

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

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Abstract

The assignment of seats to specialized standing committees is a most consequential choice in legislative contexts. Distributive theories of legislative organization suggest that electoral incentives to cultivate personal votes explain the assignments of legislators to constituency committees best suited to please geographic constituents and to thus secure re-election. However, these theories discard the partisan basis of European legislative politics and therefore are hardly able to adequately assess the politics of personal vote seeking in partisan assemblies. This paper approaches this task for the German case on the basis of a new and rich data set including statistical data for five legislative terms (1983, 1987, 1998, 2005, 2009). It argues that in partisan assemblies political parties themselves might facilitate personal vote seeking efforts contingent upon electoral incentives and available individual-level talent. Particularly, we argue that Germany's mixed proportional system provides incentives to parties to assign legislators with local roots to district committees best suited to please geographic constituents.

Keywords

Political parties, legislative organization, committee assignments, electoral systems, personal vote seeking

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Distributive theories of legislative organization and their scope

Specialized standing committees serve as means to effectively scrutinize governments and deliberate legislation (Mattson and Strom, 1995). The question of who gets to serve on what committee is thus an important one to the functioning of the broader democratic system.

Distributive theories of legislative organization provide influential answers to this question. They assume that committee assignments result from the self-selection of legislators that seek personal votes and that aim to use committee seats to distribute electorally rewarding policies to constituents. Specifically, distributive theories envision legislators elected by plurality vote to seek assignments to so called district committees that allow channeling federal funds to geographic constituencies. Geographically targeted infrastructural policies are electorally most rewarding since they allow building broad based electoral coalitions independent from partisanship. They also provide a most plausible basis for credit claims made by individual legislators (Mayhew, 1974; Shepsle and Weingast, 1987; Weingast and Marshall, 1988).

Distributive theories of legislative organization are build upon evidence predominantly resulting from the US-American case. The question of their applicability to European contexts remains dubious to students of legislative politics. This skepticism is mainly motivated by the role of cohesive and disciplined parties in European assemblies. In European assemblies, legislators are team players that focus on national partisan coalitions of voters rather than individual entrepreneurs that cater to geographic constituents (Thomassen, 1994; Sieberer, 2006; Uslander and Zittel, 2006). This is said to have consequences for legislative organization. Committees are portrayed as arenas for partisan conflict controlled by parliamentary parties and staffed by partisan legislators. They are assumed to be vehicles for parties to deliver partisan policies to national constituents rather than particularistic policies to geographic constituents.

In this paper we argue against an irresolvable contradiction between distributive theories of legislative politics and partisan contexts. We rather argue that contingent upon electoral context parties themselves might have an interest in personal-vote seeking efforts launched by individual legislators designed to deliver particularistic geographically targeted policies. In case of candidate-centered ballots parties should consider it electorally rewarding to cater to geographic

constituents, employ available talent to pursue this task, and direct assignments to district committees to this group of legislators to help them succeed. With this argument, we conceptualize the committee assignment process as a “personnel strategy” by which parties seek to deploy available talent so as to maximize their vote seeking goals contingent upon electoral context.

To explore the argument made, this paper offers a systematic analysis of committee assignments under Germany’s mixed system. In this analysis, we take issue with the wide-spread assumption that the German system offers a quasi-experimental design and that its two tier structure, in which some members are nominally elected in single member districts and others via party lists in multi member districts, potentially provide parties with incentives to specifically assign nominally elected legislators to district committees. In contrast, we theorize that the proportional nature of Germany’s mixed system might lead parties to adopt an alternative personnel strategy and to utilize locally well connected legislators rather than district winners as conduits for party driven personal-vote seeking efforts via distributive legislative politics.

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

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

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

Committee autonomy is an important prerequisite for distributive policy-making in US-Congress. This enables members to legislate on particularistic benefits and thus please their constituents by simultaneously distributing most sought after policies and logroll consent amongst each other. Committees in European parliamentary systems in general and in the German Bundestag in particular are by no means autonomous to similar degrees. By default they rather function as arenas for partisan conflict and as agents for partisan interests.

Consequentially, it might be rather governments that function as sources of particularistic policies as a result of intra-party and/or coalition bargaining (Zittel, 2014; Suiter and O'Malley, 2014).

The significance of committees for our argument results from the fact that they serve as important and effective lobbyists for their causes vis-à-vis ministerial departments. They might not directly legislate particularistic benefits but they influence those that do. Furthermore, committees differ in their jurisdictions in systematic ways (e.g. Yordanova, 2009). Some are special since they allow targeting geographic constituents and providing infrastructural benefits under the radar screen of national matters. These committees plausibly enjoy a larger degree of autonomy from party political concerns since their jurisdictions are less salient in terms of national partisan policy debates.

Stratmann and Baur (2002) identified for the German Bundestag the existence of *district committees* that enjoy special jurisdiction in matters related to geographic constituents and that allow to “channel funds to the home district”. The Committee on Transportation, Building and Urban Affairs in the 17th Bundestag is one concrete example in this regard (Stoffel, 2014; Stratmann and Baur, 2002). It drafts national plans specifying where motorways, streets and

bridges will be built or repaired as part of the national budget (*Bundesverkehrswegeplan*). These public works projects allow members of the committee to direct federal funds to their electoral districts to support local enterprises and the local economy. Stratmann and Baur (2002) also put the Committee on Tourism and the committee for Agriculture into the district committee category. The latter participates in allocating significant amounts of subsidies to farmers (e.g. *Agrarexportförderung, Grünland Milchprogramm*) and also to rural areas for infrastructural developments (e.g. *Gemeinschaftsaufgabe Verbesserung der Agrarstruktur und des Küstenschutzes*).

The contrast to other committee types underscores the special significance of district committees. Stratmann and Baur (2002) particularly highlight the existence of *party committees* that focus on larger national policy issues related to partisan conflicts over the allocation of values. These committees require political parties under the conditions of nationalized party systems to position themselves on national policies, to propose partisan policy solutions, and to cater to large national coalitions of voters. They predominantly deal with general kinds of legislation and universal programs that either regulates the behavior of all citizens or that redistributes benefits among broader social groups such as the rich and the poor. The Labor and Social Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag for example legislates on social policies that decide on the volume of transfer payments and related conditions of eligibility. Legislators serving on these committees function as their party's spokespersons and representatives for specific policy profiles and positions in specific national policy domains. Procedural committees are an important third type of committee in the Bundestag that include the committees on Petition and on Electoral Integrity and Rules (*Wahlprüfung und Geschäftsordnung*). Both share purely organizational jurisdictions that concern the functioning of electoral and legislative processes.

Partisan control over the assignment of committee seats is an important observational indicator for the partisan basis of committee politics. To what extent do parties control committee assignments in the German case? Stratmann/Baur (2002: : 513) hypothetically argue for a greater role of self-selection than we intuitively would expect in partisan assemblies. However, the case specific qualitative literature rather suggests an interactive process dominated by party and partisan concerns.

In the Bundestag, committee seats and chairs are first distributed in proportion to the strength of the parliamentary parties (Röper, 1998; Edinger, 1992). The parliamentary party groups then allocate “their” committee seats among their members. In the SPD, FDP, and CSU, the step of allocating each party’s posts is coordinated by the Chief Whips of the parliamentary parties. The CDU puts a special “panel on the assignment of committee seats” in charge of this process, which among others underscores the federal nature of the party.¹ This panel is made up of the chief whip and the chairs of the regional (state) subgroups that are important gatekeepers in the allocation of assignments to their delegation and that also oversee fair representation of all regional groups in all committees. In addition, the parties main sociological groups are included in this process (Mickler, 2013). The final decision on committee assignments in all party groups first requires the agreement of the parliamentary party leadership (*Fraktionsvorstand*), and then by majority vote in a general meeting the agreement of the whole party group (*Fraktionsversammlung*) (Ismayr, 2000; Schüttemeyer, 1998).

At the informal level, party leadership does not single-handedly determine committee assignments. Instead, Ismayr (2000: 167) characterizes this process as lengthy and conflict ridden since party groups aim to be responsive to the wishes and motivations of their members despite the structured and disciplined nature of party politics in Germany (Saalfeld 1995). The political groups consult their members about their committee preferences at the beginning of the legislative term in formal ways. It is common practice in all parties to explore member preferences through internal questionnaires distributed prior to the decision on committee seat allocation; in all cases the Chief Whip coordinates this process. The chairs of the policy task forces and the chairs of the regional chapters of the party groups also survey their members and develop ideas on seat allocation (Ismayr 2000: 174). These initial consultations follow lengthy informal negotiations between leadership and ordinary group members.

Internal conflicts about committee assignments can be severe since seats are scarce and the stakes are high for individual legislators. This is especially true for large party groups where each legislator will generally receive only one assignment. A few informal commonly agreed upon rules are instrumental in minimizing conflict. Seniority in a given committee plays a crucial role

in the allocation of committee seats. As a common practice, committee members are able to keep their assignments after re-election if they wish to do so. Many committee seats are simply returned to their previous holder (Kaack, 1990). Each committee is also made up of an equal number of “deputies”. If legislators wish to take a seat on a new committee, having served as a deputy in this committee in the previous parliamentary session generally helps their cause.

Independent of informal rules, disagreement and conflict eventually is also moderated by the capacity of party leaderships to “convince” legislators, to have the final say if necessary, and to even sanction non-cooperative individuals. The special role of the leadership is emphasized by its right to withdraw legislators from committees even during the legislative cycle (Edinger, 1992; Patzelt, 2000: : 30). A most recent and most dramatic example concerns the removal of one of the most prominent and outspoken opponents within the CDU of the *European Stability Mechanism* strategy from the Budget committee of the German Bundestag (Willsch, 2015: : 204ff.).

Despite the partisan basis of committee politics in the Bundestag, we do envision some distributive politics at the margins in this context. Specifically, we expect two distinct observational implications. First, we expect parties to take *district committees* as opportunities to cater to local constituents and to pursue particularistic policies. Second, we expect parties to single out those individuals that are most motivated and also able to perform this task in most effective and loyal ways. In the remainder of this section we will discuss the types of legislators parties might select and their reasons for doing so.

Committee assignments under mixed-member proportional rules

District committees provide opportunities for parties to cater to geographic constituents by assigning the right legislators to the right committee. This raises questions on the type of legislator parties might be willing to assign to these committees and on their reasons to focus on geographic constituents in that ways. In the following we argue that parties under Germany’s

mixed member proportional system are most likely to assign local legislators with profound local roots to district committees to boast their party vote.

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

Mixed-systems combine a plurality tier with a proportional tier of election. The so-called mandate-divide literature envisions the plurality tier to result in behavioral strategies that are close to those adopted in pure plurality systems. Related literature on the German case stresses this point of view (e.g. Klingemann and Wessels, 2001; Lancaster and Patterson, 1990). The German mixed system allows voters to cast a candidate and a party vote and thus manufactures two different types of constituencies that parties are faced with. The candidate vote is cast in single member districts under plurality rule. As a result, approximately half of the members of the German Bundestag are elected on the basis of the nominal (candidate) vote and face local constituencies. The party vote is cast in multimember districts under proportional rule and on the basis of closed party lists. Consequently, this elects approximately the second half of the members of the German Bundestag that face national constituencies. Formally, these legislators face regional constituencies as they are elected on the basis of statewide party lists. Practically, they cater to national constituencies due to the relative ideological homogeneity of German political parties and due to the division of labor between the *Bundestag* and the *Bundesrat*, the second chamber that represents state (*Land*) interests. For these reasons, we will refer in the following to “national constituencies” rather than to regional or state constituencies.

According to Stratmann and Baur (2002) Germany’s mixed system particularly provides incentives to parties to adopt a dual personnel strategy and to assign nominally elected members (district winners) to district committees and incumbents elected via party lists to party

committees. The underlying rationale is that geographically targeted policies suited to please local constituents might help district winners to win re-election and thus to secure nominal mandates for their parties. In turn, partisan policies discussed and enacted in policy committees are assumed to help list winners to boost the party vote and thus win re-election. Committee assignments are thus considered to provide opportunities for electoral gains in the respective tier of the mixed-member system.

In contrast to the mandate-divide literature, we argue that the proportional nature of Germany's mixed system accounts for interaction effects between the two tiers of election and thus for unique personnel strategies that aim to assign local instead of electorally competitive legislators to district committees to boost the party vote.

In mixed-member proportional (MMP) system, the list tier compensates parties, on a national basis, for deviations from proportionality that arise from the allocation of nominal-tier seats via plurality rule (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001a). Thus it is the list vote that determines the overall allocation of seats in the Bundestag, implying that it is this vote that parties should be primarily focused on. Parties' nominal-tier seat totals are subtracted from the allocation they receive in the list tier to maintain proportionality, and thus parties are normally unable to win additional seats simply by increasing their nominal votes.² To further illustrate the proportional nature of the German mixed system, it is worth contrasting it with the other main class of mixed-member system, those that are classified as mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) by Shugart and Wattenberg (2001b). In these systems, list seats are allocated in parallel to the nominal-tier seats, rather than in a compensatory manner. Only in the MMM variant, as used for instance in Japan, are there formally two truly independent tiers of election functioning on the basis of two different electoral systems (Pekkanen et al., 2006).

Prior to the 2013 election, the compensatory nature of the German mixed-member system was disturbed by surplus mandates (*Überhangmandate*). Parties received surplus seats if they manage to win more nominal-tier seats than what would be their proportional entitlement based on list votes (Behnke, 2007). These surplus seats were not compensated by additional seats to other parties, and thus disturbed the predominant role of the list vote in the process of vote-seat

allocation (Farrell, 2001). However, although the number of surplus seats had been increasing since 1990 (Behnke, 2007),³ they remained a small enough part of the overall picture that they do not undermine the notion that the electoral system is fundamentally compensatory (Gschwend, 2004). Thus we are safe in saying that list votes are the most important determinant of seat allocation (unlike in MMM systems).⁴

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

The argument on the strategic effects of MMP systems for further clarification can be pushed to the extreme in the following way. Even hopeless legislators who will never ever be able to win their district should receive consideration for district committees if they are able to demonstrate localness. This is certainly true for small parties in German politics that are most unlikely to win any district at all. But this should also be true for bigger parties with fair chances to win nominal votes. The reasons can be demonstrated in a short thought experiment. Consider a local candidate of a particular party who managed to increase his or her vote share in the nominal tier from 25 to 35 percent. Consider now a local candidate that managed to increase his or her nominal vote share from 49 to 51 percent. If we wish to predict which one of these two candidates would be most likely to be assigned to a constituency committee, we would pick the first candidate, notwithstanding that this candidate lost the nominal-tier race, while the second candidate won. If

the contamination theory holds true, large swings in vote shares at the nominal tier should translate into large swings at the PR tier and thus into increases in parliamentary seats. Legislators who manage to deliver these results to their party should receive its utmost attention.

The behavioral strategies of German parties that we theoretically substantiated above can be further clarified in light of a number of observable implications. The frequent practice of dual candidacy for example stresses the fact that nominally elected legislators have no monopoly on geographic representation (Saalfeld, 2008) and that parties aim to link the incentives resulting from the proportional tier with the plurality tier. In the 2005 federal election for example, 1,050 candidates (45 per cent) ran in both a nominal district and on the party list. Only 434 candidates (18 percent) ran solely in one of the 299 electoral districts, while 862 (37 per cent) competed only on their party's list (Zittel and Gschwend, 2008). Among those elected, the percentage of dual candidacies is even higher. Manow (2007) reports an average of around 80 percent of MPs that were dually listed in recent elections. Because of the frequency of dual candidacies, most German legislators combine a national with a local focus.

The perceptions and behavioral strategies of legislators provide further evidence for the assumed contamination effect in Germany's mixed system. This particularly concerns the "shadow incumbent" phenomenon. Dual candidates who lost their district races subjectively perceive themselves as district representatives and aim to "shadow" the incumbent constituency representative (Schweitzer, 1979; Zittel, 2014; Lundberg, 2006; Zittel and Gschwend, 2008). The reasons for this special motivation to focus on local contexts can be manifold. Legislators might simply enjoy the role of a good constituency member, or they might aim at increasing electoral security in the long run (Roberts, 1988).⁷ However, we suspect that individual level motivations to pay attention to local constituencies also result from close personal and social ties to the district level.

In this analysis we are interested in an additional observable implication that concerns the personnel strategies of political parties. We suspect that Germany's mixed system provides incentives to parties to recruit legislators with profound local ties rather than district winners to district committees. This is because of the proportional nature of the system parties should not

predominantly be interested in winning districts. We do not dispute that winning nominal votes might be a goal for political parties and that it might play some role in their personnel policies, or even that its importance may be growing as the number of surplus mandates increase. Rather we dispute the notion that it is the only goal for parties. We argue in turn that legislators' "localness" is a phenomenon independent from the mode of election and that it does matter in the process of assigning committee seats in the German Bundestag.

We shall conclude our theoretical considerations on the politics of committee assignments in Germany with some final qualifications. A party's interest in supporting legislators with a strong local focus independent of their mode of election is of course dependent on whether voters cast straight-tickets. To be sure, split-ticket voting is considered to be on the rise in German elections. Nevertheless, more than 75 percent of German voters still cast a straight ticket in federal elections (Gschwend et al., 2003; Schön, 1999; Huber, 2014). This reinforces the parties' perceptions that running strong local candidates and helping legislators with strong local orientations to please their local constituencies will translate into increasing list-vote shares and thus in gains in parliamentary seats.⁸

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

Data, indicators, and hypotheses

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

Measuring legislators' localness

In order to assess differences in legislators' "localness" we are able to draw from a new set of pooled statistical data on candidates in the German Federal Elections of 1983, 1987, 1998, 2005, and 2009. Our dataset contains 2953 legislator-observations (assignments), for 1334 unique legislators of all major parties (Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Social Democratic Party (SPD)) and minor parties (Christian Social Union (CSU), Free Democratic Party (FDP), Alliance '90/The Greens (Green Party) and the Left Party).⁹

The available data contain five empirical indicators that we use to measure the localness of legislators. We conceptually distinguish these indicators on the basis of two different dimensions: biographical and political localness. We consider these two dimensions as distinct for two main reasons. First, biographical ties forge emotional closeness to a specific district. This should particularly increase individual *motivations* to take care of local problems and to represent geographic constituents. Second, political ties to local communities guarantee first hand knowledge of local affairs and also lasting personal, professional and political contacts to local level elites and ordinary citizens in the district. This should particularly increase individual *abilities* to take care of local problems but also to mobilize volunteers and voters in election campaigns. This is why especially this second aspect of localness should be most valuable to political parties (Shugart et al., 2005; Andre et al., 2014). Our assumptions are that legislators are emotionally closest to their districts if they are born there, went to school there, and live there.¹⁰ In contrast, we consider those legislators emotionally most distant to their districts that have none of these three properties. Additionally, we assume that those legislators are politically

closest to their districts that held or hold elected local offices. We transform these five variables in two indices that reflect our two dimensions and that both form our main independent variables summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The localness of German legislators.

<i>Variables</i>		<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
Local Biography	Born in district	10	207
	Went to school in district	6	128
	Resident of district	36	742
Index: LocalBio (0 =weak, 3 = strong)	0	55	1122
	1	30	610
	2	13	263
	3	3	56
Local Politics	Member of local parliament	47	961
	Mayor of city (in district)	12	236
Index: LocalPol (0=weak; 2 =strong)	0	40	813
	1	51	1051
	2	9	187

The descriptive findings in Table 1 demonstrate significant individual level differences with regard to both of our localness measures. Our index measuring biographical localness indicates that a majority (55%) of the legislators in our data share no local biographical roots whatsoever compared to 3 per cent that are biographically deeply rooted in their districts. The members of this latter group were born in the district, went to school there and live there. In between these extremes we see a fair share of variance at moderate levels of biographical localness. Similarly, our index on political localness demonstrates a fair share of variance between 40 per cent of legislators that never held an elected office at the local level, 51 per cent that held one elected office at the local level, and another 9 per cent that held an elected office in the executive (mayor) and in the legislative (city council).

Committee types in the German Bundestag

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

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

<i>Assignments</i>			N	%
Policy Committees	District	Agriculture	132	4.47
		Transportation and Housing	206	6.98
Tourism		45	1.52	
	Party	Budget	190	6.43
		Foreign Affairs	182	6.16
		Interior	174	5.89
		Defense	161	5.45
		Finance	166	5.62
		Legal Affairs	157	5.32
		Labor & Social Affairs	177	5.99
		Economics	168	5.69
		Family Affairs /Youth / Women /Health	233	7.89
		Education, Research & Technology	176	5.96
		Environment	106	3.59
		Economic Development	113	3.83
		Human Rights	52	1.76
		Media & Telecommunications	78	2.64
		EU	97	3.28
		Sports	60	2.03
		German Relations/Unification	83	2.81
Procedural		Electoral Integrity	70	2.37
		Petition	127	4.30
Total			2953	100

The typology documented in Table 2 sides with Stratmann and Baur's on which committees need to be put into the district category. There are other committees with jurisdiction on programs that allow targeting local constituents. This for example concerns the Defense Committee that has jurisdiction on military deployments and thus on allocating jobs and public works projects to local communities. However, this is only a small part of the overall committee jurisdiction and also pales in light of the national implications of defense policy. In contrast, the Committees on Agriculture, Transportation and Housing, and Tourism are those that most exclusively share jurisdiction on programs that allow targeting local constituents.¹¹

In the following analysis, we estimate which legislators get assigned to constituency committees as full members compared to legislators that receive no assignment to constituency committees as full members. This question results in important choices while constructing the dependent variable for our analysis that we shall lay out in the remainder of this section. Firstly, this means that we conflate procedural and party committees. The main reason for this lies in our research question and our interest in testing distributive theories of legislative organization in partisan contexts. We are not interested in exploring different reasons for assigning legislators to these three different types of committees. We rather wish to understand whether something is special about those legislators that are assigned to district committees compared to the rest of legislators that receive no assignments to district committees.¹²

A second coding choice relates to the type of committee membership that enters our analysis. Legislators either can join committees as full or alternate member. In practice, each committee in the Bundestag is composed of approximately 20-40 full members and an equal number of alternate members. Similar to Stratmann and Baur we include only full committee members since only those legislators enjoy full participation rights in committee procedures especially voting rights. Furthermore, this allows to better replicate Stratmann and Baur and to test our hypothesis against the one stressed by Stratmann and Baur.¹³

Thirdly, we analyze initial assignments only rather than taking fluctuations in committee assignments during legislative terms into account.¹⁴ Initial assignments should mirror the strategic considerations of parties in most pure forms.¹⁵ Fourthly, our estimation is based upon

legislators per legislative term rather than legislator-observations (assignments) as documented in Table 2 or unique legislators. In each legislative term, each legislator can be initially assigned to more than one committee, and multiple assignments are particularly prevalent for members of small parties. In these cases, we coded legislators assigned to at least one district committee as “district”, even if they also held a party and/or procedural committee assignment. This reduces the number of cases we work with to 2051, which either fall into the “district committee” category or into the “non-district committee” category. The distribution across these categories is as follows: 17 per cent (N=340) of all observations are assignments to district committees and 83 per cent (N=1711) of all observations are assignments to non-district committees.

Legislators’ modes of election, margins, and controls

To test our argument we need to include in our analysis the *mode of election*, which is of primary importance in Stratmann and Baur’s (2002) analysis. About 50 per cent (N=1021) of all our observations in the final data set are related to legislators elected in the nominal tier (coded as 1) while the rest of the observations are related to legislators elected in the list tier.

We test for one further electoral incentive that might matter for political parties in their desire to please local constituents independent from the mode of election. Parties might assign nominal legislators in marginal districts to help them winning re-election and also to make sure that legislators most motivated to cater to their district receive assignments to district committees.¹⁶ We calculate the margin variable in the following way: We took for legislators who lost district races their differences in vote shares to the respective district winners. For nominally elected legislators we took the differences in vote shares to the respective best losing candidates in their districts.

In light of the German party system and our previous observations on the process of committee assignments in this country in our analysis we control for the *size of party*. According to Stratmann and Baur (2002) legislators representing small parties should not care at all about the nominal vote and thus should not perceive district committees as means to improve their electoral fortunes. This is because small party candidates do not have many chances to win

nominal-tier seats. More often than not they do not come even close.¹⁷ Consequently, Stratmann and Baur (2002) disregard small parties from their analysis. However, in light of our previous remarks on the phenomenon of contamination between the two tiers of election in Germany's mixed-member system we argue that small parties *should* care about district committees and thus *should* pursue personnel strategies similar to large parties and recruit local legislators to district committees. Consequently we included small parties but added a dummy for small party to control for party size (members of the Greens, Left, and FDP are coded as 1); 22 percent of our observations (N=448) are related to legislators representing small parties.¹⁸

We also control for the *number of legislators' legislative terms* and thus whether they are senior or junior members of the Bundestag. We suspect that in the course of parliamentary socialization legislators should develop a more pronounced policy profile and a better policy expertise and should thus become more valuable for parties to be assigned to policy committees. On average the legislator in our data have been in the Bundestag for about 2.8 legislative periods.

Last but not least we control for gender since research on the consequences of descriptive representation emphasizes a relationship between this factor and the allocation of committee seats (e.g. Friedman, 1996). The distribution of this variable is 23 per cent female legislators compared to 77 per cent male legislators.

Hypotheses and type of analysis

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

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

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

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

The politics of committee assignments in the *German Bundestag*

We distinguished in the previous section between two types of legislative committees: district and party committees. While we have a total of 2051 legislator-observations across the five legislative periods we look at, about 83 per cent of our observations (N=1711) concern assignments exclusively to policy and/or procedural committees; the remaining 17 per cent (N=340) concern legislators that have been assigned to at least one district committee. Table 3 provides a quick bivariate overview of the relationship between the “localness” of legislators, their modes of election, and the type of committees they were assigned to.

Table 3 supports our main theoretical expectation with regard to the relationship between local political experiences in elected offices on the one hand and assignments to district committees on the other. It demonstrates that a higher number of legislators with moderate or strong local political roots are assigned to district committees compared to legislators with no local political roots. Obviously, district committees are more likely to be staffed with those experienced in local politics. Cramer’s V indicates a weak but nevertheless existing statistical relationship. Table 3 also looks at the effect of legislators’ biographical ties to their district on committee assignments. It finds a weaker but nevertheless existing effect in the expected direction. Legislators with stronger biographical ties to their district are more likely to be assigned to district committees.

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

		<i>District</i>		<i>Cramer's V</i>
		No	Yes	
Mode	List	42	8	.0228
	Nominal	41	9	
LocalPol	Weak	34	5	.1314
	Moderate	42	9	
	Strong	6	3	
LocalBio	0	47	8	.0854
	1	24	6	
	2	10	3	
	3	2	.4	

Note: Cell entries are percentage points

Table 3 also contains interesting news on the role of the mode of election that further supports our argument. It shows that the number of nominally elected legislators assigned to district committees hardly differs from the number of legislators elected via party lists and assigned to district committees.

In the following, we aim to see to what degree the above demonstrated bivariate relationship between legislators' localness and district committee assignment hold in a multivariate model that includes our control variables and also our two electoral variables, namely electoral margin and mode of election. We estimate a logistic regression model based on the variables introduced above. The level of analysis is the type of committee seat the legislator is assigned to as a full member (or even as committee chair). The standard errors are clustered by the individual

legislators because many MPs are elected to parliament in several of the legislative periods we look at. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Predicting Committee Assignments in the *German Bundestag*.

	District Committee (= 1)
Mode of Election (1 = Nominal)	0.10 (0.16)
Local Biography	0.21** (0.09)
Local Politics	0.49*** (0.12)
Legislative terms	-0.09** (0.04)
Small Party (= 1)	-0.12 (0.23)
Margin	1.13* (0.61)
Female (= 1)	0.11 (0.17)
Constant	-2.15*** (0.22)
Log-Lik.	-895
Observations	2051
No. of different MPs	1334
Percent Correctly Predicted (PCP)	83

Clustered Standard errors (by MP) in parentheses, * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 corroborates the findings of our bivariate analysis. The variables that tap into legislators' localness both point into the expected direction and are significant at least at the .05 level.

Legislators with strong political and biographical ties are more likely to be assigned to district committees even if we control for alternative electoral explanations and additional control variables. Furthermore, Table 4 also corroborates the results of our bivariate analysis with regard to the effects of the mode of election on committee assignments. The relationship points into the direction expected by prior research but fails to show significance. Nominally elected legislators

are not more likely to receive assignments to district committees if we include our localness measures in the model. We will further explore this issue below by looking into effect sizes.

Table 4 does show an effect of our second variable on electoral context, namely the margin of victory or defeat. However, this effect is statistically significant only at the .1 level and also points into the direction that is opposite to the standard expectation: non-marginal legislators are less likely to be assigned to district committees. This further supports our argument on the crucial role of localness as a means for the personnel strategies of parties to boast list votes compared to the role of electoral incentives to make every effort to win nominal races and to utilize the committee assignment process accordingly.

Our findings hold if we control for additional variables, especially legislators' seniority. As we have speculated elsewhere in the paper, this variable does produce a negative effect on our dependent variable. The likelihood to be assigned to a district committee decreases with increasing seniority. Obviously, senior members become valuable for parties as policy experts or caretakers of the institution and are thus more likely to be assigned to policy or procedural committees. This effect is statistically significant at the .05 level. However, most importantly, this does not contradict the positive effects of our two localness variables on the likelihood to be assigned to district committees.

In order to explore the size of the demonstrated effects in our model we estimate average marginal effects. Our strategy to get an average marginal effect is as follows. Based on our model we calculate the difference of two predicted probabilities for each observation in the estimation sample when assuming our key variable of interest, say mode-of-election, changes from the maximum, i.e., '1' (nominally elected), to the minimum, i.e., '0' (elected through party list). For all other variables we use the values actually taken on by each observation in our data (aka "observed value approach"). After calculating the marginal effect for each observation in this way we compute the average across those marginal effects to obtain the average marginal effect in the sample. In order to account for the uncertainty in our model predictions we draw simulations from a multivariate normal distribution with a mean vector represented by the estimated coefficients of our logit model and a variance represented by the estimated variance-

covariance matrix of our logit model (King et al., 2000). The estimate size of the average marginal effects together with their 95% confidence interval is provided in Figure 1. The dashed line indicates an effect size of 0, i.e. as long as the confidence intervals intersect with this line, we cannot consider the estimated effect as systematically different from zero.

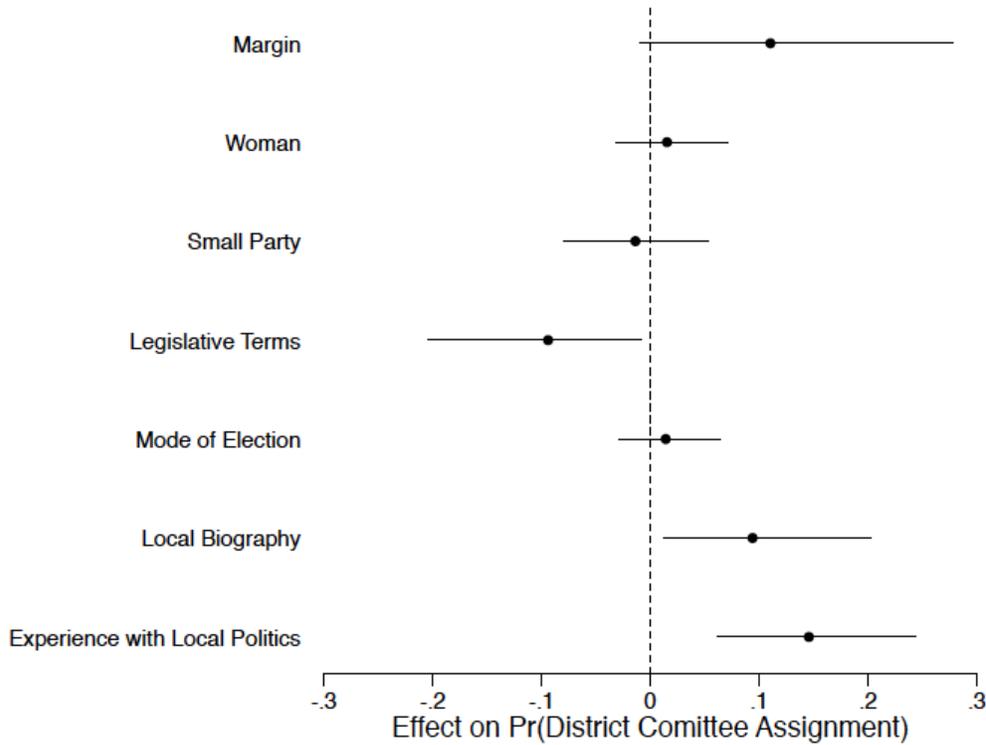


Figure 1. Average marginal effects of predictors of district committee assignment.

Figure 1 demonstrates on the one hand the small to zero effects of the two variables related to the electoral system level. This further stresses that standard explanations on the role of electoral incentives for the personnel strategies of political parties cannot be verified in our analysis. Particularly, the mode of election makes almost no difference for legislators' committee assignments. In contrast, we observe a very different picture when evaluating the average effect

of prior experiences in local electoral politics. Legislators who previously held multiple elected offices at the local level, i.e. that score '2' on our related index, are in our sample on average about 15 percentage points more likely than legislators that lack any local political ties to get assigned to a district committee. This represents the strongest effect that we find in our model. It indicates that localness is highly instrumental in motivating legislators to pursue district committees and also in making political parties to consider them.

It is important to note the difference in effect size between political and biographical localness. The second variable has weaker effects on parties' committee assignment choices. Legislators with strong biographical roots to the district they ran in, i.e. that score '3' on our related index, are in our sample on average only about 10 percentage points more likely than legislators that lack any biographical ties to their districts to get assigned to a district committee. However, even this effect is notable and statistically significant. It further corroborates our key argument that localness is highly instrumental in motivating legislators to pursue district committees and also in making political parties to consider them.

Conclusion

Our analysis advances the notion that individual talent in the form of "localness" matters for the committee assignments of legislators independent from the mode of election in Germany's mixed electoral system. We are able to demonstrate that legislators with strong political and biographical ties to their district are more likely to be assigned to district committees that allow bringing home some pork to please local constituents. Furthermore, we show that political ties take center stage compared to biographical ties and produce a larger effect on our independent variable. Strikingly, we are not able to find any effect of legislators' modes of election.

Nominally elected legislators are not more likely to be assigned to district committees to please local constituents. This finding is robust across the five legislative terms that we look at ranging from 1983 to 2009.

We interpret our main finding as the result of a “personnel strategy” by which German parties deploy their legislators to posts that would help their vote seeking goals best under mixed proportional rules. In Germany’s mixed-member proportional system, seats are ultimately won predominately by how well the party does at the national level in obtaining party-list votes. However, parties also run candidates in a nominal tier of single-seat district contests, comprising about half the seats. Our argument is that parties have an interest in ensuring that they deploy legislators in such a way as to take advantage of those that have a local orientation, because such candidates can help the party win votes in the nominal tier, which spills over into--or contaminates--the list tier. Thus locally oriented legislators are beneficial regardless of whether they win a nominal-tier district seat, or are elected via the party list. Parties are interested in obtaining contamination benefits on their list vote by running candidates in the nominal tier who have a strong local focus.

Despite our focus on the German case, we consider any candidate-centered but nevertheless proportional electoral system susceptible to the politics of committee assignments outlined in this paper. Electoral systems that allow voters to take choices on candidates provide incentives to political parties to take advantage of individual level talent and to target geographic constituents on the basis of locally well-connected legislators. These legislators link parties with local political contexts to better mobilize voters and receive feedback for responsive policies. In times of electoral de-alignment in Western European established democracies these resources might even increase in importance in future times.

Despite our focus on the politics of assigning seats to pork committees, we consider other kinds of talent crucial for other kinds of committee assignments in the context of a larger “personnel strategy” of political parties. This paper does not study this issue. However, one of our findings point into this direction. We find, that increasing seniority results in decreasing likelihood of being assigned to a pork committee. This suggests that increasingly experienced legislators with increasing policy expertise become more valuable for political parties in other party committee posts.

Electoral incentives are not the only factors structuring committee assignment processes. Studying them in isolation as parts of a larger process is nevertheless important because the distinct strategies that result from their influences should have larger systemic implications, for instance with regard to public policies and the legislative process. If parties assign legislators based on localness, the likelihood of using the pork barrel increases significantly, as legislators who sit on district-focused committees use their influence at all levels of the legislative process to press for direct benefits to the local areas to which they are tied. These demands and activities resulting from local legislators particularly concern intra-party processes in legislative assemblies and suggests a paradox parties might be faced with. Under mixed proportional rules parties act under incentives to utilize legislators with strong motivations and capabilities to individually cater to geographic constituents. This however might signal to candidates a type of independence that could raise challenges to party unity and that might increase the need for active leadership interventions. Because of these crucial ramifications for the larger policy process, it is most important to keep a close eye on committee assignment processes and the impact of electoral incentives on this process.

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¹ The CDU and the CSU form one party group in the German Bundestag. Each party however receives committee chairs depending on its overall share of seats and independently allocates these seats among its members in coordination with its “sister party group”.

² The only exception here is when a given district victory results in an additional seat beyond the party’s entitled share, based on list votes. This results in so called “overhang seats” (*Überhangmandate*), which we address below.

³ The number of surplus seats increased from an average of 2.75 between 1949 and 1990 to 16 in 1994. It went down to five seats in 2002 but increased again to 16 seats in the Bundestag elected in 2005. Declining turnout and the increasing fragmentation of the German party system are major and lasting factors behind this development (Behnke 2007).

⁴ In close elections, even the small disturbance to proportionality created by surplus seats can have a considerable effect on government formation. The last Kohl Government (1994 - 1998) rested for example on a parliamentary majority that would not have existed but for surplus seats. Moreover, surplus seats could lead to a plurality of seats being one by a different party from the one that earned the highest number of list votes (Gschwend 2004: 16). The increasing relevance of surplus mandates should be one important incentive for German parties not to ignore the nominal vote and to support “real winners” rather than any “ambitious locals” who might help the party also earn list votes. We however argue that this incentive might be of greater

relevance in the future given the relatively recent increase in the number of surplus mandates, but that it is not yet a major factor.

⁵ In this case, the direction of spillover goes both ways. PR competition spills over into the nominal tier on the one hand because the latter is dominated by the expectations of political parties aiming to increase a proportional share of their vote. The vote choices of voters spill over from the nominal tier to the list tier because increases in the share of the nominal vote translate into gains in the list vote.

⁶ Note that under an MMM system, candidates with local appeal would be desirable for parties even if there were no spillover (contamination). Under MMM, every additional seat that a party wins in the nominal tier increments its overall seat total. However, under MMP systems as in Germany, the logic for localness would be almost nonexistent without an expectation of spillover effects, because the compensation mechanism of MMP means that any additional nominal-tier seat won is simply one less list seat won (excluding districts that generate overhangs, which we address below).

⁷ Incumbents generally enjoy high electoral security in German politics. Roberts (1988) nevertheless concedes that nominally elected MPs enjoy a competitive edge in terms of electoral security. Manow (2007) underscores this argument in a most recent analysis on turnover in the German Bundestag. He demonstrates a higher electoral security of directly elected incumbents compared to those incumbents that entered the German Parliament via the list vote.

⁸ For a more differentiated version of this argument distinguishing between three different mechanisms of contamination see Ferrara et al. (2005: 68–69)

⁹ The data rely on three sources. All the biographical variables are hand-coded based on the information provided in the respective *Kürschner's Volkshandbuch* of each legislative period. Given that this information is based on self-reports by legislators that sometimes vary across legislative periods, we coded a certain characteristic as present for all legislative periods if it is mentioned at least once. Thus, if a legislator reports that she was mayor of a city in the district in one legislative period but not in others we still code this legislator as mayor of a city in the district. Thus we assume that legislators might sometimes either forget or resent personal information strategically. But if it reported once it belongs to the official biographical record of the legislator. The committee variables were coded on the basis of Vierhaus/Herbst Vierhaus L and Herbst L. (2002)

Biographisches Handbuch der Mitglieder des Deutschen Bundestages 1949-2002. München: Saur Verlag. and internal documents provided by the German Bundestag (Parlamentsarchiv). All other variables are based on the data provided by the Office of Federal Returning Officer.

- ¹⁰ In order to code whether those localness indicators apply to a particular legislator we hand-coded the respective city if mentioned in which the legislator went to school, was born, as well as the name of the community the legislator was previously mayor or member of the local parliament. We then used official classification information from the Federal Statistical Office to be able to map every community into one electoral district.
- ¹¹ We mapped the following specific committees as district committees: Defense; Food, Agriculture and Forestry (1983,1987, 1998); Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (2005, 2009); Transportation (1983, 1987); Transportation, Building, and Housing (1998, 2005); Transportation, Building, Urban Affairs (2009); Regional Planning, Building, Urban Development (1983, 1987).
- ¹² We also replicate our analysis documented below with a nominal dependent variable using three categories, hence estimating a multinomial logit model. The substantive conclusions are the same.
- ¹³ This decision is not a crucial one as our results stay the same even if we change the nature of the sample. Our results are robust to include alternate members into the analysis.
- ¹⁴ We operationally define “initial assignment” as an interval of 60 days after the first session of a newly elected *Bundestag* rather than a particular day. This is a consequence of observable differences across legislative terms in the time span that it takes to organize the Bundestag contingent for example upon the length of coalition negotiations but also upon differences across parties to name their committee members and thus differences across committees to convene for their first session.
- ¹⁵ We further test how consequential this assumption is for our results. Again, our results remain robust even when we include all other committee assignments that occur within a respective legislative period.
- ¹⁶ With this modeling choice we reduce our estimation sample to legislators that ran as pure district candidates or dual candidates in the previous election. We omit pure list candidates. However, the latter type is rare in the Bundestag and the number of cases we lose thus small. Furthermore, our results remain robust if we test our model by including pure list candidates.

¹⁷ As always, there are exceptions to this rule: in 2005, the Greens won one district in Berlin and the Left won 3 districts in Berlin.

¹⁸ This choice obviously is not neutral to our model and also to possible outcomes. By including small parties we introduce a set of actors into the analysis that has no choice to either assign nominally elected legislators or party list legislators to district committees. There just are almost no nominal legislators in small party groups. Consequently, we potentially downplay the role of the electoral context in explaining the strategic behavior of parties. However, at the same time, we allow to better gauge the role of localness in committee assignments and our related assumption that parties do not differ in that regard despite differences in size. We checked the results reported below and found only minor difference between analyses that included or excluded small parties. In particular, there is no systematic effect of mode-of-election within the sample of large-party legislators from CDU/CSU and SPD.