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Explaining MEPs' use of written parliamentary questions: the impact of domestic experience and parliamentary culture (1994-2019)

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## **Explaining MEPs' use of written parliamentary questions: the impact of domestic experience and parliamentary culture (1994-2019)**

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**Abstract:** Despite a growing scholarship focusing on the use of parliamentary questions in the EP, we still know little about the personal motivations as well as national cultural political differences that drive MEPs to invest time in the use of parliamentary questions. The paper provides an analysis of MEPs' use of written parliamentary questions (WpQ) in the 28 member states covering 163.894 WpQs presented since the 4<sup>th</sup> legislative term (1994 – 2019). For that goal, this paper investigates the impact of a domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs (i.e. macro-level variable). We argue that when entering the EP, MEPs bring their domestic 'vision' about how to behave and act in an assembly parliament (i.e., how things are done in my country). In addition, we posit that this parliamentary culture thesis is stronger for MEPs with a former experience in domestic politics (i.e. individual-level variable). MEPs who have been directly socialized in a domestic parliamentary culture will be more likely to 'replicate' their work habits in the EP. Our findings confirm that MEPs originating from a country where the use of written parliamentary questions is high are also more active in the EP. And vice and versa for MEPs from a parliamentary culture with lower WpQs activity. The empirical effects observed are stronger for MEPs who directly experience a domestic parliamentary culture serving in a national parliament prior to their European mandate. These findings therefore confirm that macro-level and individual-level variables matter in the explanation of MEPs' parliamentary activity. Their interactive effects should be systematically taken into consideration in future research.

**\*\*\* First draft \*\*\***

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## Introduction

Parliamentary representation has become a central feature of the European Union. The European Parliament's (EP) formal authority has considerably expanded since 1979 and is now on an equal footing with the Council of the European Union regarding the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP). Today's behavior of Members of the EP (MEPs) has very concrete effects on the European Union (EU)'s policy-making and has consequently attracted a growing attention from scholars. In this wake, various scholars have established that the parliamentary behavior of MEPs impact upon the EU policymaking (e.g., see. Hix et al., 2007; Hix and Noury, 2009; Kreppel, 2002). While these studies made important contributions in our understanding of legislative politics in the EP, our knowledge on how MEPs behave besides voting behavior remains, however, limited.

In particular, the reasons why MEPs decide to invest time in the use of parliamentary questions is still a topic relatively understudied (Brack and Costa, 2019). Since the pioneer studies of Raunio (1996), Proksch and Slapin (2010) and Jensen et al. (2013), there has been a growing interest in the use and or focus of (written) parliamentary questions by MEPs. While parliamentary questions are clearly not the most powerful legislative instrument available for MEPs (Brack and Costa, 2019; Navarro, 2019), their analysis is an interesting method for gathering additional information on the preferences, behavior and focus of representation of parliamentarians (Rozenberg and Martin, 2011; Martin, 2011). Considering the other instruments available to MEPs (e.g., voting, amendments, speeches in plenary, rapporteurship, etc.) and knowing that MEPs have scarce resources and time, the reasons why they decide to devote time to an activity of a (a priori) weak scope deserve attention.

Overall, the literature focusing on MEPs' use of written parliamentary questions has already established the decisive roles of several *structural-level factors*, such as the impact of the electoral system (Chiru, 2022; Sozzi, 2016a; Koop et al., 2018), government-opposition dynamics at the national (Proksch and Slapin, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013) and European levels (Kaniok and Kominkova, 2019), (the size of) EPGs (Navarro, 2019; Sozzi, 2016b; Sorace, 2018; Brack and Costa, 2019), the position towards European integration (Proksch and Slapin, 2010) but also committee membership (Sozzi, 2021, Navarro, 2019). Yet, we still know little about the impact of *macro-level factors* (i.e., national cultural political differences) as well as of *individual-level factors* (i.e., MEPs individual career patterns) that drive MEPs to invest time in the use of written parliamentary questions in the European Parliament.

In this wake, the objective of the article is to analyze MEPs' use of written parliamentary on two accounts. First, the paper provides a longitudinal analysis MEPs' use of written parliamentary questions over the last five legislative terms (i.e., 1994-2019), accounting for about 163.000 parliamentary questions. Second, the article also aims at expanding our

understanding of MEPs use of parliamentary questions by investigating the impact of the domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs (i.e. macro-level variable) in combination with MEPs career patterns (i.e. individual-level variable). Therefore, the research question of this paper is the following: *How can we explain the variation in the use of WPQs across MEPs?*

The article contributes to the existing research theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, despite the fact that some authors highlighted in the past the importance of the domestic political culture and highlighted differences across countries (see. Raunio, 1996; Proksch and Slapin, 2010, Sorace, 2018; Brack and Costa, 2019; Chiru, 2022), scholars have not yet tested the argument of domestic parliamentary culture in a systematic and causal manner (i.e., findings are mainly descriptive). Overall, the rationale of these studies is that MEPs from countries that are accustomed to written parliamentary questions will be more active in using this kind of parliamentary tool. This was the intuition of Raunio (1996) and was also highlighted by Proksch and Slapin (2010). Other studies also took country differences into account but they limited their analyses to a control variable of EU 28 countries (e.g., Sorace, 2018) or for some specific countries, like in the study of Chiru (2022) that control for 'new' EU-13 MEPs or the study of Sozzi (2016b) that control for UK, as this country is recognized as having a tradition in using parliamentary questions (Farrell and Scully, 2007; Katz, 1997).

In addition, in the wake of the seminal contribution of Schlesinger (1966), the paper also analyses the influence of career orientation (Scarrow 1997) in combination with the domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs. On this regard, several scholars already discussed the impact of MEPs career patterns on their legislative behavior, yet they never focused on non-legislative activities (i.e. WPQs), a tool that is less constrained by EPGs leadership. Overall, while analyzing parliamentary questions, some authors looked at proxies aiming at capturing to some extent the impact of MEPs career patterns, such as seniority, MEPs tenure (in days) or being a newcomer/incumbent but scholars still need to reflect on the interaction between MEPs career patterns – limited in this version of the article to the distinction between domestically experienced MEPs and the others<sup>1</sup> – and their domestic parliamentary culture.

Empirically, while existing studies made important contributions to understand the use of WPQs, they are also limited in their empirical scope and do not offer a comprehensive and longitudinal analysis of the use of written parliamentary questions over time. Studies are often restricted to a small number of countries (e.g., Sozzi, 2016b), and/or limited to the analysis of

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<sup>1</sup> The littérature on MEPs career patterns is more developed than what we achieve in this version of the paper. In forthcoming versions of this paper, we will analyze in depth the impact of various career patterns on the use of parliamentary questions. Indeed, existing research, notably the one of Meserve et al. (2009) showed that 'nationally-oriented' MEPs are less disciplined than 'EP-oriented' MEPs in terms of voting. Høyland et al. (2019) analyzed the relationship between career ambition (i.e., national, European and non-political career) on voting and speeches in debates and outlined that MEPs who seek a European level career participate more than national-oriented MEPs. Van Geffen (2016) – analyzing attendance, amendments and motions – found similar results.

specific legislative terms (e.g., Sorace, 2018; Sozzi, 2016a; Proksch and Slapin, 2010; Raunio, 1996), on the analysis of a sample of parliamentary questions (Chiru, 2022; Brack and Costa, 2019; Jensens et al., 2013) or finally, they focus on certain EPGs, categories of MEPs (i.e., female MEPs or Eurosceptic MEPs) (Cornacchione and Tuning, 2020; Kaniok and Kominkova, 2019, 2020) or on certain policy fields (see. Kluger Dionigi, 2020; Michon and Weill, 2022; Meijers and van der Veer, 2019).

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the analytical framework and discusses how the variation in MEPs use of parliamentary questions can be explained by looking at the career orientations of MEPs (individual-level) and at domestic parliamentary culture. The next section discusses why it is pertinent to focus on written parliamentary questions and introduces the data, operationalization of variables and the method of analysis. Subsequently, we provide a preliminary analysis and provide a short discussion of the findings and the future steps of our research project.

## **2. Understanding MEPs' use of WPQs: domestic political culture and MEP's career patterns**

Following the seminal contribution of March and Olsen (1989, see. also Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), this paper rests on the assumption that institutions matter. Indeed, institutions constrain but also offer opportunities to actors within a particular organizational context (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and they show resilience over time, producing 'stable, valued and recurring patterns of behavior' (Huntington, 1968). Therefore, the variation in the behavior of MEPs – and in this case, the use of WPQs – can be understood by considering the institutional framework in which they operate. In this paper, we conceptualize the domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs and their career patterns as (complementary) institutions impacting on their behavior.

On the one hand, while entering the EP, MEPs bring with them the political culture of their home countries and in particular, their domestic parliamentary culture. The 'institution' of (domestic) parliamentary questions (Raunio, 1996) can also impact on how MEPs will deal with parliamentary questions in the EP. Indeed, MEPs may act at the EU level as 'things are done' at the domestic level, as they come with their work habit and as the latter are perceived as 'natural, rightful, expected and legitimate' (March and Olsen, 2004:3). To some extent at least, 'actors are able to look back and learn from past experience, and can look forward and attempt to influence events in the future' (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 44). On the other hand, a MEP career experience as well as anticipation of future offices can impact the way she/he acts once serving in office. In this respect, career patterns are thus more than the succession of different positions: career patterns are 'institutions in their own right' (Borchert 2011). In the

wake of Daniel (2015), we consider that career patterns allow those in office to learn the ‘rules of the game’. Going back to a seminal sociological perspective, a career is thus a dynamic concept providing cognitive and interpretative meaning schemes which in turn shape one’s behavior (Hughes, 1937). Quite importantly, as underlined by Ostrom (1986), no institution stands alone: they are interconnected with other institutions which can reinforce its effect or complement them. In practice, it means that an MEP career pattern may as well interact with the domestic (parliamentary) culture of its country. Indeed, as underlined by Raunio (1996), some MEPs have had previous experiences in domestic parliaments and/or in executives. Their domestic work habit and behavior in the EP may as well ‘reflect their experiences in national politics’ (Raunio, 1996:358), thereby combining the institution of ‘career pattern’ together with ‘the domestic parliamentary culture’.

## **2.1 MEPs domestic parliamentary culture and parliamentary questions**

An institution that may impact on the activity of MEPs is the domestic parliamentary culture (Raunio, 1996). In fact, several studies (see Raunio, 1996; Proksch and Slapin, 2010, Sorace, 2018; Brack and Costa, 2019; Chiru, 2022) already highlighted the existence of country variance but have not yet tested, in a systematic manner, its impact on the use of parliamentary questions. Most of the time, the findings on this matter are descriptive and ‘only’ control for the existence of country variance.

Overall, while parliamentary question is a tool available in all EU national legislatures, there exist important cultural differences across parliaments regarding the procedure to submit a question as well as the type of written parliamentary questions. Indeed, we know that the institutional style of the parliament can be more or less favorable to oversight activities and, within the set of available oversight tools, to specific instruments such as written questions. Within political systems focused on the representational ideal type of parliamentary politics, written questions are more likely in order to cultivate the electoral link between citizens and legislators (Palonen 2018). While parliamentary written questions are not necessarily effective for getting reelected (Lazardeux 2005), they may enable yet legislators to signal their constituents that they are active and mobilized. For example, it often put forward in the literature that UK is a special case, recognized as having an important tradition in the use of parliamentary questions (Sozzi, 2016b; Farrel and Scully, 2007).

The differences between the institutional rules organizing the procedure reflect this variation in the dedication towards these instruments. There are countries where the possibility to ask questions is limited, either through the total number of questions that can be asked or through some thresholds. In other cases, such as Israel, written questions do not have a specific status: all questions are asked in writing, some are answered orally, and the remaining

ones receive a written answer. As a result, existing datasets indicate that the volume of written questions varies greatly from an assembly to another. In 2015, there were about 70 questions yearly asked by a MP from the House of Commons in the UK vs. only 5 in most European legislatures<sup>2</sup>. To sum up, there exist important variation at the domestic level regarding the parliamentary culture of written question.

Consequently, when they enter the EP, MEPs bring their ‘vision’ of how to behave and act in parliament as per their own domestic parliamentary culture (i.e., how things are done in my country). It can also be the case of their staff that typically, at least for some of them, originate from the same Member States and that are tasked with drafting a large number of questions (Michon 2018). We therefore expect that the behavior of MEPs will reflect – at least at the start of their mandate – the parliamentary culture of their home countries. In practice, it means that **the more MEPs originate from a country with a tradition of using written parliamentary questions, the more written parliamentary questions asked (H1)**.

## **2.2 MEPs career patterns, parliamentary culture and written parliamentary questions**

Another institution that may impact MEPs’ behavior is their career patterns. Indeed, as outlined by Dodeigne et al., (2022), in comparison to other multilevel democracies (Stolz 2011; Dodeigne 2018), the EP can be categorized as an “integrated electoral arena” – like Belgium or Spain for instance – as it displays relatively strong interactions between European and domestic electoral arenas. This makes the EP an interesting example of multi-level career paths (Hoyland et al., 2019). Overall, we expect that different types of MEPs would display different levels of activity, as they have different prior experience and career goals. Indeed, previous studies focusing on career paths and legislative activities – but not on parliamentary questions – already showed a link between career ambition and parliamentary activities (Hoyland et al., 2019; Meserve et al., 2009; van Geffen, 2016). We therefore turn to the question of how and in which direction can MEPs’ career patterns impact on the use of written parliamentary questions.

In particular, considering that the EP is an integrated electoral arena, it also means that there are an important number of MEPs bringing their domestic parliamentary culture and, for some of them, their parliamentary ‘work habit’ into the EP. In this respect, the distinction between MEPs having prior domestic political experience and the ones having no prior experiences is particularly interesting, as it allows to distinguish between MEPs having experienced their domestic parliamentary culture compared to ‘domestic virgin’ MEPs (i.e., MEPs embedded in a parliamentary culture, yet without having experienced it). More precisely,

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Olivier Rozenberg, Eleni Tsaireli, *Vital Statistics on European Legislatures*, 2016. See: <https://statisticslegislat.wixsite.com/mysite/data>

for MEPs who have been directly socialized in such culture (because of former direct domestic experience in parliaments and/or executives), we expect that the ‘replication’ of such work habits would be even stronger. Therefore, we expect that **the more MEPs originate from a country with a tradition of using written parliamentary questions and having experienced it, the more written parliamentary questions asked (H2).**

### **3. Case selection, data and operationalization**

#### **3.1 A focus on written parliamentary questions**

Parliamentary questions serve several functions: it can be used to obtain information as well as to control the European Commission, the Council (Raunio, 1996) and more recently, the ECB. Other authors also highlighted the role of questions as a form of obstruction (Jensen et al., 2013) as well as a tool to promote MEPs’ reputation among relevant groups (i.e., constituencies, interest groups, national party or the EPG) (Sozzi, 2016; Martin, 2011). Finally, parliamentary questions have also been described as a two-way information channel (Raunio 1996), as they can also be used to send information to the executive (Rozenberg and Martin 2011). Overall, and compared with other parliamentary instruments available to MEPs, written parliamentary questions are not the most powerful legislative instrument available for MEPs. In this regard, some authors consider parliamentary questions as serving a symbolic purpose as they have a limited impact on EU policy-making (Brack and Costa, 2019).

The focus of this article is on written parliamentary questions. This choice is explained by several reasons. First, written parliamentary questions are the most popular form of questioning in the EP. Their number has constantly been on the rise between 1979 and 2014, with a peak during the 2009-2014 legislative term (LT). In particular, for the period covered in this article, our comprehensive datasets 163.705 WPQs that are split over accordingly over the last five legislative terms: 13.096 WPQs during LT4, 15.000 questions during LT5, 18.723 WPQs during LT6, 30.292 WPQs during LT7, 31.000 during LT8, 55.742 WPQs during LT9 and finally, 54.000 during LT10 and 45.852 WPQs during LT11. This increase in the number of questions leads to wonder why are MEPs using such an important amount of written parliamentary questions and what can explain their use over time. Second, as underlined by Navarro (2009, see also Brack and Costa, 2019), the procedure for written parliamentary question in the EP is the most stable one (at least until 2014), and this allows to make comparison over time. Defined in Article 130 of the EP’s Rules of Procedure, there exist two subtypes of written questions: non-priority (E) and priority (P) questions. While the number of priority questions is limited to 1 question per month per MEP, up until the 8<sup>th</sup> legislative term, there was no limit regarding the number of non-priority questions an MEP could ask. However, given the important increase in the number of questions asked, modifications were introduced in the EP’s Rules of procedure for LT8 (Brack



and Costa, 2019). More precisely, from July 2014 to December 2016, MEPs could ask a maximum of five questions per month. This number changed again in the course of the legislative term (EP's rule of procedure of December 2016) and fixed the limit to 20 questions over a period of three months (i.e., 80 per year). Another distinction between priority and non-priority questions is the time allowed to the Commission and the Council to answer them. In the case of priority questions, they shall be answered within a three-week period whereas non-priority questions shall be answered within six weeks after they have been forwarded to the addressees. Finally, and most importantly, when compared to other parliamentary instruments available to MEP, written parliamentary questions offer several advantages. They are accessible at the individual level (1) and are independent of control from the party leadership (2). In addition, there are few institutional constraints in their use (but see. LT8) and require little effort or skills (3).

### **3.2 Presentation of the data**

The empirical analysis is based on the combination of several original datasets. The first dataset includes the total number of written questions by each MEP during the 1994-2019 period and was scraped from the official website of the EP. For each question, we collected the following information: the date, the EP's rule and title of the question as well as the author(s) and addressee of the question. In total, this amounts for 163.894 WPQs over 25 years (1994-2019).

Second, to establish the nature of domestic parliamentary culture across Member states, we compiled a dataset gathering information on the use of written parliamentary questions at the domestic level in all EU Member States over time (Randour, Rozenberg and Dodeigne, 2022). For each Member States, we gathered data on the number of written questions asked per year in the lower chambers, up to five years before the Member State entered the EU in line with the period analyzed (i.e., 1995-2019). For example, it means that for EU-15 Member States, we collected yearly the number of WpQs asked between 1990 and 2019 while for most EU-13 countries, the data collection period starts in 1999. These data were directly retrieved on the website of the national parliaments – when available – or via contacts with the different parliamentary administration<sup>3</sup>.

The third dataset rely on the Evolv'EP project data sets (Dodeigne, Randour, Kopsch, 2022) which includes information of EU-28 3,654 MEPs having served in the EP since 1979. In particular, for each MEP, we collected empirical data regarding the duration (in months) of their parliamentarian and governmental career at the domestic and European levels before,

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<sup>3</sup> With this procedure, we could retrieve 'complete' data for 27 out of 28 parliaments, and 'partial' data (covering 10 years) for 1 parliament (i.e., Greece).

during (dual mandates) and after their EP mandates. Because a significant number of Member states sending delegations of MEPs to the EP are federations or regionalized states in which regional tiers present a high degree of authority (see. Regional Authority Index; Hooghe et al., 2010), the dataset also includes systematic information related to subnational political offices for 7 out of the EU-28 Member States (i.e., Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK). Finally, for information related to committee chairs, EPG, EP leadership positions and rapporteurship, we updated the dataset of Hix and Høyland (2011), respectively for LT7 and LT8.

### 3.3 Operationalization of the variables

The **dependent variable** 'use of written parliamentary questions' is operationalized as the total number of questions asked by each MEP over the five legislative terms covered by this study. Our first main independent variable of interest is '**MEPs' career paths**': we make a distinction between MEPs with previous domestic political experience in the domestic legislature and executives and the other MEPs. We furthermore control for the duration of prior domestic experience (number of months served). Our second main independent variable is **domestic parliamentary culture**: we created a categorical variable distinguishing between five types of domestic parliamentary cultures (see Appendix 1). For each Member States, we calculated the degree of parliamentary activity in terms of mean of WpQs asked by MPs. Based on the empirical distribution, we made a distinction between MEPs originating from countries having an (1) 'extremely low' and (2) 'low' domestic parliamentary culture in terms legislative activity (i.e., on average, MPs asked respectively less than 2 or 10 written parliamentary per year in their national parliament.), (3) countries having a 'medium' level of activity (between 11 and 19 written questions, N=13), and finally countries labelled as (4) 'high' and (5) 'extremely high' considering that national MPs ask respectively more than 25 and 65 questions per year. As we collected data over time, we will also take into consideration time variations in the domestic parliamentary culture. For instance, we observe that Belgium (currently classified as 'medium' parliamentary culture) should be labeled as low before the 2003 electoral reform that fostered personalization of electoral behavior and, therefore, increased the number of WpQs in the Belgian Parliament. However, for the sake of parsimony in our statistical modelling, we use an average score of domestic parliamentary culture at this stage of the project.

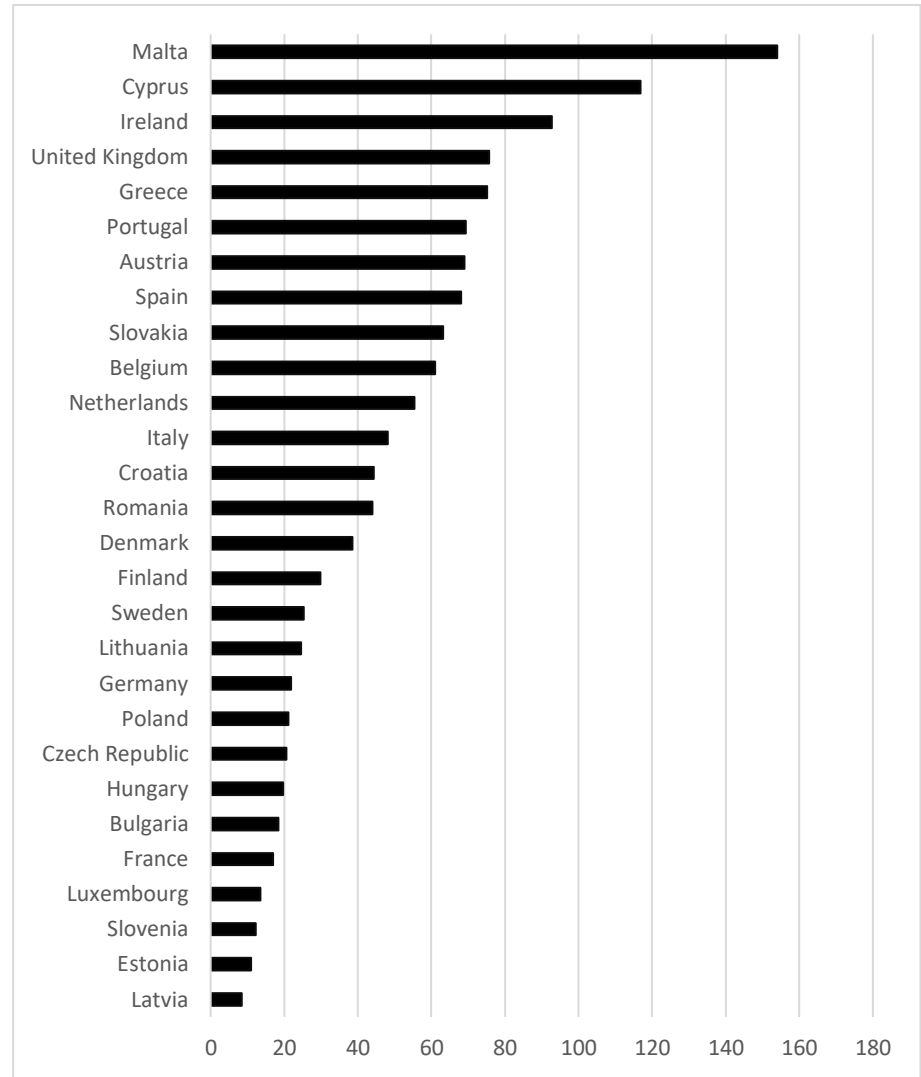
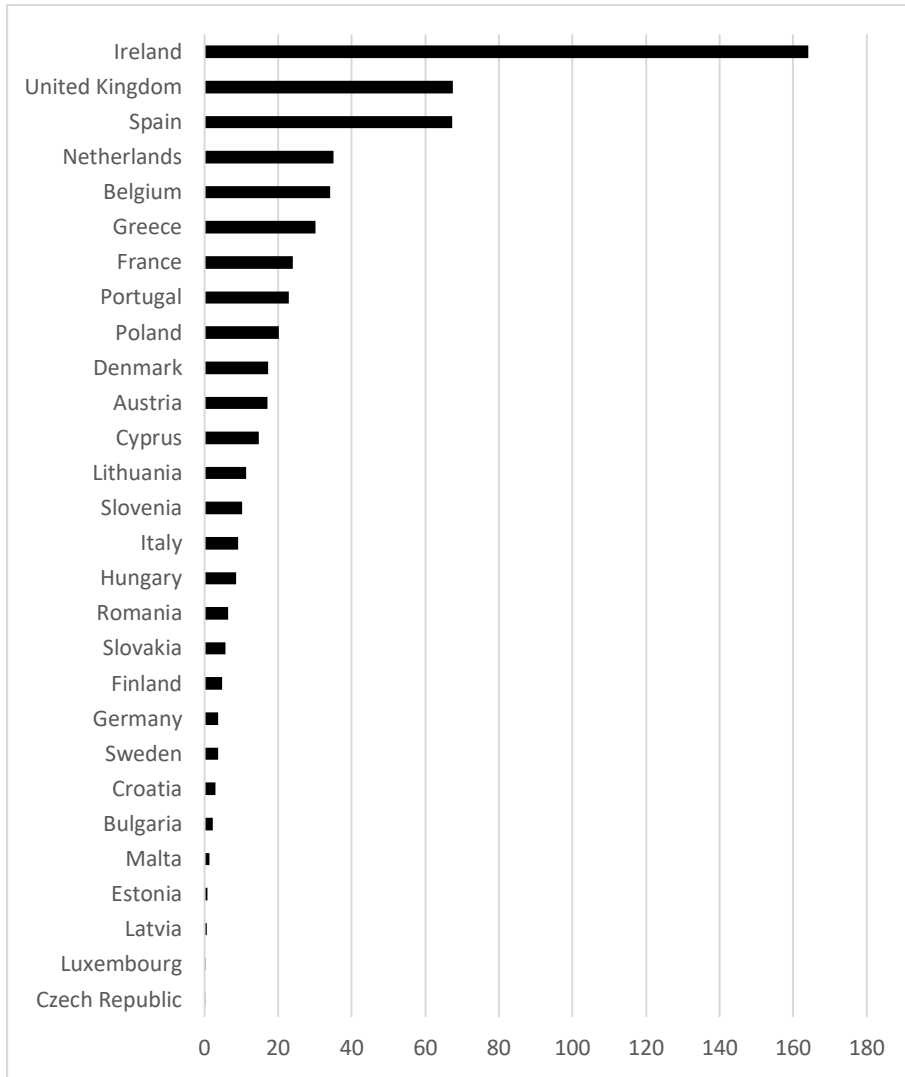
The descriptive stats presented in table 1 show that MEPs these five domestic parliamentary cultures behave significantly differently. We observe that a large part of the MEPs originates from the 'low' culture (n=854 MEPs from 9 countries) and the 'high' culture (n=729 MEPs from 6 countries). The other categories include between 169 and 445 MEPs, except the 'extremely low' category that covers hardly 80 MEPs (from five of the smallest

Member states in terms of delegation size). Regarding MEPs' activity, we observe that MEPs originating from a country with a 'low' domestic parliamentary culture tend to ask significantly fewer WPQs in the EP, than MEPs from a high domestic parliamentary culture. However, the distribution does not respect a strict linear trend: even though MEPs from an 'extremely low' domestic culture ask on average less than higher categories (medium, high, and extremely high), they still ask slightly more questions than MEPs from a 'low' domestic parliamentary culture. Yet, the number of MEPs from this category is limited to merely 80 MEPs, where a few individual behavior could strongly impact the average of WpQs in this category. Our goal is precisely to take into account individual-level variable in explaining the variance across these domestic cultures.

<b>Domestic Parliamentary Culture</b>	<b>MEPs (N)</b>	<b>Countries (N)</b>	<b>Mean of WpQs in the EP</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
Extremely low	80	5	63,5	130,8
Low	854	9	54,7	154,4
Medium	169	5	69,2	170,4
High	729	6	69,8	150,1
Extremely high	445	3	110,1	194,4
<i>F = 8.514, df = 4 ; p &lt;.0001***</i>				

**Table 1:** Mean of WpQs in the EP by domestic parliamentary culture.

In addition, the relation between domestic parliamentary culture and the use of WPQs is visible on Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively presenting the variation in the use of written parliamentary questions at the domestic and at the European levels. While not a perfect match, the comparison between the two figures tend to indicate that there is a strong relation between domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs and their use of WpQs in the EP. For example, if we look at the bottom of both figures, we can see some similarity for countries like Estonia, Latvia or Luxembourg. To a certain extent, a similar observation can be done for some countries classified as having a medium (e.g., Denmark and Austria) or extreme political culture (e.g., Ireland and the UK). In the next section, we seek to estimate how these preliminary descriptive observations hold when considering other control factors in our multivariate statistical models.



**Figures 1 and 2:** Country variance in the use of domestic written parliamentary questions (left) and of EP written parliamentary questions (right)

As summarized in the table 2, we control for the impact of several variables at both the individual and meso-levels. At the individual level, we took into consideration gender, the age of 1<sup>st</sup> office in the EP, the overall experience in the EP, prior domestic experience as well as the impact of some leadership positions in the EP (i.e., committee chair, responsibilities in the EPG or for the EP). As argued by Sorace (2018), looking at key position held in EPG, the EP or at positions like committee chairs allows to account for the selective nature of a parliamentary activity.

In addition, we also controlled for meso-level factors, and in particular variation across EPGs and electoral systems. Regarding EPGs, we included a dummy variable for each EPG in order to test whether group affiliation is a relevant factor in shaping legislative behavior as well as to see whether MEPs from Eurosceptic groups behave differently (i.e., Eurosceptic model of Proksch and Slapin, 2010)<sup>4</sup>. Regarding the electoral system variable, we followed Hoyland et al. (2019) – but also colleague that outline the importance of electoral motivations (see. Sozzi, 2016a; Navarro, 2019; Chiru, 2022; Koop et al., 2018) – and controlled for the impact of the electoral system of the country of origin. Overall, the argument put forward by these studies is that there will be a difference in the activity of MEPs based on the domestic electoral systems. Yet, actual findings on this variable are mitigated<sup>5</sup>. Regarding the operationalization of electoral systems, we followed Farell and Scully (2007) and Sozzi (2016) (see. Appendix for more details).

Independent variables	Operationalization	Descriptive stats
<b>Individual MEP factors</b>		
Gender	Binary variable	1579 male MEPs (ref.) 698 female MEPs
Age (1 <sup>st</sup> office in the EP)	Continuous variable (in years, before log. transf.)	Min-Max: 21-80, Mean: 47.1, std: 10.1
XP in the EP	Continuous variable (in months, before log. transf.)	Median: 59, Mean: 93.8, std: 64.4
Domestic XP	Binary variable	No XP in domestic politics (ref.), N=1589 XP in domestic politics, N= 688

<sup>4</sup> At this stage of the article, we relied on a ‘simple’ estimation based on the membership of MEPs whereas Proksch and Slapin used an expert survey on the positions of national parties on European integration conducted by researchers from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in 2006.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Sozzi (2016a) – but see also Navarro (2019) – find that MEPs elected under a candidate-centred electoral system ask more questions than parliamentarians elected via a party-centered system. However, this finding is not corroborated by Chiru (2022), as the author find no evidence of more activity of MEPs originating from candidate centred system.

Committee chair	Binary variable	Never rapporteur (ref.) = 2136 At least once, n= 141
Rapporteurship	Binary variable	Never rapporteur (ref.) = 559 At least once, n= 1718
EP leadership	Binary variable	Never rapporteur (ref.) = 2253 At least once, n= 24
<b>Meso &amp; macro factors</b>		
EPGs	Categorical variable	Conservatives (ref) N=182 EPP N=685 Eurosceptics N=134 Greens_EFA N=158 GUE/NGL N=159 Liberals N=212 Non-inscrit/Technical N=110 Socialists N=637
Domestic Parliamentary culture	Categorical variable	Extremely Low (ref.), N=80 Low, N=854 Medium, N=169 High, N=729 Extremely high, N=445
Electoral systems	Categorical variable	Index of electoral systems (5 categories)
<b>Control variables</b>		
Legislative terms	Binary variable	Dummy for each legislative term in which MEPs served (LT4, LT5, LT6, LT7 and LT8)

**Table 2:** Recapitulative table of variables and their operationalization

## 4. Empirical Findings

Because the distribution of our dependent variable is skewed to the left (Poisson distribution), we develop Poisson and negative binomial regressions (duplicate models for robustness checks). Given the nested structured of the dataset (MEPs are nested by member states), and our research objective to assess the effects of domestic parliamentary culture across Member states, we, furthermore, specify models with a varying intercept (i.e., varying total number of WPQs by MEPs across Member States). Our model hence has a level-II structure made of 28 member states for which parliamentary culture can take different values. At this stage, we test our hypotheses with models that estimate the impact of our main variables on the total number of WpQs by MEP (table 3)<sup>6</sup>. In the future, we also seek to estimate how the number of WpQs evolves over legislative terms, based on specific time series modelling (allowing time varying covariates, including for domestic parliamentary culture).

<sup>6</sup> We also run separate models for each legislative term. The findings are pointing in the same direction (although some exceptions exist that would require further robustness checks).

For the sake of parsimony, Table 3 only presents the results for the Poisson regression<sup>7</sup>. The first model is the baseline model and only includes the variable 'domestic parliamentary culture'. The second model adds to the baseline model the meso-level factors (i.e., EPGs and electoral system) as well as the individual-level factors (i.e. leadership positions, gender, age, etc.). The third model is the most comprehensive full model, including all independent variables from the model 2, as well as an interaction effect between domestic experience and domestic parliamentary culture. Finally, the fourth model replicates model 3 but considering only Rookies MEPs.

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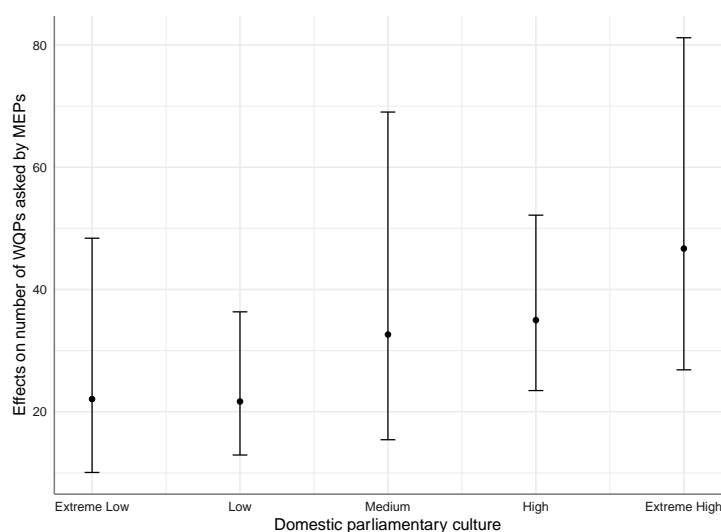
<sup>7</sup> Which has a better model fit than the negative binomial, but the latter also gives statistically significant results in the same direction for domestic culture and its interactive effects with prior domestic experience.

	Model 1 Baseline	Model 2 Full model	Model 3 Full model interaction	Model 4 Full model interaction (rookies only)
<b>Individual level variables</b>				
Female MEPs (ref. category= male MEPs)		-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.22*** (0.01)
Committee chair (ref. category= never)		-0.03** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.17*** (0.02)
Rapporteurship (ref. category=never)		0.19*** (0.01)	0.18*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
EP Leadership (ref. category=never)		-0.28*** (0.03)	-0.27*** (0.03)	-0.61*** (0.04)
Domestic XP (ref. category=none)		0.03*** (0.01)	-0.76*** (0.04)	-1.40*** (0.07)
Months served in the EP (log.)		0.34*** (0.01)	0.34*** (0.01)	0.97*** (0.01)
Age (log)		-0.84*** (0.01)	-0.84*** (0.01)	-1.10*** (0.01)
National delegation size		-0.02 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)
Membership post 2004		-0.23 (0.26)	-0.24 (0.25)	0.01 (0.33)
<b>Domestic Parliamentary Culture</b> (ref. category= extremely low)				
Low	0.07 (0.24)	0.30 (0.32)	-0.02 (0.32)	-0.04 (0.34)
Medium	0.44 (0.27)	<b>0.78***</b> (0.30)	0.39 (0.29)	-0.11 (0.32)
High	<b>0.46*</b> (0.26)	<b>0.76**</b> (0.38)	0.46 (0.37)	0.38 (0.41)
Extremely high	<b>1.02***</b> (0.31)	<b>1.06**</b> (0.46)	<b>0.75*</b> (0.45)	0.52 (0.49)
<b>Interactive effects Domestic XP * Parl culture</b> (ref. extremely low parliamentary culture)				
Domestic XP * Low culture			<b>0.79***</b> (0.05)	<b>1.85***</b> (0.07)
Domestic XP * Medium culture			<b>0.92***</b> (0.05)	<b>1.84***</b> (0.07)
Domestic XP * High culture			<b>0.69***</b> (0.05)	<b>1.18***</b> (0.07)
Domestic XP * Extremely high			<b>0.91***</b> (0.05)	<b>2.15***</b> (0.07)
<b>Additional (meso-level) controls</b>				
Legislative terms	√	√	√	√
EPGs	√	√	√	√
Electoral systems	√	√	√	√
Constant	3.50*** (0.19)	4.69*** (0.46)	5.01*** (0.45)	3.97*** (0.50)
Observations	2 177	2 177	2 177	1 168
Member states	28	28	28	28
Log Likelihood	-84 042	-62 714	-62 442	-59 543
Akaike Inf. Crit.	168 097	125 490	124 955	119 156
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	168 131	125 667	125 154	119 333
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01				



**Table 3:** Poisson regressions for all terms (1994-2019)  
Models 1, 2 and 3 with all MEPs - Model 4 with Rookies MEPs only

First, we observe that the full model with interactive effect (Model 3) offers the best AIC and BIC scores when considering the entire set of MEPs. Furthermore, the inclusion of individual-level variables in addition to parliamentary cultures substantially improves the goodness of fit in Model 2 (significantly better AIC score). Second, regarding the empirical results, we observe that our hypothesis 1 stating that MEPs originating from domestic parliamentary systems that have an extensive use of written parliamentary question will ask more questions in the EP is confirmed for countries classified as ‘extremely high’ in our categorization (see model 2). Compared to countries categorized as ‘extremely low’ (ref. category), these MEPs are indeed asking about twice as much written parliamentary questions in the EP than their colleagues (respectively about 22 and 47 WpQs, see figure 3). This confirms the intuition of Raunio (1996) that the ‘institution’ of (domestic) parliamentary questions impacts on how MEPs deal with parliamentary questions in the EP.

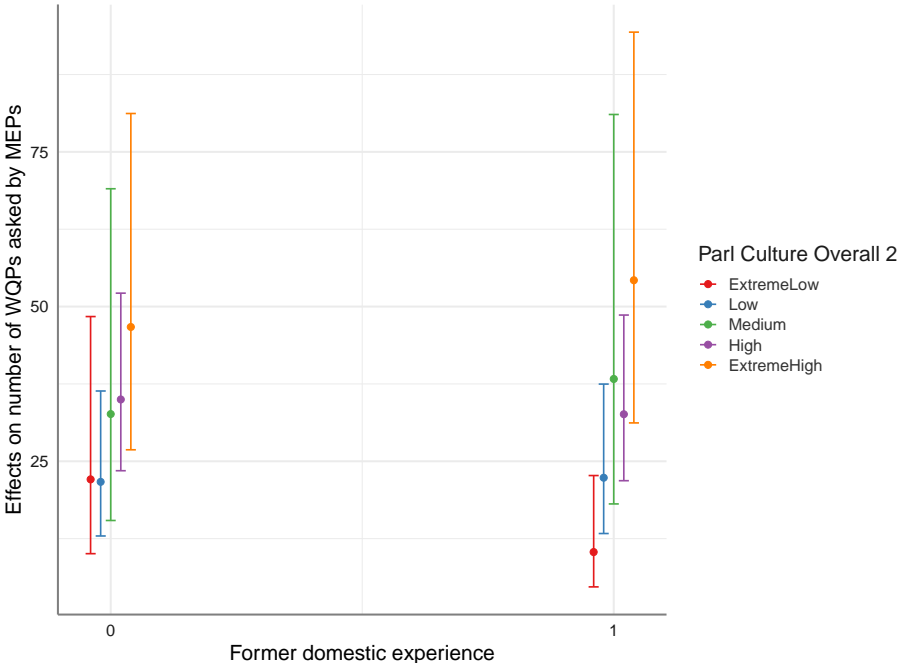


**Figure 3:** Effect of domestic parliamentary culture on average number of WpQs by MEP

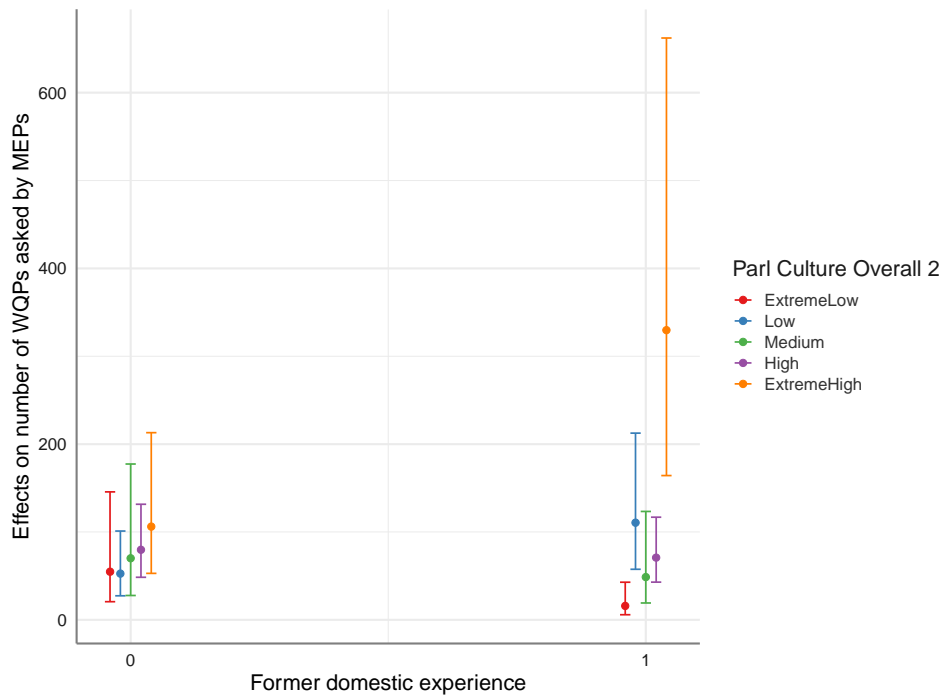
Model 3 also depicts some interesting findings related to hypothesis 2. The positive and statistically significant coefficient indicate that MEPs who have been socialized by an extremely high parliamentary culture – thanks to their prior experience as national/regional MP or member of a cabinet – are indeed asking more questions than MEPs having no prior political experience. This finding is particularly visible in the following figure 4a, which presents the interacting effect of domestic parliamentary culture with the variable prior-domestic experience. While domestic parliamentary culture does trigger different legislative behavior for all MEPs, we observe that the differences observed between types of cultures are the highest for MEPs with experience in domestic politics. Hence, MEPs (without domestic experience) ask about

twice more questions in the EP when originated from an extremely high parliamentary culture, in comparison to extremely low culture. However, when MEPs directly experienced such domestic culture, the differences are much larger: MEPs from an extremely high parliamentary culture ask four times more questions. If (domestic) legislative socialisation matters, one could argue that such effects should be counterbalanced by the (European) socialisation when these MEPs enter the EP. Therefore, we replicated our model splitting our data between newly elected MEPs (Rookies) and MEP having served at least one mandate in the EP. Model 4 indicates that the effects of hypothesis 2 are indeed the strongest for rookies MEPs, and milder for MEPs having served at least one legislative term in the EP (difference between extremely low and extremely high is 30 times greater). In other words, domestic parliamentary culture matters but only for the newly elected MEPs. When the latter start serving the EP, a new socialisation process develops which harmonize legislative activity across the different national delegation to a point where differences due to domestic parliamentary culture tend to decrease.

Finally, we also run additional robustness checks (using a continuous operationalization of parliamentary culture or taking into consideration the duration of the former domestic experience). While the effects can vary in magnitude, the conclusions unmistakably remain the same: domestic parliamentary culture is a strong predictor of MEPs' legislative activity, especially for MEPs having previously served in domestic politics.



**Figure 4a:** Interaction between domestic parliamentary culture and prior domestic experience (all MEPs)



**Figure 4b:** Interaction between domestic parliamentary culture and prior domestic experience (Rookies MEPs only)

Finally, our control variables are also depicting interesting findings, confirming the results of earlier studies. Regarding meso-level variables, our different models highlight that the biggest EPGs in the EP (i.e. the EPP, S&D and the liberals) are asking on average fewer questions than smaller EPGs, like the GUE/NL or the Greens (see. On this matter Navarro, 2019; Sozzi, 2016; Chiru, 2022). In addition, the findings also indicate that MEPs from Eurosceptics groups and of technical groups are the one asking the most question, a result that goes in the direction of the Eurosceptic model<sup>8</sup> of Proksch and Slapin (2010) (see. also Chiru, 2022). Finally, regarding the electoral system, like Chiru (2022), we do find any evidence that the electoral system has an impact on the use of parliamentary questions. At the individual level, holding a leadership position in the EP (i.e. President, Vice President, Member of the Bureau) presents a negative coefficient for the use of written questions. On the contrary, MEPs who have been rapporteurs during their mandate in the EP tend to ask more written questions. This could suggest that more active MEPs overall are also more active in asking WpQs (i.e., legislative activism), but this finding should be substantiated with additional data.

## Conclusion

Starting from the observation that the country variance was often identified as significant across Member States, but not yet tested in a systematic and causal manner, the objective of

<sup>8</sup> But see. Footnote 7: our operationalization is different than the one of Proksch and Slapin.

this article was to investigate the impact of the domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs (i.e. macro-level variable) in combination with MEPs prior domestic experience (i.e. individual-level variable). Our main assumptions were that (1) MEPs act in the EP as per their own domestic parliamentary culture and behave in a similar way than what is done at home and (2) that this effect would be even stronger if MEPs had prior-domestic experience at the domestic level.

Our findings indeed highlight that MEPs originating from a country having a strong culture of using written parliamentary questions ask more questions in the EP. In addition, the data also outlines that the effect of the parliamentary culture is even stronger when considering the previous domestic experience of MEPs (i.e., previous 'domestic' socialisation). To sum up, MEPs act in the EP following their domestic parliamentary culture and this effect is even stronger when they have had a prior political career at the domestic level. Put simply: tell me where you come from, and I'll tell you how you behave in the EP (at least for written parliamentary questions). However, and interestingly, we also noticed that the impact of the domestic parliamentary culture and the domestic socialisation is, to some extent, counterbalanced by parliamentary socialization taking place within the EP over time. Indeed, we observed that the effect of the domestic parliamentary culture is stronger for 'rookies' MEPs (i.e., MEPs serving their first EP mandate) compared to more 'Euro-experienced' MEPs.

Overall, the findings presented in this paper support the assumption that institutions matter, by constraining the behavior of (rookies) MEPs. Furthermore, the findings also underlined that institutions are interacting between each other, combining the institution of 'career pattern' together with 'the domestic parliamentary culture'. However, these findings must be further refined in the future on several dimensions. For instance, we also seek to estimate how the number of WpQs evolves over legislative terms, based on specific time series modelling (allowing time varying covariates, including for domestic parliamentary culture). We also need to complete the data collection for one country (out of 28) regarding its domestic parliamentary culture.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Categorization of Domestic parliamentary culture

Domestic parliamentary culture				
Extremely Low	Low	Medium	High	Extremely high
Czech Republic	Bulgaria	Slovenia	Poland	Spain
Luxembourg	Croatia	Lithuania	Portugal	United Kingdom
Latvia	Sweden	Cyprus	France	Ireland
Estonia	Germany	Austria	Greece	
Malta	Finland	Denmark	Belgium	
	Slovakia		Netherlands	
	Romania			
	Hungary			
	Italy			

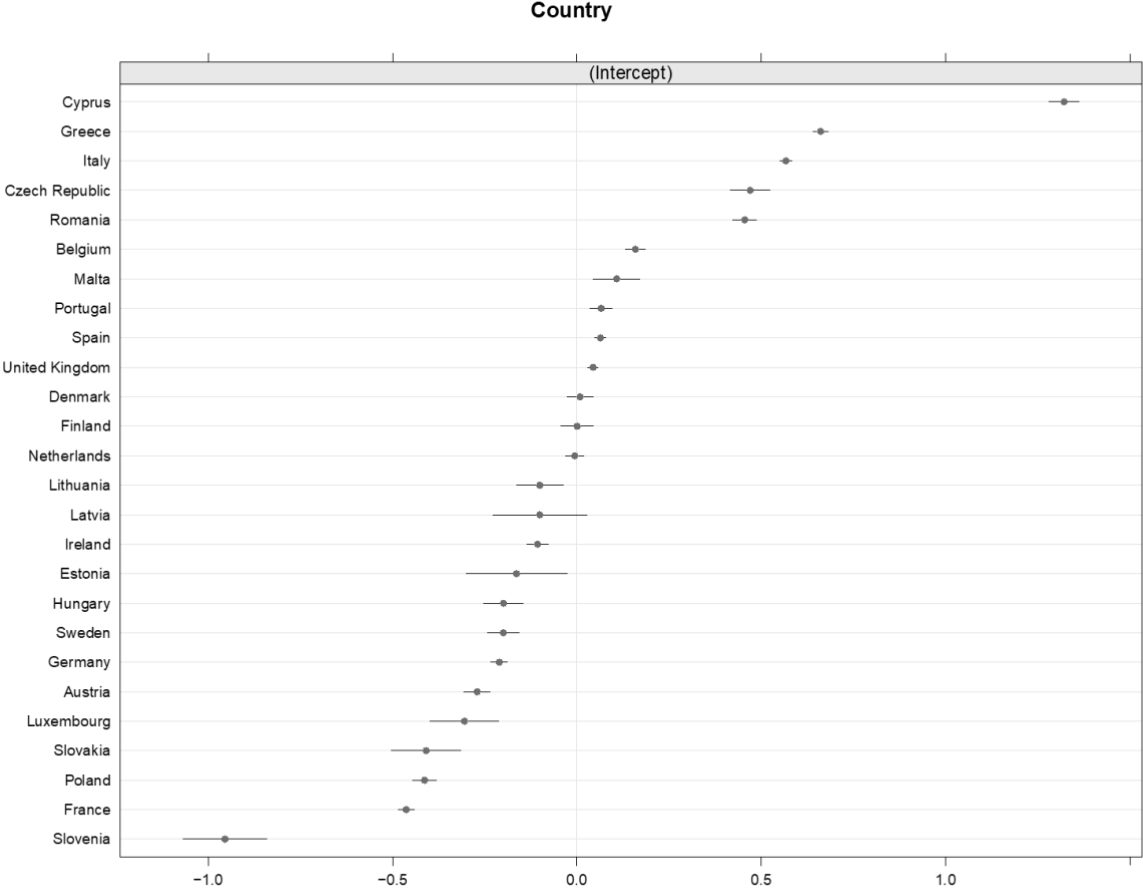
### Appendix 2: Electoral system operationalization

Index	Component scores (ballot, votes, district magnitude)	Description of system	Cases
9	3,4,2	STV	Ireland, Northern Ireland, Malta
8	2,4,2	Quasi-list	Finland
7	2,3,2	Open list, panachage	Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg
5	2,2,1	Ordered list	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Latvia, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden
3	1,1,1	Closed list	Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal Spain

Source: Farrell and Scully (2007).

**Appendix 3: Residual country variance beyond parliamentary culture**

*Country residual variance is not anymore explained by parliamentary culture distribution (but simply random).*



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