

THE POLITICS OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS ASSIGNMENT IN IRELAND AND SPAIN

Committee chairs are key positions in legislatures. Their holders are vested with important formal and informal powers. In this article, we make a comparative appraisal of the politics of committee chair assignment in Ireland and Spain. Using an original dataset that covers the last two decades in both countries, we make a twofold contribution. Based on Cox and McCubbins's partisan theory of US Congress, we first develop a framework for parliamentary democracies by showing that party leadership assigns legislators with low electoral vulnerability to committee chairs to buy their loyalty to the party. Further, results suggest that those legislators are assigned to committee chairs to heighten their willingness to work for partisan public goods. Second, our contribution leverages electoral systems variation to show how different institutional environments produce similar outcomes.

Keywords: committee chairs; legislative organization; partisan theory; personal vote; political parties

I. Introduction

Together with political parties, committees are the organizational backbone of legislatures in parliamentary democracies (Müller, 2000; Saalfeld and Strøm, 2014). They help aggregate preferences, curb transaction costs, and facilitate information acquisition and dissemination (Strøm, 1998). Much of their influence in the decision-making process stems from their size, which makes them an optimal decision-making arena (Verba, 1961). In his influential work on committee decision-making, Sartori (1987: 236) dubs them as arenas that “shun majority rule, seek unanimous agreements via internal deferred payments, and adjust to the outer world, or incorporate its demands, via side payments.”

The study of committee systems has benefited immensely from scholarship developed in the context of the US Congress (Shepsle and Weingast, 1994). Yet, attempts to make those theories travel to the European context have yielded mixed results (see Martin, 2014). Two reasons explain the difficulties to create a general and unified theory of legislative organization in parliamentary democracies. First, the pivotal role of political parties in organizing the chain of delegation. In Müller’s formulation, “no one would seriously consider any alternative to political parties as the most important political coordination mechanism” (2000: 316). Second, the fused nature of legislative and executive branches (Huber, 1996) creates an environment in which “professional advancement and policy influence [are] a single indivisible good controlled by the party leadership” (Kam, 2009: 26).

In this article, we explore the politics of committee chairs assignment in two parliamentary democracies – Ireland and Spain. By focusing on these countries, we can test whether different institutional settings are conducive to similar outcomes. We focus our attention on committee chairs. Over the past few years, a burgeoning body of literature has explored their usage as coalition governance mechanisms (Kim and

Loewenberg, 2005; Carroll and Cox, 2012). Moreover, chairs concentrate important agenda-setting powers (Fortunato et al., 2017) and have privileged contacts with the parliamentary party group leaderships (see chapters in Heidar and Koole, 2000).

Our argument hinges on Cox and McCubbins's (2007) proposition that committee assignment is informed by a reward/punishment system. In their work on the US Congress, the authors argue that the party leadership makes a *retrospective* examination of legislators' voting behaviour and decides who deserves a promotion or a demotion. Legislative organization at time t results of an *ex-post* examination of what happened in the previous legislative term. We adapt this argument to make it applicable to parliamentary democracies. We argue that the party leadership makes committee chairs assignments based on *prospective* behaviour. In this case, legislative organization at time t results of an *ex-ante* examination of potential negative and positive effects of the assignment.

Our expectation is that parties choose legislators with low electoral vulnerability to occupy positions as committee chairs. Because of their perception of electoral security (Fenno, 1977), those legislators will take more advantage of opportunities to shirk and to focus on their personal agenda. Parties will curb potential deviation from the party line, by buying off their loyalty. Further, it will promote a more efficient parliamentary organization. Legislators with low electoral vulnerability are less concerned with their re-election and thus are more able to provide the party with collective goods, such as information, when they obtain one of these posts.

To test our argument, we turn to Ireland and Spain to leverage cross-country variation in electoral system settings. Although both employ proportional representation (PR) rules, the mechanics of intra-party delegation in both countries are fundamentally different. The Irish single transferable vote system offers legislators incentives to

cultivate a personal vote. Personal attributes have high importance for vote-seeking activities, while the party brand is less important. Spain's closed list proportional representation (CLPR) system does not offer incentives to cultivate a personal vote. Voters cast a ballot for a party list, which blurs the distinction between candidates' qualities and effort, and party label. Our contribution to the literature is to show that there are similar patterns in the politics of assignment of committee chairs, regardless of the institutional incentives.

II. Confronting American and European Experiences in Committee Assignments

Scholarship on the US Congress is the most sophisticated literature on the study of legislative organization (Smith, 2007). Although some of its assumptions and rationales are problematic to translate into European strong-party contexts, it is worth making a cursory discussion about them. The three canonical theories of Congress legislative organization offer some stylized assumptions about legislators' motivations and behaviour (Martin and Mickler, 2018) that may be helpful to generate hypotheses on Ireland and Spain. First, the distributional theory sees committees as an arena for legislators to obtain gains from trade (Shepsle, 1978). This strand of literature hinges on the assumption that legislators are first and foremost re-election seekers (Mayhew, 1974). Consequently, their work in committees is oriented to fulfil this goal. Political parties are conceived as weak organizations with a meek role in the assignment of legislators to committees. Rather, legislators self-select to committees that offer them the opportunity to deliver 'pork barrel' to their constituencies and, in turn, heighten their re-election prospects (Shepsle and Weingast, 1981). The distributional theory further argues that committees should be composed of preference outliers. In other words, they claim that

the preferences of the median member of the committee are not representative of those of the chamber.

The informational theory puts the costs in acquiring and disseminating information at the centre of legislative organization (Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1987; 1990). This theory builds on the assumption that there is high uncertainty about the policies passed by the chamber and the outcomes of those policies. The median legislator does not have the time or the resources to acquire the necessary information to make a meaningful decision, with a clear understanding of all its potential impacts. Thus, committees appear as the institutional solution to help legislators curb information costs. Legislators engage in labour division in committee work by developing expertise in specific policy-areas. Committees are expected to digest information and deliver benefits to the median legislator of the chamber. In return for their work in committees, and the costs of becoming legislative bellwethers, legislators are expected to have heightened influence in their area of expertise (Krehbiel, 1991). Conversely to distributional formulations, the informational theory presupposes that committees' compositions are representative of the preferences of the chamber. Crucially, it also downplays the role of political parties, placing great emphasis on the individual legislator as the pivotal actor in legislative organization.

Finally, the partisan theory reassesses the role of political parties in legislative organization (Cox and McCubbins, 2007). This approach is the one that bears more resemblances with European strong-party contexts. Legislators do not have the leeway to self-select to their preferred committees. Rather, they are constrained by a macro-level party structure that cartelizes committee positions by acting as a gatekeeper. The partisan theory argues that legislators are expected to contribute to a collective good: the party label. Crucially, "the better [...] the party's brand name, the better will be the prospects

for (re)election” (Cox and McCubbins, 2005: 7). The politics of committee assignments are intimately linked to legislators’ contribution to the party label. The party leadership auscultates the preferences and desires of legislators to ensure that committees are “a microcosm of their party caucus” (Cox and McCubbins, 2007: 184). However, the success of legislators’ preferences is mediated by their loyalty to the party. Accordingly, “loyalty [...] is a statistically and substantially important determinant of who gets what assignment” (Cox and McCubbins, 2007: 175). The higher the party loyalty of the legislator in the past, the more likely she will obtain an influential committee today.

In line with Cox and McCubbins’s (2007) original contribution, our discussion of committee assignments in parliamentary democracies may be perceived as a principal-agent framework. Parties (the principals) delegate to their backbenchers (the agents) the power to represent them in the committee arena. Principal-agent relations entail potential dangers. Specifically, we are interested in the dangers of moral hazard. Legislators may deviate from the preferences of their principal (Kiewit and McCubbins, 1991). Furthermore, legislators may free-ride and fail to contribute to the party brand. In their legislative organization strategies, political parties need to account for this.

Parliamentary democracies have benefited immensely from an ever-growing interest in the politics of legislative organization that builds on the American literature (Hansen, 2010, 2011; Martin, 2011; Fernandes, 2016; Mickler, 2017b; Riera and Cantú, 2016). Yet, most of this work is based on case-studies, which undermines the possibilities of producing general propositions beyond the idiosyncratic nature of each case study. Within this framework, there are two specificities in parliamentary democracies that are worth underline.

First, in parliamentary democracies, political parties act as gatekeepers for ambitious politicians and as organizers of the chain of democratic delegation

(Schlesinger, 1966; Strøm, 1997). Parties are the only route *to* parliament and to channel progressive ambition *within* parliament (Carroll et al., 2006). Furthermore, in parliamentary democracies, parties cartelize campaign funds, which are crucial for re-election efforts (Katz and Mair, 1995).

Second, committees in parliamentary democracies offer fewer opportunities for fiscal particularism (i.e., pork barrel). As Martin (2011) demonstrates, even in systems with high incentives to cultivate a home style, such as Ireland, legislators in charge of institutional design choose not to endow committees with such power. Instead, legislators privilege parliamentary questions, speeches, and direct contact with their constituents as mechanisms to cultivate the personal vote (André and Depauw, 2013).

Bearing these general considerations in mind, Damgaard (1995) examines two dimensions of the intra-party dynamics of committee assignments in parliamentary democracies. First, parties consider legislators' competency and expertise in the committee assignment process. Parties benefit from having knowledgeable legislators in committees. Legislators benefit from continuous work on previous areas of expertise, which helps them in reputation building. Second, parties consider the wishes and preferences of legislators. Legislators have different career paths and prospects. Committees may be an important springboard to help them fulfil their progressive ambition for higher office (Sieberer and Müller, 2017). Parties, of course, need to manage expectations. In big parties, there are more candidates than positions available. In small parties, members must take up positions that they would otherwise not be interested in.

In this article, we are particularly interested in committee chairs. These are the most important prize in committee systems, if anything for the symbolic weight they carry. Committee chairs are endowed with several formal and informal powers that make them an interesting institutional focus to examine. First, over the last decade, the literature

recognized the importance of committee chairs as coalition governance mechanisms (Kim and Loewenberg, 2005; Carroll and Cox, 2012). Specifically, chairs serve for political parties to make a strategic shadowing of the portfolio holder, curbing her capacities to shirk from the coalition agreement.

Second, committee chairs have agenda-setting powers that shape the menu of choices, and in turn political outcomes. In their comparative work on four European democracies, Fortunato et al. (2017) show that chairs have the capacity to call witnesses, intervene at their volition, and choose rapporteurs. These powers might influence the general outcome of policy-making processes in committees.

Third, chairs have privileged contacts with the parliamentary party group leadership (see chapters in Heidar and Koole, 2000). Additionally, they have contacts with the bureaucracy, ministers, and junior ministers. By being embedded in these networks, chairs have access to privileged information that is helpful not only to their party, but also to their personal careers (Fortunato et al., 2017).

Despite this prior research, other analyses cast some doubt on the importance of chairs for committees. According to Sieberer and Höhmann (2017), there is no empirical evidence that chairs are endowed with special powers to help them perform a prominent role in committee life. However, as the authors rightfully acknowledge, their analysis is only limited to formal rules (i.e., rules of procedure), which may be overlooking informal practices about the role of committee chairs in parliamentary democracies.

III. Committee chairs assignments in Ireland and Spain

In this article, we turn to the Irish and Spanish cases to explore the dynamics of committee chairs assignment in parliamentary democracies. Ireland and Spain have important institutional differences, notably, in their electoral system. Yet, we expect that our hypotheses blur the canonical boundaries of electoral systems and hold in both contexts.

Ireland is a multiparty parliamentary democracy with a bicameral legislature. The lower house currently consists of 158 members elected every five years under a single transferable vote system. The small size of the Irish *Dáil* has important implications for its internal organization. Members of the executive serve simultaneously as members of the legislative branch. Consequently, the number of remaining backbenchers to deal with a massive workload daily is relatively reduced. This problem is particularly acute in the case of small parties that often do not have the possibility to foster labour division and specialization in the parliamentary party group.

The Irish electoral setting strongly promotes incentives for legislators to cultivate a home style. Consequently, personal attributes have more weight than the party brand (Cain et al., 1987). Ireland has 40 constituencies with magnitudes ranging from 3 to 5.¹ Electoral competition happens not only at the inter-party level, but also at the intra-party level. Voters can support specific candidates, which undermines partisan control of the electoral process. Candidates need to cater individual votes by heightening their personal profile at the expense of their fellow party members (Marsh, 2007). The ballot structure further contributes to the personalization of the Irish system, insofar as it includes not only the party logo, but also the candidate's photograph (Gallagher, 2005). Typically, legislators engage in constituency work, table parliamentary questions, and deliver speeches that voice their concern with their constituents (Martin, 2011). Interestingly, committee work is not seen as a privileged arena for legislators to deliver benefits to their constituents. The weakness of the committee system, in conjunction with the lack of opportunities for fiscal particularism, explains this (MacCarthaigh, 2005).

Recently, the Irish *Dáil* has benefited from two case-studies on legislative organization. Hansen (2011) describes the committee assignment process in Ireland to be

¹ In most constituencies, political parties only put forth three candidates.

predominantly random. Sector knowledge emerges as one of the few systematic determinants of assignments. Mickler (2017a) contributes to the debate with an account enriched with information from elite interviews. Two findings are worth underlining. First, work developed in the context of committees offers little leverage to cultivate a personal vote. In other words, committees deal with substantive policy-making issues that are not easily transformed into electoral assets even though this author acknowledges that committees offer informational advantages that can be useful for legislators to help their constituents. Second, Mickler (2017a) describes a sequential pattern in the assignment of influential institutional positions. If we consider the *Dáil* as the talent pool from which the party leadership can select persons to take over top positions in institutions, Mickler's evidence suggests that "first, ministers and junior ministers are appointed from the pool of TDs, followed by committee chairs and vice-chairs" (2017a: 18). This seems to imply that institutional positions are assigned according to a ranking. The most important positions – ministers and junior ministers – are the first to be filled, followed by committee chairs and vice-chairs. The author, however, falls short of providing an explanation for how the party leadership ranks members of parliament (MPs) to be assigned to those positions.

Our discussion of the Irish case brings us to the hypothesis that, in preferential systems, the party leadership acts *prospectively* by choosing candidates who have garnered more preferential votes as committee chairs. Legislators who obtain a large share of preferential votes are less dependent on their performance for re-election. Moreover, they are better equipped to be electorally successful in case of becoming independents. Consequently, they have more opportunities to shirk and to focus on their own agenda and delivering benefits to their constituency. We contend that the party leadership uses committee chairs strategically as a mechanism to buy loyalty. The leadership promotes

legislators with low electoral vulnerability to positions of influence in the legislature. This has two consequences. First, it heightens their symbolic importance in the parliamentary party group, increasing the reputational costs of shirking. Second, it keeps these legislators with a focus on the party as their main principal.

H1: In preferential vote systems, the higher the number of preferential votes the more likely a legislator will be assigned to a committee chair.

Spain is also a multiparty parliamentary democracy with a bicameral legislature. The lower house – *Congreso de los Diputados* – consists of 350 members elected every four years under a closed list proportional representation system. Considering the cubic root rule of assembly size (Taagepera and Shugart, 1989), it is not a small legislature. Members of the executive do not have to be simultaneously members of the legislative branch, even though most of them are.² The number of backbenchers is sufficient to promote labour division and specialization, particularly in the case of the two major parties. Conversely, small parties face difficulties to devote at least one MP to each policy area, and their legislators end up overseeing more than one.

Spain is divided in 50 province-wide, multi-member districts, whose magnitude varies considerably.³ In each multi-member constituency, seats are allocated to closed party lists. Typically, political parties put forth a full list of candidates per district whose ranking voters cannot modify. Most parties normally do not use primaries to choose the names and order of the candidates, which hinders voters' capacity to influence candidates during the selectorate stage. Electoral competition happens strictly at the inter-party level,

² In fact, junior ministers are usually forced to quit their seat when they are appointed in order to focus on their executive tasks.

³ For instance, in the 2016 elections, Soria elected two MPs whereas 36 seats were distributed among parties in Madrid. In order to participate in the apportionment of seats, a list must receive at least three percent of all valid votes cast in the district. 348 candidates are elected under a CLPR system. There also two single-member districts in Africa - Ceuta and Melilla - that are filled by plurality rule.

with little incentives to cultivate a home style. The party brand is thus highly important as a cue for voters' electoral decision.

We should note, however, that Spain does not constitute the purest example of a closed-list system. First, the ballot contains the names of the candidates (Hopkin, 2005), which contributes to a more personalized perception from voters. Second, voters appear to slightly reward parties when the top candidates in their district-level lists are well-known persons, such as prime ministers, members of regional cabinets, mayors, and incumbent members of the national parliament with long careers (Riera, 2011). For all their importance, these details do not fundamentally change the fact that an absolute control of the electoral process is bestowed on Spanish party leaders.

Previous research on the Spanish legislature has been eminently descriptive (Sánchez de Dios, 1999; Martínez, 2000; Capo, 2003). The few empirically-driven works that we are aware of either adopt a public policy perspective, in which individual legislators are not the unit of analysis (Mújica and Sánchez-Cuenca, 2006; Sánchez de Dios, 2006; Chaqués et al., 2015), or lump different cases of closed-list systems together (Riera and Cantú, 2016).

The dearth of research is particularly troubling in the case of the committee system, which has been predominantly studied by law scholars. In Spain, the Constitution does not limit the number of committees, which leads to numerical fluctuations from term to term and an overall high number of them.⁴ The Standing Order of the *Congreso* lacks decisive regulations concerning committee size, but each member of the chamber is entitled to serve on at least one committee. The composition of congressional committees reflects the proportion of seats held in the Chamber by the various party delegations (the

⁴ There are currently 19 standing legislative committees in the Spanish Congress.

so-called, *grupos parlamentarios*), which are the main organizing units in the legislature.⁵ Compared to the Irish case, Mattson and Strøm (1995) show that committees in Spain are relatively strong in terms of drafting authority and agenda control. More specifically, most substantive legislative policymaking is conducted in standing committees with specific policy jurisdictions and bills can bypass the floor of the Lower Chamber and go directly to the Senate under some circumstances. Extant literature on the Spanish literature does not offer any account on committee chairs.

Turning to our hypotheses, we argue that, in closed-list systems, the party leadership also acts *prospectively* by assigning legislators with low electoral vulnerability to committee chairs that can help maximize the efficiency of legislative organization. The motivation for this type of behaviour, however, is different from the Irish case. In closed-list electoral systems, the party is the pivotal principal of legislators. Even legislators with low electoral vulnerability have few incentives to deviate from the party line, insofar as their reselection, position in the list, and career advancement hinge on the party (Willumsen, 2017).

In the Spanish case, the party prefers to choose legislators with low vulnerability as committee chairs for several reasons. First, they are often party notables, with high media prominence. Second, in closed-list systems, legislators with high positions on the list have incentives to free-ride and take advantage of the party label benefits, without contributing to the collective effort of building it (Sieberer, 2006). They can do it because the electoral system does not require them any personal-vote effort and, further, their position in the list often makes reselection virtually equivalent to re-election. Thus, our

⁵ All parties with fifteen or more members can constitute a delegation with a president and any other authorities they wish to designate. Practically, parties with five or more members constitute a delegation most of the times.

expectation is that the party leadership puts them to work as committee chairs to ensure that they contribute to shore up the party brand.

H2: In closed-list systems, the higher the list position the more likely a legislator will be assigned to a committee chair.

Finally, we examine the moderating effect of district magnitude on the likelihood of party notables obtaining a committee chairs. Our rationale hinges on the assumption that parties strategically allocate their notables to different districts. Specifically, we assume that the most relevant party notables run in high magnitude districts for two reasons. First, in high magnitude districts there are more seats at stake and in turn their potential impact on the total seat tally of the party is bigger. Notables are asked to help the party in its vote-seeking battles in contexts where stakes are higher. Second, even in closed-list systems, the risks of not being elected are bigger in smaller districts, even for top candidates. The party leadership does not want to run the risk of not having a party notable in the parliament. This discussion leads us to the expectation that party notables are less likely to appear at the bottom of lists in small districts, and, subsequently, the effect of list position in the likelihood of obtaining a committee chair should increase as district magnitude decreases.

H3: In closed-list systems, the effect of the list position on the likelihood of being assigned to a committee chair becomes stronger in small districts.

IV. Methods and Data

In this article, we turn to Ireland and Spain to examine the hypotheses put forth previously. Our case selection helps us to make a most different system research design - that is, to formulate “statements that are valid regardless of the systems within which observations are made” (Przeworski and Teune, 1970: 39). Members of both parliaments are elected based on proportional representation rules. However, institutional differences

in their electoral systems can help us to understand the mechanisms underpinning committee assignment. Ireland offers a textbook example of preferential voting, where legislators have strong incentives to cultivate a personal vote and parties have individual-level information about candidates' electoral appeal. Conversely, Spain has a closed-list system, where political parties are the pivotal actors and legislators have little incentives to cultivate a personal vote. We leverage on the divergent personal vote-seeking incentives in these two countries to test our theoretical expectations on the allocation strategies of parliamentary parties. Our observation window ranges from 1997 through 2016 in Ireland. The Spanish case is examined from 2000 through 2015. Data have been retrieved from official archives in the legislatures, supplemented with party archives and Wikipedia.⁶

Our dependent variable is *Chair Assignment*, which is coded as 1 if legislator i at legislature l was assigned as a committee chair in the legislature, and 0 otherwise.

We have two key independent variables. First, *Vote Share*, defined as the proportion of votes that every legislator received in the district. Since our two countries have different electoral systems, we operationalize the variable differently. In the Irish case, this variable gauge the share of ballots that each candidate received as first preference. Furthermore, supplementary Table S1 and S2 use the actual number of first preferences rather than the share as an independent variable. In Spain, *Vote Share* is the proportion of votes that list i received in district j . All list members in district j are assigned the same value. We also include the squared value of *Vote Share* in some model specifications to account for non-linear effects.

Second, in the case of Spain, another relevant independent variable is *List Position*, which is a continuous variable that accounts for a legislator's rank on the party

⁶ We owe thanks to Tim Mickler for sharing his data on Irish committees. Shane Martin pointed out official sources on Irish government data.

list. In this case, a value of 1 is for those legislators ranked at the top of the list in the district.

Our models include several control variables that account for competing explanations for our hypotheses. First, we include *Magnitude (Log)*, a continuous variable indicating the number of seats allocated in each district. District magnitude ranges from 3 to 5 in Ireland and from 2 to 36 in Spain. Second, we include a measure of *Seniority*, indicating the number of legislative terms the legislator has served before the current term. Our expectation is that parties are more likely to reward more senior legislators with committee chairs. Third, the variable *Minister* takes the value of 1 if the legislator has been member of the cabinet in the current term, and 0 otherwise. Finally, our models for Spain include controls for legislators' *Gender* and *Age*. Table 1 and Table 2 show the descriptive statistics for the variables employed in the analyses.

[Table 1 and 2 about here]

Our unit of analysis is the individual legislator. All our estimations include legislators fixed-effects, to account for unobserved heterogeneity. Such specification allows us to estimate the likelihood of legislator i to be assigned as committee chair, while keeping all her unobserved characteristics constant. Furthermore, we also include legislature and party fixed-effects to account for potential variant characteristics of legislators across legislatures and parties.

All the models presented below use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions. Despite the binary nature of our dependent variable, our model selection is based on three reasons. First, many of the legislators in our database were never assigned a committee chair. As a result, many of the individual fixed-effects are collinear with the dependent

variable, and using a maximum-likelihood estimator would drop all these observations and produce biased estimators. Observe that this is not a problem of the relatively low number of committee chair assignments—which it could be fixed with a rare-event logistic regression, for example—but the no variability of the dependent variable within individual legislators. Second, alternative model specifications, such as multilevel models, are inefficient estimates due to the small number of observations in our database for every legislator. Our approach, therefore, maximizes the probability of providing unbiased estimates. Finally, a linear probability model deals provides estimates that are easier to interpret (Angrist, 2001).

V. Results

We start our empirical foray by examining the politics of committee chairs assignment in Ireland. Our expectation is that a linear function of candidates' votes should be positively correlated with the probability of a legislator being assigned as a committee chair. Table 3 shows the results.

Results suggest support for our theoretical expectation. Legislators who fare better in the electoral arena have a higher likelihood of being assigned as committee chairs. In all linear specifications (Models 1 to 4), a 2-standard deviation change in the candidates' vote share increases the probability of being assigned as a committee chair by more than 20 per cent. This evidence shows support to our first hypothesis. Models 5 through 8 also show that this effect is curvilinear: the probability of being assigned as committee chair starts to decline beyond some given threshold of electoral support.⁷

Results are robust to the inclusion of party and term fixed-effects. Furthermore, they are robust to a change in the nature of the dependent variable, as seen in

⁷ Model 4 offers the linear full specification with fixed effects at the MP-, party-, and term-levels. Model 8 shows the non-linear specification with fixed effects at the MP-, party-, and term-levels.

supplementary Tables S1 and S2. Of all our potential confounding covariates, only seniority has a statistically significant effect in the likelihood of being assigned to a committee chair. Conversely, having served in the cabinet during the current term does not have any discernible impact on being assigned to a committee chair.

[Table 3 about here]

Turning to the Spanish case, our hypothesis argues that the likelihood of being assigned as a chair in this country depends on list position. Table 4 shows the results. Empirical evidence suggests that the likelihood of being assigned as a committee chair declines by about 2 per cent for every marginal decrease in the list position. This effect is highly significant and robust to the inclusion of party and term fixed-effects. The effect of control covariates on the likelihood of becoming a committee chair in Spain is somehow mixed. Both legislators' seniority and age have an independent positive effect of being assigned to one of these positions. By contrast, sex and having served on the national government during the current term do not have any discernible effect on the probability of chairing a committee.

[Table 4 about here]

Next, we examine a potential interaction effect between list position and district magnitude. Figure 1 shows that in low magnitude districts ($M=2$) being second (i.e., last) on the list decreases the likelihood of obtaining a committee chair by about 7 per cent. In high magnitude districts ($M>30$) like Madrid or Barcelona, the effect of list position on the likelihood of being assigned to a committee chair is not statistically distinguishable from 0.

[Figure 1 about here]

VI. Conclusion

In this article, we set up to explore the politics of committee chairs assignment in parliamentary democracies. Our motivation was twofold. First, we wanted to contribute to the debate on how political parties select their agents to sit in committees. Specifically, we wanted to understand how intra-party delegation happens in the choice of chairs. Second, we aimed at making a comparative approach to committee assignments. Most of the existing empirical approaches in Europe are case-studies, which undermines the possibility of leveraging institutional variation as a potential explanation for different outcomes.

Our account focuses on Ireland and Spain. These countries offer an optimal case selection because, albeit their electoral system hinges on proportional representation, they have important institutional differences in the extent they offer incentives to cultivate a personal vote. This allows us to leverage differences in the electoral system.

Our contribution to the literature suggests that in European parliamentary democracies legislative organization is decided based on *prospective considerations*. Conversely to the US case, where political parties make a retrospective analysis of loyalty and reward legislators accordingly, we suggest two strategies of legislative organization in parliamentary democracies.

First, where parties should heavily compete with voters for the time and resources of the legislator, that is, in preferential vote systems, our findings suggest that parties choose legislators with high electoral attractiveness as committee chairs. By and large, the leadership does this to buy loyalty and to ensure that legislators who are highly certain of their district support will not shirk and will instead toe the party line.

Second, in closed-list systems we find that parties also choose legislators with low electoral vulnerability as committee chairs. Their motivation, however, is different. In this case, the leadership chooses these legislators to force them to contribute to the party brand. With re-election virtually assured by reselection, and without other principal to satisfy, these legislators could free-ride. By being appointed as committee chairs, party leaders push them to contribute to the party brand.

Overall, the novelty of our paper is that legislators with low electoral vulnerability are more likely to be assigned as committee chairs, regardless of the electoral system in which they operate. Future research should expand the number of cases to explore the nature of committee chairs assignments. This will facilitate our understanding of how political parties make intra-party decisions in their legislative politics depending on the institutional environment in which they operate.

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Figure 1. Marginal effect of position list on probability of being assigned to a committee chair as district magnitude increases, Spain (2000-2015)

Note: The solid line shows the marginal effect and the dashed lines the 95% confidence intervals based on the estimates reported in model 8 of Table 4

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, Ireland (1997-2016)

	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Chair	524	0.187	0.39	0	1
Votes Share	523	15.8	5.1	2.7	37.7
District Magnitude(log)	523	1.361	0.206	1.098	1.609
Seniority	524	2.066	2.432	0	10
Minister	524	0.019	0.136	0	1

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, Spain (2000-2015)

	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Chair	1382	0.265	0.441	0	1
List Position	1382	3.935	4.099	1	28
District Magnitude(log)	1382	2.136	0.738	0.693	3.583
Votes Share	1382	41.694	10.355	13.73	65.31
Seniority	1382	2.305	1.741	1	11
Minister	1382	0.021	0.145	0	1
Female	1382	0.385	0.486	0	1
Age	1382	45.419	9.643	19	73

Table 3. Determinants of committee chairs assignments - Ireland (1997-2016)

	M-1	M-2	M-3	M-4	M-5	M-6	M-7	M-8
Votes Share	0.019*** (0.007)	0.021*** (0.006)	0.021*** (0.006)	0.021*** (0.006)	0.095*** (0.033)	0.08*** (0.031)	0.079** (0.031)	0.075** (0.031)
District Magnitude(log)	0.764** (0.344)	1.102*** (0.324)	1.126*** (0.327)	1.171*** (0.327)	0.986*** (0.352)	1.264*** (0.332)	1.273*** (0.335)	1.309*** (0.334)
Seniority				0.185* (0.112)				0.168 (0.112)
Minister				-0.289 (0.265)				-0.305 (0.263)
Share Squared					-19.898** (8.362)	-15.348* (7.868)	-14.849* (7.969)	-14.119* (7.970)
MP fixed-effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Party fixed-effects	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Term fixed-effects	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES
Constant	-1.157** (0.524)	-1.877*** (0.503)	-2.011*** (0.550)	-2.201*** (0.557)	-2.123*** (0.658)	-2.604*** (0.623)	-2.663*** (0.649)	-2.807*** (0.651)
Observations	522	522	522	519	522	522	522	519
R-squared	0.630	0.687	0.688	0.693	0.640	0.692	0.693	0.698

Note: These are linear probability models with standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 4. Determinants of assignment to a commission chair, Spain (2000-2015)

	M-1	M-2	M-3	M-4	M-5	M-6	M-7	M-8
List Position	-0.023*** (0.004)	-0.023*** (0.004)	-0.024*** (0.004)	-0.014*** (0.004)	-0.144*** (0.022)	-0.145*** (0.022)	-0.149*** (0.022)	-0.088*** (0.022)
District Magnitude(log)	-0.182 (0.295)	-0.183 (0.296)	-0.183 (0.295)	-0.195 (0.284)	-0.211 (0.292)	-0.210 (0.292)	-0.211 (0.291)	-0.208 (0.283)
Votes Share	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Seniority				0.040*** (0.008)				0.035*** (0.008)
Minister				-0.075 (0.081)				-0.084 (0.081)
Female				-0.027 (0.024)				-0.023 (0.024)
Age				0.008*** (0.001)				0.007*** (0.001)
Position*District Mag.					0.038*** (0.007)	0.038*** (0.007)	0.039*** (0.007)	0.023*** (0.007)
MP fixed-effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Party fixed-effects	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Term fixed-effects	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES
Constant	0.778 (0.636)	0.784 (0.637)	0.707 (0.638)	0.262 (0.618)	0.904 (0.629)	0.898 (0.630)	0.817 (0.630)	0.356 (0.616)
Observations	1,373	1,373	1,373	1,373	1,373	1,373	1,373	1,373
R-squared	0.067	0.067	0.075	0.144	0.089	0.089	0.099	0.152

Note: These are linear probability models with standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.