are stable across policy-areas (Carrubba et al. 2006, Hix and Høyland 2013), they nevertheless summarize how frequently MEPs vote together on average in recorded votes.

First, in line with H1, we see that those with a realized ambition to continue their career at the European level participate more than those with progressive career ambitions, who wish to be elected to national parliaments (.76 vs. .61). The difference is significant as the 95 percent confidence interval estimate the difference to be between .10 and .20. Second, we also find support for H2: among MEPs with European ambitions, those from party-centered electoral systems participate in significantly more votes than those with similar ambitions from candidate-centered electoral systems (.78 vs .62). Third, in line with H3, we find that the electoral system moderates the effect of career ambitions. While we are able to detect a significantly higher level of participation (.14) for MEPs with realized European level career ambitions than for MEPs with national level career ambitions amongst the MEPs elected in party-centered systems (.78 vs. .64), we are less certain about this difference in candidate-centered systems. Here the mean difference is only .10 (.62 vs .52) and not statistical significant.

Having presented the results of the initial evaluation of the hypotheses, Table 2 presents the results from the regression models using, first, our measure of realized career ambition, followed by the results of the models using stated career ambition. The key results are as follows. Regardless of which measure we use, our findings show that career ambition, moderated by the electoral system, influences participation in the plenary. For legislators seeking a European level career we find that those from candidate-centered systems participate less, while those from party-centered systems participate more, than MEPs without continuing political career ambitions. Legislators seeking to move to the national level participate less than other legislators in both systems, but the negative effect of national career ambition is substantively greater in candidate-centered systems than in party-based systems. Regardless of type of political career ambition, we find that political career-seeking legislators from party-based systems participate more than career-seeking legislators from candidate-based systems.

[Table 2 about here]

Starting with *realized* career ambitions, from model 1 in Table 2 we see that those that return to national politics participate in less than those that stay on in Brussels. The predicted level of participation is $(1/1+\exp(-1.190)) \approx .767$ for European (static) careerists that belong to one of the major groups, while it is only $(1/1+\exp(-1.190-.691)) \approx .622$ for national (progressive) careerists. We see MEPs with static ambitions from the minor groups participating in .727 of the votes, while those from the minor groups with progressive ambitions participating in only .571 of all votes. This corroborates our first hypothesis.

In model 2 we add our moderating variable, which distinguishes between party-centered and candidate-centered systems. We thus include interactions between candidate-centered electoral systems and career ambition (national and non-political). The reference category is MEPs with European career ambitions in party-centered systems. There is a clear difference in the level of participation across the two systems. MEPs from candidate-centered systems participate in fewer votes than those from party-centered systems. The difference is about .146 for those seeking a European level career (.637 versus .784) and about .117 for those that seek to a national level career (.534 versus .652).

In model 3, we include several control variables. The effects discussed above still hold. In addition, we find that participation increases with age, but at a decreasing rate, given that the MEP continues the political career. This effect may be a seniority effect as older MEPs may be placed higher on lists or be allowed to run in safer districts than younger MEPs. Therefore, older MEPs may be able to spend more time voting in the plenary. Unsurprisingly, those who plan to leave politics participate less than those who continue their careers at the European level.

To facilitate the evaluation of our hypotheses 2 and 3, while also controlling for other factors, we use the estimates from the full model (3) and compare the effects across career-ambition types and electoral systems. Here we follow Brambor, Clark and Golder (2006) and simulate the effects on the basis of the coefficients and the (adjusted) variance-covariance matrix from our full model 3. This allows us to evaluate our hypotheses directly as we can compare the simulated level of participation for different subgroups of interest, holding all other variables constant, at their mean (age and age squared) value or at zero (all others) value. When we limit our comparison to those MEPs with progressive ambitions who seek a national political career, we see that politicians who are elected from candidate-centered systems participate in fewer votes than those from party-centered systems in all of the simulations, in accordance with hypothesis 2. In contrast, we find that EU careerists from candidate-centered systems participate less than national level careerists in 6 percent of the simulations, which suggest that, in line with hypotheses 3, that the differences between the two types of career ambitions is less pronounced in candidate-centered systems than in party-centered systems.

[Figure 1 about here]

The estimated levels of participation for the various combinations of career ambition and electoral system are illustrated in Figure 1. The top row shows the estimated participation level for MEPs with realized European level career ambition, whereas the bottom row shows the estimated level of participation for those with national career ambition.

On the left is the estimate for party-centered electoral systems. On the right is the estimate for candidate-centered systems. The vertical line shows the mean level of participation for the other system, i.e. the mean level in candidate-centered in the party-centered plot and vice versa.

The figure shows that participation is higher in party-centered systems. Also, across both systems, participation is lower amongst those that seek to continue their career at the national level. However, this effect is moderated by the electoral system: the difference in participation across career-ambition types is smaller in candidate-centered systems than in party-centered systems. Below, we evaluate to what extent these differences in participation by realized career-ambition types also manifest themselves as differences in participation by stated career-ambition types.

Models 4 to 6 in Table 2 show the effect of *stated* career ambition on legislative participation. Due to the smaller number of observations, we are less confident about the robustness of these results, but these analyses can be used to verify the patterns reported above. The results are in line with those reported for realized preferences. Model 4 shows that MEPs who seek to continue their political career at the national arena participate in fewer votes ($1/1+\exp(-1.583 - .529) \approx .741$) than those who seek to continue their European level career ($1/1+\exp(-1.583) \approx .830$). The difference is statistical significant. The difference in participation between MEPs from large and smaller groups amongst those that answered the survey is minor, .741 vs. .725 and .830 vs. .817 for large party versus small for national and European level respectively.

Model 5 adds the moderating effect of party-system. While the direction is the same as in model 2, the difference between party and candidate-centered systems is not significant at the conventional 5 percent level. However, the difference becomes significant in Model 6, when additional controls are added. Similarly, the difference between European and national level career is significant at a 5 percent level in model 6, but not significant at this level in model 5. As we are interested in differences between European and national career ambition within each system as well as differences across systems for MEPs with the same career-level ambitions, the most useful comparison is to compare estimated level of participation across the different career-ambition types. The findings from our analysis of realized career-ambition are, by and large, reproduced using data on stated career ambition, although somewhat less clear-cut. Figure 2 illustrates the predicted level of participation for the different combinations of stated career-ambitions and electoral systems.

[Figure 2 about here]

Participation is higher in party-centered systems than in candidate-centered systems for both those that seek a European as well as those that seek a national level career. Furthermore, participation is higher for those seeking a European rather than a national level career in both systems. However, the low n for survey respondents with national level career ambitions from candidate-centered prevents us from drawing firm conclusions about the characteristics of the participation level for this group. We are hence not able to firmly conclude on the differences in the effect of career ambition across these two systems on the basis of these stated career ambitions alone.

In sum, we can infer three key results. First, legislators with progressive ambitions who seek to move their political career from the European to the national level participate less than those that plan to stay in Brussels (H1). Second, legislators who have progressive career ambition participate more if they originate from party-centered than candidate-centered electoral systems (H2). Third, the effect of career ambition on participation is moderated by the electoral system. There is a clearer difference in participation levels of legislators with static and progressive ambitions in party-centered systems than in candidate-centered systems (H3). The total effect of these differences means that national level careerists from party-centered electoral systems participate about as much as European level careerists in candidate-centered systems. So, while a candidate-centered electoral system may be attractive from an electoral accountability point of view, it also encourages parliamentarians to spend more time on extra-parliamentary activities in order to build name-recognition regardless of which level they seek to continue their political career. In contrast, party-centered systems offer protection for loyal parliamentarians who wish to continue their political career at the European level through the prospect of a safe placement on the list. This frees up time to spend on parliamentary activities. Furthermore, party-centered systems also limit the cost in terms of parliamentary participation for those seeking to continue their career at the national level as one of the key determinants for successful entry into national politics will be controlled by the party leadership through the nomination process.

Conclusion

Legislators' participation in legislative activities is a prerequisite for political influence. Voters whose elected representatives fail to be present in the legislature are not represented in a meaningful way. However, for the elected politicians, participation in legislative activities has to compete with extra-parliamentary activities, such as meetings with voters in the constituency, or other activities that might enhance a politicians' personal profile amongst the electorate. Hence, it is important to examine the conditions under which politicians have

incentives to prioritize legislative work. This paper has investigated to what extent electoral systems moderate the effect of career ambitions on participation in legislative activities in a multi-level political system.

To examine how the electoral system moderates the effect of political career on legislative engagement, we have taken advantage of the European Parliament setting, where politicians are elected under different electoral systems in each EU member state. Using unique data on both the stated career ambitions (from a survey conducted during the first of the five year term) and the realized career ambitions (from post-parliament careers) of the MEPs, we demonstrate that politicians with ‘progressive’ career ambitions, who use the European Parliament as a stepping-stone to a national career, are less active in the legislature than those MEP with ‘static’ ambitions, who wish to continue their political career at the European level.

Moreover, contrasting candidate-centered electoral systems with party-centered electoral systems, we find that even those representatives who seek to continue their career at the European level have lower levels of participation if they were elected in candidate-centered electoral systems than in party-centered electoral systems. This, we argue, is because politicians in candidate-centered systems need to be visible to voters to be able win the within-party competition for support. In contrast, politicians elected in party-centered systems simply need to please the selectorate in the party leadership. That task can more easily be achieved by focusing on legislative activities. We find that the effect of electoral institutions in legislative participation is greater for politicians who seek to return to national politics: with candidate-centered rules leading to lower legislative participation than party-centered rules.

These findings have potentially important implications for representation in the European Union and beyond. Although we can assume that most voters would like their elected representatives to participate in the legislative activities of the institution in which they serve, our results suggest that party-centered electoral systems are more likely to encourage politicians to invest significant time and efforts in legislative activities. In contrast, in candidate-centered systems, even politicians who want to pursue a long-term career inside their current legislature have few incentives to engage in legislative activities, since their re-election depends on their links with local constituents. Such electoral systems reward politicians who raise their profiles among local voters and party members. In the EU context, participation in European Parliament committees and plenary sessions is barely noticed beyond Brussels. While the European Parliament is dependent on members who are prepared to commit themselves to the legislative activities in such a way that the European Parliament is able to strengthen its hand in its dealings with other EU institutions, it seems

that the incentives to do so are largely confined to those politicians who wish to stay in the European Parliament and who are elected in party-centered systems.

These findings are also likely to have relevance for other legislatures. The European Union may be seen as peculiar in that the hierarchy of career paths in the EU is reversed compared to many other multi-level systems, since the European Parliament is often regarded as the less coveted “lower” legislature. However, most political systems have a hierarchy of legislatures with some that are regarded of “lower salience” and where voter attention to legislative activity is limited and hence where the mechanism of electoral selection and monitoring does not work as efficiently as in more highly salient elections. In such legislatures, we would expect similar mechanisms of career ambition (static or progressive) shaping legislative participation, conditioned by the electoral system in place. Research on legislative behavior in countries with mixed-member electoral systems suggests that whether a politician is elected in a (candidate-centered) single-member district or a (party-centered) party-list influences how she behaves in the legislature and in her campaigning activities (e.g. Ames 1995; Haspel, Remington and Smith 1998; Stratmann and Baur 2002; Ferrara, Herron and Nishikawa 2005). This suggests that the conditioning effect of electoral systems is likely to travel beyond the specific European context.

More broadly, our findings therefore present a dilemma for constitutional designers in the EU and elsewhere. Previous research on the European Parliament has shown that candidate-centered electoral systems encourage MEPs and candidates to the European Parliament to campaign directly to voters (e.g. Farrell and Scully 2007; Hix and Hagemann 2009). These incentives lead to greater awareness about the European Parliament and closer connections between citizens and MEPs in member states where candidate-centered systems are used, such as in Ireland, Finland and Denmark. On the other hand, as our study has found, MEPs elected in candidate-centered systems are less motivated to participate and engage in day-to-day legislative activities inside the European Parliament, even if they aim to be re-elected to that institution.

Our results consequently suggest a trade-off between two desirable outcomes in representative democracy: on the one hand, better known or more accountable politicians, and, on the other hand, more dedicated and professional legislators. This trade-off is likely to be particularly acute in low-salience legislatures, like the European Parliament or state-level or local assemblies, where legislative participation may not enhance the public profile or re-election chances of individual legislators in their home constituencies. Future research should examine whether this trade-off is a general phenomenon or whether highly salient legislatures encourage politicians from both candidate-centered and party-centered systems to participate in equal numbers regardless of their career ambitions.

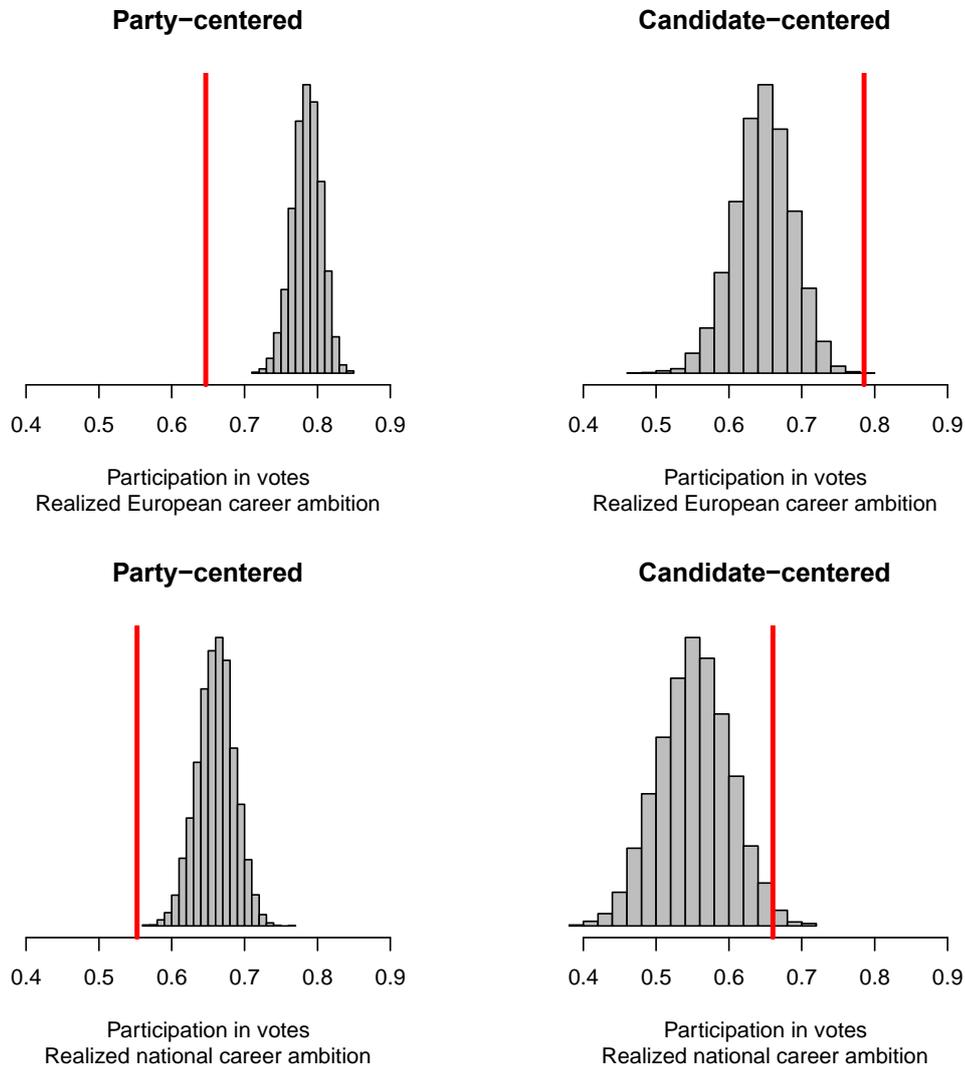
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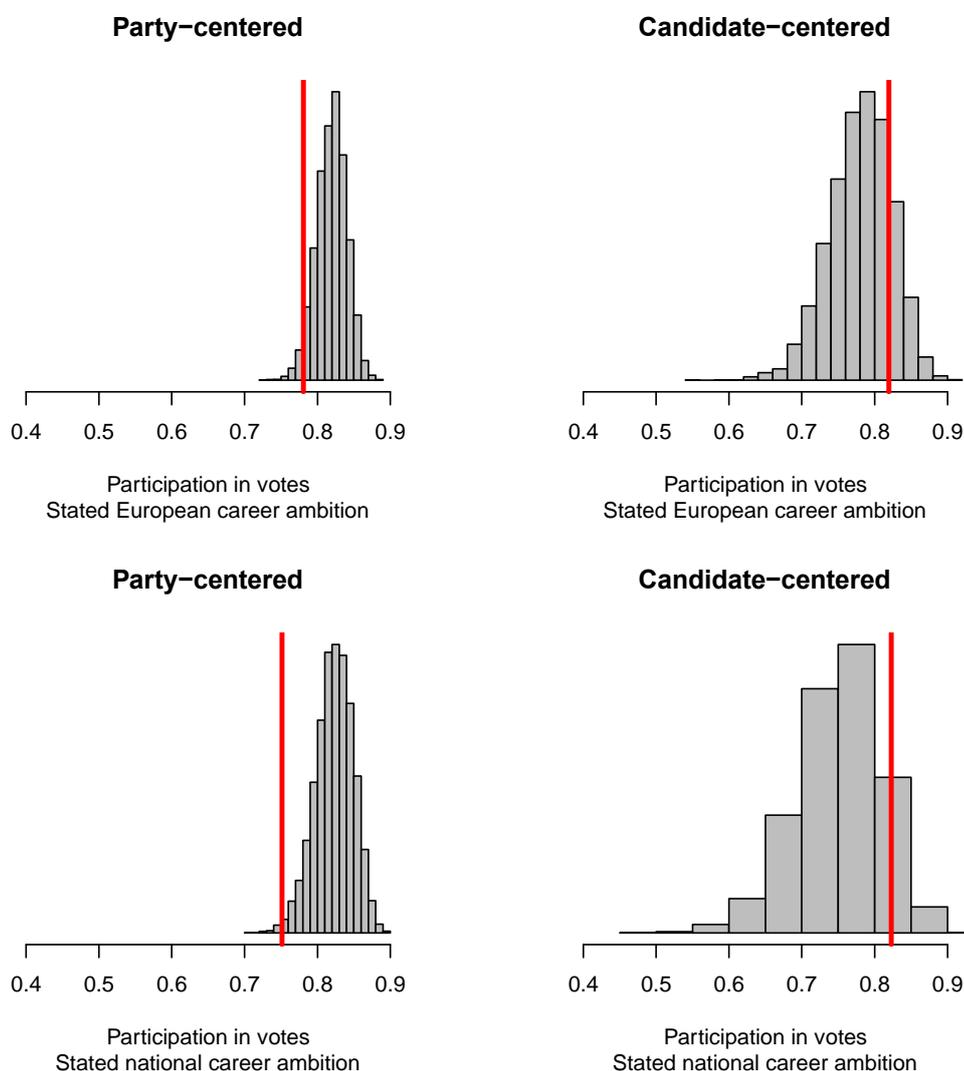
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Figure 1: Effect of realized career ambition type moderated by electoral systems.



Note: The effects are calculated on the basis of 10000 simulations from model 3. The top line compares the estimated participation level for those with European level career revealed ambition for party-centered (left) and candidate-centered electoral systems (right). The bottom line shows the estimated participation level for those with revealed national level career ambition. The purpose of the red line is to aid comparasion across electoral systems, conditional on career ambition type. The red line shows the mean level of participation for MEPs with the same type of career ambition, but in the other electoral system (left=conditional mean in candidate-centered, right=conditional mean in party-centered).

Figure 2: Effect of stated career ambition type moderated by electoral systems.



Note: The effects are calculated on the basis of 10000 simulations from model 6. The top line compares the estimated participation level for those with European level career stated ambition for party-centered (left) and candidate-centered electoral systems (right). The bottom line shows the estimated participation level for those with stated national level career ambition. The purpose of the red line is to aid comparison across electoral systems, conditional on career ambition type. The red line shows the mean level of participation for MEPs with the same type of career ambition, but in the other electoral system (left=conditional mean in candidate-centered, right=conditional mean in party-centered).

Table 1. T-tests of the differences in participation by realized career ambition and electoral systems

	Mean_EU	Mean_Nat	t	lower	upper
H1: European career > National career	.76	.61	4.434*, df=81	.10	.20
H2: European career in party-centered system > EU career in candidate-centered system	.779	.623	3.324*, df=23.54	.059	.252
H3(a): European career in party-centered system > National career in party-centered system	.779	.641	4.989*, df=202.5	.083	.192
H3(b): European career in candidate-centered system = National career in candidate-centered system	.623	.522	1.601, df=52.24	-.026	.228

* p< .05

Table 2: Modeling Legislative Participation in the European Parliament

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
National career	-.691* (.117)	-.661* (.127)	-.632* (.130)	-.529* (.191)	-.416* (.181)	-.349 (.192)
Non-political career	-.156 (.105)	-.265* (.113)	-.223 (.118)	-.245 (.127)	.369* (.143)	.391* (.162)
Candidate system		-.724* (.189)	-.692* (.190)		-.457 (.275)	-.620* (.303)
Age			.065* (.033)			-.026 (.073)
Age ²			-.001* (.000)			.000 (.001)
Incumbent			.034 (.093)			-.189 (.119)
National experience			-.097 (.110)			-.205 (.140)
Distance to group median			-.505 (.393)			.156 (.654)
Small group	-.212* (.094)	-.197* (.095)	-.185 (.101)	-.085 (.167)	-.054 (.179)	-.097 (.187)
National career * candidate system		.234 (.285)	.235 (.279)		-.275 (.496)	-.150 (.540)
Non-political * candidate system		.770* (.249)	.799* (.251)		.709* (.352)	.865* (.369)
Constant	1.190* (.081)	1.288* (.085)	-.165 (.799)	1.583* (.104)	1.663* (.106)	2.177 (1.790)
N	589	589	589	174	174	174

Note: All models are fractional logit models with robust standard errors. * p<.05

APPENDIX

Table A1: Descriptive statistics: realized (stated) ambition

	Mean	St.dev.	Min	Max
Participation in votes	.704 (.787)	.228 (.141)	.000 (.045)	.986 (.968)
European career type + candidate-centered	.034 (.040)		0 (0)	1 (1)
European career type + party-centered	.251 (.201)			
National career type + candidate-centered	.070 (.052)		0 (0)	1 (1)
National career type + party-centered	.197 (.161)		0 (0)	1 (1)
No political career	.448 (.546)		0 (0)	1 (1)
Experience (MP/Min.)	.224 (.247)		0 (0)	1 (1)
Incumbent	.408 (.454)		0 (0)	1 (1)
Distance from EP group	.075 (.077)	.106 (.106)	.000 (.000)	1.053 (.0612)
N	589 (174)			

Note: The numbers in brackets relate to the subset of MEPs for whom we have stated career ambitions.