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8 Parliamentary roles of MPs in sharp and soft focus

Interviews and behavioural record compared

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The lay observer of politics tends to see parliamentary work as the main or even sole task of MPs. Work in parliament in general and giving speeches in particular is the yardstick that some Austrian news media apply when hunting down the laziest MP of the year and putting all others in pecking order at the end of a parliamentary year. They should know better. It is no secret to politicians and professional observers of politics, whether journalists or academics, that parliamentary work in the narrow sense is only part of their many obligations resulting from public office. Indeed, for some MPs it may not be among their most important tasks. While the floor of parliament in many ways is the most important arena in which MPs act, their contribution to the collective goals of both the nation and their party may be greater if they adhere to some division of labour and concentrate the greater amount of effort on their activities in less visible arenas. These other arenas include constituency rallies, media events such as talk shows on national or regional TV and radio stations, attending meetings of their party organization, visiting administrative agencies and businesses, attending events organized by interest group, and having contacts with ordinary citizens. Notwithstanding that the job of an MP includes such a broad spectrum of often essential tasks this chapter confines itself to analysing what MPs do in parliament.

We choose Kaare Strøm's definition of parliamentary roles as "routines, regular patterns of behavior" (Strøm 1997: 158) as the conceptual anchor of our study. Behavioral data should thus be an excellent, if not the best source of data to capture the roles of MPs. The alternative methodological approach that is used by most classic contributions and is still dominant in the research field on parliamentary roles is the analysis of interviews with MPs (see e.g. Müller and Saalfeld 1997). In this chapter we combine the two approaches. We compare roles or types of Austrian national MPs derived from behavioural data with the role descriptions derived from personal interviews.

The MPs are from the twentieth legislative period (1996–1999) of the National Council, the lower and dominant chamber of the Austrian parliament. We describe the two interview questions most relevant to the topic and the patterns of answers given. Then we present data on MPs' parliamentary activities and develop our typology of MPs based on their behavioural record in

parliament. We analyse the match between the behavioural data and the interview data, show where they differ or concur and draw some conclusions on how the different sources of data impact on the roles and types of MPs found in empirical research.

Theory: roles and types of MPs

Modern research on representatives begins with *The Legislative System* by Wahlke, Eulau, Buchanan, and Ferguson (1962). This landmark study distinguished between "role orientations" – its main focus – and "role behavior". "Role orientations" constitute a "coherent set of 'norms of behavior'" while "role behavior" refers to "overt actions which result from legislators' acting in conformity with some norms included in the role" (1962: 8–9). This study's conception of role orientations has been criticized severely because of its underlying functionalistic assumptions. Hence, role-related attitudes and behaviors are considered to be coined by the expectations of the individual's social environment rather than by the actors themselves. Moreover, widespread consensus is assumed about the contents of such roles that may or may not exist (Searing 1991: 1245). Yet first and foremost, the roles developed in *The Legislative System* suffer from being theoretical constructs "that were not operationalized as roles that exist in the minds of politicians" (Searing 1991: 1250). When this is not the case, the question remains why we should expect representatives to behave according to these roles.

In his work, culminating in the magisterial *Westminster's World*, Searing (1994) moved forward the research on parliamentary roles by developing the "motivational approach". Accordingly, political roles are "particular patterns of interrelated goals, attitudes, and behaviors that are characteristic of people in particular positions" (1994: 18). In line with Rational Choice theorizing, Searing considers cognitive career goals as central ("prominent part") for parliamentary roles (1994: 19). Career goals are more important the more explicitly the tasks are defined that come with a particular parliamentary position. Leadership positions – including ministers and junior ministers in the British case and presiding officers, committee chairmen, and all kinds of whips everywhere – clearly come with a long list of tasks that need to be fulfilled (1994: 19). They constitute what Searing calls "position roles". Yet career goals are only part of the story. Searing also includes "emotional incentives" – which provide the "passion" – into his "motivational core" of political roles (1994: 19). Secondary components of political roles are "characteristic attitudes" (or "beliefs") and "characteristic behaviors" (or "actions") (1994: 19). While political leadership positions largely confine MPs to "position roles", backbenchers can choose roles that "have nearly as much to do with the preferences of the role players as with the established rules of the institution" (1994: 13, 395).

Searing's study clearly is a landmark and has moved our understanding of political roles in the right direction. Yet, it may not have gone far enough. We concur with Strøm (1997: 157) that it is not convincing to include motivational

incentives as part of the role definition. Rather we prefer to separate individual preferences, (institutional) constraints, and actual behaviour. The preferences held by politicians are not part of their roles, but they exercise influence on the choice and shaping of such roles. Political roles, then, are "routines, regular patterns of behavior" (Strøm 1997: 158). Patterns of behaviour, in turn, are designed to help politicians to reach their goals. The choice of particular behavioural patterns is hence strategic. Individual preferences ("emotional incentives", "passions") and the institutional environment influence the choice of these goals. Unconstrained actors, as assumed in influential first-generation Rational Choice studies, would follow only their individual preferences. Yet no MP is unconstrained by his or her institutional environment. As Searing (1994) points out, there are differences between backbench and leadership positions with incumbents of the former having more freedom to define their roles than those of the latter. In any case, the behaviour that is likely to help in achieving the goals is chosen deliberately by the MPs and thus represents "roles that exist in the minds of politicians" (Searing 1991: 1250). Finally, the behaviour relevant here involves the use of scarce resources such as time, attention, and effort on the part of the MPs.

The conceptual shift in the definition of roles, what the term includes or excludes from Searing to Strøm, makes it much easier to use the terms "roles" and "types" of MP interchangeably. By using Strøm's definition of roles as routinized behaviour we can talk of a typology of MPs and easily build a bridge towards multivariate statistical methods like cluster analyses that are commonly used to find groups of similar cases in the data.

Searing developed the roles or types of MPs from interviews in the 1970s with MPs for the British parliament. There are many system differences between Great Britain and Austria – in particular party system and institutional differences – that suggest that a straightforward transfer of Searing's MP roles to other national parliaments would not work. Back then Great Britain had a true two-party system resulting in alternating single-party governments. In contrast, Austria in the 1990s had a multi-party parliament (with very different sized parties) and a grand coalition government comprising the two major parties, the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP). As we will demonstrate below, party size has a tremendous effect on the "patterns of behavior" of the respective MPs, even more so when party size is combined with the party's status as a government or an opposition party. The next section describes our research design and data.

Research design and data

From the fall of 1997 to the spring of 1998 in-depth interviews with all 183 Austrian MPs in the Austrian National Council were conducted by a research team of academics and PhD students (Müller *et al.* 2001: 36). Interview partners were assured complete anonymity in publications. Each interview opened with two general questions about the respective MPs' tasks and activities. During the

course of the interview we followed up with more specific questions about the various arenas and dimensions of their behaviour: in the constituency, in parliament, in the parliamentary party group, activities to reach out to the public, and the MPs' relations with interest groups. We also asked about changes that occurred during their career as MPs. In the interviews we did not confront the MPs with prefabricated response items. However, for some of the more specific questions the interviewers had a list of sub-dimensions to be used as prompts if the MPs did not mention them in their initial responses. Notes were taken during the interviews and they were transcribed immediately after their conclusion to arrive at close to verbatim protocols. Each of the interviews was subsequently coded independently by two members of the research team. Coding differences were identified and resolved by discussion between the two coders or, if necessary, among the entire research team. These codings formed the basis for quantitative analyses.

Our second source consists of behavioural data on parliamentary instruments that were selected to match with the self-descriptions of parliamentary behaviour from the interviews. They include the number of parliamentary questions, private member's bills and motions introduced by each MP, committee rapporteurships held and speeches given to the plenary between January 1996 and July 1997, which corresponds roughly to the first half of the twentieth legislative period and thus constituted the time immediately preceding the interviews. The period of data for bills and amendment motions as well as committee rapporteurships was somewhat shorter than for other parliamentary instruments, covering January 1996 to the beginning of October 1996 (Müller *et al.* 2001: 264–5). The aim was to have enough data to be able to differentiate activity levels of individual MPs rather than the complete coverage of parliamentary activity.

As already mentioned the political context of the interviews and parliamentary behaviour was the grand coalition government of the SPÖ and ÖVP (S and V in the tables, respectively). Our study covers the last of four consecutive legislative terms of this coalition, which had been governing together since 1986. Initially, the grand coalition comprised 85 per cent of the seats. In the last term, beginning in January 1996 and ending in February 2000, the government parties still held more than two-thirds of the seats between them. Yet, compared to the situation at the beginning of their cooperation in 1986 the opposition was considerably strengthened by the spectacular rise of the Freedom Party (FPÖ, F) and the establishment of two new parties, the Greens (G, from 1986) and the Liberal Forum (L), a 1993 break-away from the FPÖ. Table 8.1 provides the basic information about the government status and parliamentary strength of the parties during the period of this study.

The recorded parliamentary behaviour occurred before our interviews were undertaken. Therefore there can be no observer-induced effect on what the Austrian MPs did in parliament. Rather, any influence worked the other way. We expect that the MPs in formulating answers to our questions drew on their own behaviour in the most recent past.

Table 8.1 Government status and size of parliamentary parties (1997)

	Governing parties	Opposition parties	(n)
Large parties	Social Democrats (S) (71), People's Party (V) (52)	Freedom Party (F) (42)	(165)
Small parties		Liberal Forum (L) (9), Greens (G) (9)	(18)
(n)	(123)	(60)	(183)

Note
Number of parliamentary seats given in parentheses.

Parliamentary activities: the MPs' perspective

The following two tables provide information based on the interviews with all 183 MPs who were asked questions about their parliamentary priorities and the parliamentary instruments they deemed most important to their work. The often quite extensive answers given were coded by the research team based on a common coding scheme. The first question we present in Table 8.2 puts the focus on the arenas that the MPs prioritize in parliament. Deliberations in committee are given the most frequent emphasis, followed by dealings with their own party. Only one-tenth of the MPs put their emphasis on activity in the plenary – e.g. giving speeches, being a rapporteur, asking questions. About the same number of MPs mention inter-party negotiations or said “somewhere else”. The latter coded statement, given by many liberal MPs, ... went outside the scope of the question, which was meant to deal only with intra-parliamentary activity. The answer referred to the MP's dealings with important actors situated outside of parliament, e.g. with the media or interest groups.

Another small group of MPs, among them many Green MPs, say that ranking is impossible, and that everything they do in parliament is equally important.

Table 8.3 shows what the MPs identified as the most important parliamentary instruments for their work. The relevance of parliamentary instruments for MPs is largely balanced between the parties. Yet, predictably, we recognize two imbalances, relating to committee work and parliamentary questions.

Altogether, 56 per cent of the MPs mentioned committee work, but there is a large gap between the answers from government and opposition MPs: 69 per cent of the former, but only 29 per cent of the latter mentioned committee work. Some opposition MPs complained about the futility of tabling their own legislative proposals in committee, as these would be voted down routinely by the government parties.¹

Parliamentary questions exhibit the opposite pattern: Government MPs are much less inclined to introduce parliamentary questions than those from opposition parties. Plenary speeches were mentioned by about a third of the MPs, by government and opposition MPs in equal proportion. Bills and motions were mentioned overall by slightly less than a third of the MPs, but more often by opposition than

Table 8.2 Most important emphases of parliamentary activity (%)

	S	V	F	L	G	Large parties	Small parties	Gov. parties	Opp. parties	Parliament
Committees	66	65	59	29	29	64	29	66	51	61
Own parliamentary party	43	35	34	14	29	38	21	39	31	37
Plenary	3	6	27	0	14	10	7	4	22	10
Inter-party negotiations	10	14	2	14	0	9	7	12	4	9
Somewhere else	7	6	7	57	0	7	29	7	13	9
No ranking possible, equally important	6	10	5	0	43	7	21	8	9	9
(n)	(68)	(52)	(41)	(7)	(7)	(161)	(14)	(120)	(55)	(175)

Notes

The question was: "Where do you put the emphases in your parliamentary activity?" Additional question asked participants to name the most important ones in case of multiple answers. Coding of answer in up to three different categories allowed. Numbers are column percentages.

Parliamentary activities: objective data

In Table 8.3 we have reported responses to a question on the importance MPs attach to parliamentary instruments. The answers are, of course, subjective and include an evaluation component, as instruments can be important even if rarely used. We now turn to the actual behaviour of MPs (as reconstructed from the official record). We measure the amount of parliamentary work of individual MPs with a range of behavioural data. For each MP we measure (1) the number of bills and other material motions, (2) the number of parliamentary questions asked, (3) the number of rapporteur reports to the plenary meeting when bills return from committee deliberations (to be followed by debate and final voting), and (4) the number of plenary speeches per session. Whenever parliamentary instruments require the support of more than one MP, in accordance with common knowledge of experts on Austrian parliamentary practice, we count only the first one to sign.²

All of these indicators are "hard" quantitative ones that we have generated from the parliamentary records. Together these indicators cover the range of instruments provided by the standing orders of parliament. They include the most relevant indicators of individual MPs' parliamentary work that can be extracted from publicly available sources for the time immediately preceding our interviews. As access to committee deliberations is restricted, only the successful legislative and non-legislative initiatives of MPs coming out of the committees could be extracted from the official parliamentary records. This introduces a bias towards observing the behaviour of MPs from the two government parties at the committee stage. Proposals introduced at the committee stage make up less than one-fifth of the total number of 689 bills and motions in our study. If anything, these limitations in data access introduce a small bias towards overstating the government MPs' activities.

Austrian MPs differ widely in their actual use of parliamentary instruments. Table 8.4 and Figure 8.1 reveal substantial differences between the MPs for all activities. More than two-thirds of the MPs (69 per cent) have never acted as a committee rapporteur on a bill, but 10 per cent of the MPs gave more than five such reports. Forty-four per cent of the MPs introduced neither a bill nor a motion, but 3 per cent (six MPs) introduced 20 or more. Seventeen per cent never asked a parliamentary question, but 4 per cent introduced 40 or more such questions. Two per cent (three MPs) gave no speech in the plenary, but three MPs at the upper end of the activity scale spoke more than 100 times each. In terms of data structure, the distribution for the plenary speeches comes closest to a normal distribution whereas the reports on bills, the bills and motions, and parliamentary questions look more like negative binomial distributions.

Table 8.3 Parliamentary instruments most important to MPs (%)

	S	V	F	L	G	Large parties	Small parties	Gov. parties	Opp. parties	Parliament
Committee work	70	67	30	22	33	59	28	69	29	56
Parliamentary Questions	31	26	50	22	44	34	33	29	45	34
Plenary speeches	29	39	35	22	22	34	22	33	31	32
Bills and motions	24	28	38	33	33	29	33	26	36	29
Other	21	14	13	11	22	17	17	18	14	17
No ranking possible, instruments are equally important (n)	6 (70)	6 (51)	15 (40)	22 (9)	0 (9)	8 (161)	11 (18)	6 (121)	14 (58)	8 (179)

Note

The question was: "Which parliamentary instruments are most important to you?". Coding of answer into multiple categories allowed. Numbers are column percentages.

A typology of MPs derived from behavioural data

We ran a two-stage cluster analysis with the four indicators of parliamentary indicators presented above to arrive at a typology of the MPs based on objective data. The resulting typology is shown in Table 8.5. The first stage of the cluster analysis included three activities: parliamentary motions/bills, written questions, and reports on bills. Clustering was done via Ward's method, a standard hierarchical clustering procedure, using squared Euclidean distances as the measure of proxim-

Table 8.4 Descriptive statistics of parliamentary activity data (1996-1997)

	Reports on bills	Bills and motions	Oral and written questions	Plenary speeches
Median	0	1	3	17
Mean	1.5	4.0	7.3	23.6
Standard deviation	3.6	6.2	13.1	23.8
Minimum	0	0	0	0
Maximum	27	31	111	132
Sum (183 MPs)	276	734	1,338	4,348

Note

Period covered: 15 January 1996 to 31 July 1997.

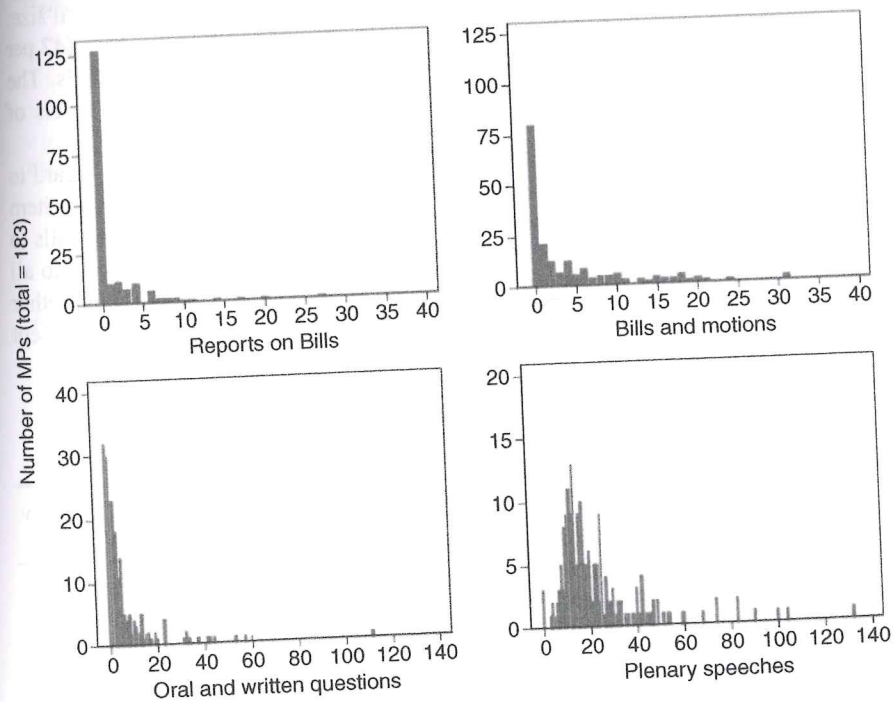


Figure 8.1 Histogram of parliamentary activities.

ity. All variables were range-standardized to the range 0–1 ahead of entering the clustering algorithm. In the second-stage cluster analysis, the five groups resulting from the first stage were entered plus the range standardized number of plenary speeches per session. The two-stage cluster analysis gives more weight to plenary speeches relative to the other three parliamentary activities. Each party has only a very limited number of slots for speakers in most debates. Hence, giving greater weight to parliamentary speeches seems substantively justified.

A cluster solution is always the result of a set of variables run through a specific clustering algorithm equipped with a specific distance or proximity measure. Whether the outcome is, from a substantive perspective, a good cluster solution or the most appropriate for a research question is mostly outside the realm of the methodological literature on cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is an exploratory method of multivariate data analysis that has been weak in giving advice on criteria like “optimality” or “stability” of a cluster structure found (Kettenring 2006). There is thus considerable leeway for researchers with regard to the cluster solution they extract from the data.

The result we present here consists of five types of MPs that we label the Spectator, Rapporteur, Showhorse, Workhorse, and Exemplary MP.³ Even though these five types result from a cluster analysis, at the same time they seem to approximate a generalized scaling of the MPs from low to high parliamentary activity as shown in Figure 8.2 below. The five groups are of very unequal size: the higher the activity patterns, the fewer MPs. Almost half of the MPs (47 per cent) are classified as Spectators, and only 7 per cent as Exemplary MPs. The distribution resembles a pyramid with a broad base at the first two levels of activity and a narrow peak at the higher levels of activity.

Spectators justify their name by displaying the lowest activity with regard to three of our four indicators. Reporting on bills to the plenary is the only item where they fare on average slightly ahead of Showhorse MPs. Reporting bills to the plenary is the core activity of the Rapporteurs. It is there that they outdo all other groups and they tend to be slightly more active than Spectators in the other realms. Showhorses beat the Spectators and Rapporteurs in all activities except rapporteurships.

Table 8.5 Means of parliamentary activity by type of MP

Parliamentary activities	Spectator	Rapporteur	Showhorse	Workhorse	Exemplary MP
Parliamentary motions/bills	0.4	3.4	5.4	16.9	20.7
Parliamentary Questions	1.9	6.8	8.9	26.7	30.7
Reports on bills	0.8	3.8	0.0	1.0	0.1
Plenary speeches per session	0.2	0.2	0.6	0.5	1.1

Note:

Numbers are mean activity values for MPs belonging to the same type.

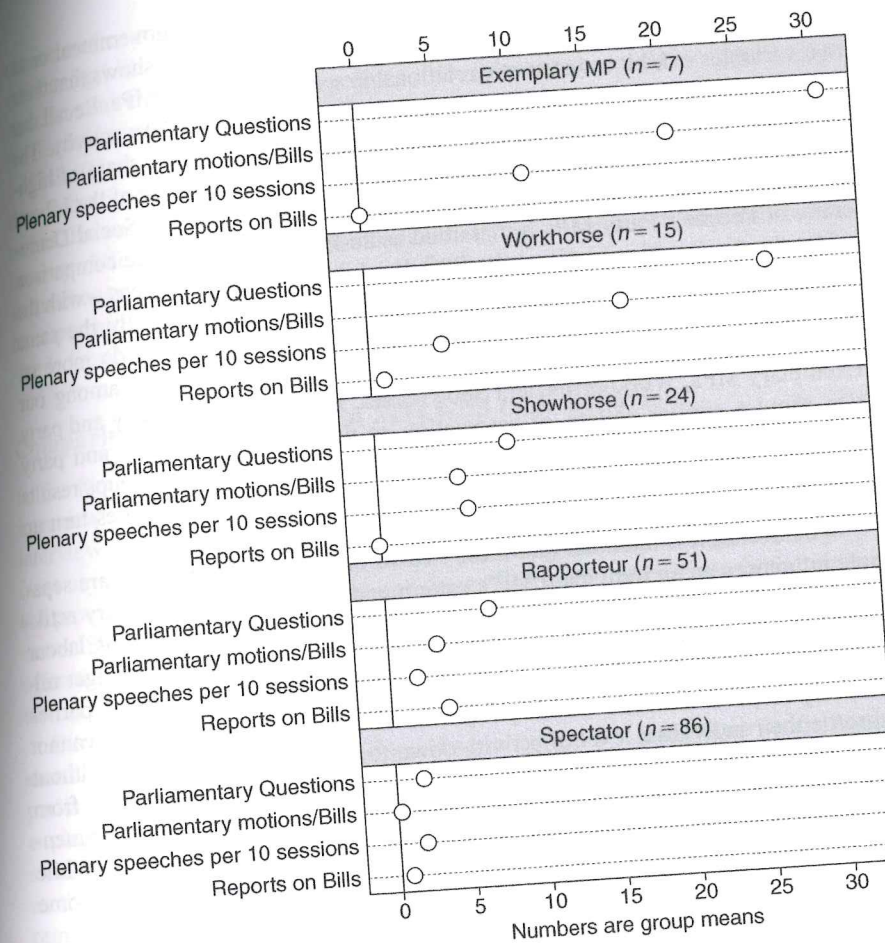


Figure 8.2 Five types of MPs based on their parliamentary activities.

The group label Showhorses stems from contrasting this type’s behavioural pattern from that of the Workhorses: MPs of the Workhorse type introduced on average many more parliamentary questions, motions and bills. They were behind only in giving speeches. Therefore we labelled them Workhorses and the former group of MPs Showhorses. A small group of seven MPs, named here Exemplary MPs, introduced more parliamentary questions, motions, and bills, and delivered more speeches than the Workhorses. However, the Exemplary MPs did not engage in reporting bills to the plenary. Rapporteurships therefore seem to be a necessary, yet not particularly highly esteemed activity in the Austrian parliament.

Our cluster analysis is deliberately blind or agnostic toward the MP’s party membership and includes no variables measured at the party group level. Neither

the size of the five parliamentary parties nor their status as a government or an opposition party entered the clustering algorithm. Yet Table 8.6 shows that these two variables exhibit a systematic relationship with the types of MPs. Recall that the five types approximate a dimensional scaling of parliamentary activity. The two small parties, the Liberals and Greens, have a much higher share of high-activity types of MPs than the three large parties. We see that none of the Liberal or Green MPs is a Spectator or a Rapporteur and that none of the Social Democratic or People's Party MPs is classified as an Exemplary MP. The comparison of the three opposition parties – the FPÖ, the Liberals, and the Greens – with the two government parties – the SPÖ and ÖVP, exhibits directionally the same association, though it is slightly weaker. Opposition MPs seem to do more on average than government MPs and we thus find them more often among our Exemplary MPs, Workhorses, and Showhorses. Parliamentary activity and party size show a similar pattern of association as parliamentary activity and party status. Dividing the five parties with these two criteria into binary groups results in a strong overlap. With the exception of the Freedom Party all parties turn up in the same grouping twice.

We nevertheless maintain that these two variables at the party level are separate influences on an individual MP's pattern and amount of parliamentary activity he or she undertakes. Party size directly bears on the division of labour between MPs. Clearly, MPs in a small party have to shoulder a much bigger relative burden of their collective project while parliamentary demands on parties in many respects are not bound to party size. MPs in small parties simply cannot throttle their individual level of activity down to the level of a Spectator without risking their party's presence in the parliamentary arena. In contrast, MPs from large parties are neither required nor allowed by their leaders to use parliamentary instruments to the same extent as their colleagues from small parties. While all MPs from small parties understand that they carry a heavy burden, some would not want to do without these possibilities for a showing in parliament.

The government status of parties also exerts a strong influence on their MPs' parliamentary activities. MPs from government parties have fewer incentives to ask parliamentary questions to government minister as they can use informal

Table 8.6 Parliamentary types by party size and party status

	S	V	F	L	G	Large parties	Small parties	Gov. parties	Opp. parties	Parliament
Exemplary MP	0	0	5	22	33	1	28	0	12	4
Workhorse	3	2	17	11	44	6	28	2	20	8
Showhorse	1	4	31	67	22	10	44	2	35	13
Rapporteur	28	42	21	0	0	31	0	34	15	28
Spectator	68	52	26	0	0	52	0	61	18	47
(n)	(71)	(52)	(42)	(9)	(9)	(165)	(18)	(123)	(60)	(183)

Note
Number of cases given in parentheses.

channels of communication. And they enjoy much less leeway with regard to introducing bills and motions as the parliamentary leaders of government parties exercise control to avoid (unwanted) conflict between the coalition parties and the displaying of intra-party differences between MPs and their ministers.⁴

Classifying MPs according to their actual behaviour is based on objective data and should produce an accurate picture of the parliament in the given period. However, the distribution of types of MPs, derived from behaviour, may be very different only a few months later, if the government and opposition status change and party strengths in parliament alter significantly. Our interviews have produced massive evidence that changes in government status and party size led to shifts of focus and tasks among MPs (Müller *et al.* 2001: chapter 10).

Comparing the perspective of MPs with their behaviour

In the final step of our analysis we compare the two different data sources – interviews and data derived from the parliamentary records. We approach the interview answers from the perspective of the types of MPs we have extracted from objective data that cover the months preceding the interview period. Figure 8.3 provides the relative frequency of the different emphases given in the interviews. Specifically, we asked the MPs where the centre of their activities is and offered them the alternatives in the figure. If MPs mentioned several priorities, we urged them to name only the most important ones.

Our interpretation concentrates on the data points of the three most important arenas for the MPs' activities as identified in Figure 8.3: committee work, own parliamentary party, and the plenary of parliament. While we do not have an explicit ranking of these three priorities by importance, we can still draw conclusions about their relative importance based on the frequency of mentioning them as the most important arena. As only small minorities of MPs mentioned the remaining alternatives, we will not pay much attention to them.

The most noticeable result is the similarity in the overall emphasis profiles of the two types with the lowest levels of parliamentary activity, Spectators and Rapporteurs. They score similarly on ranking committee work, their own parliamentary party, and the plenary of parliament. A very large majority of these two types of MPs records the committee stage as taking priority in their parliamentary work. More than half of the MPs from both types also see their own party as an important priority. Less than a third identifies the plenary as their centre of activity. Comparing the two data sources, we can conclude that the patterns derived from actual behavioural data and the interviews do not conflict with each other. Yet, due to a lack of objective data with regard to specific arenas – work in committee and, above all, within the respective parliamentary parties – we cannot conclude that they are fully in accord with each other.

A larger share of Showhorse MPs – who are more active than Spectators and Rapporteurs according to our objective indicators – mentioned the plenary as a central arena for their work than these two reference groups. Showhorse MPs

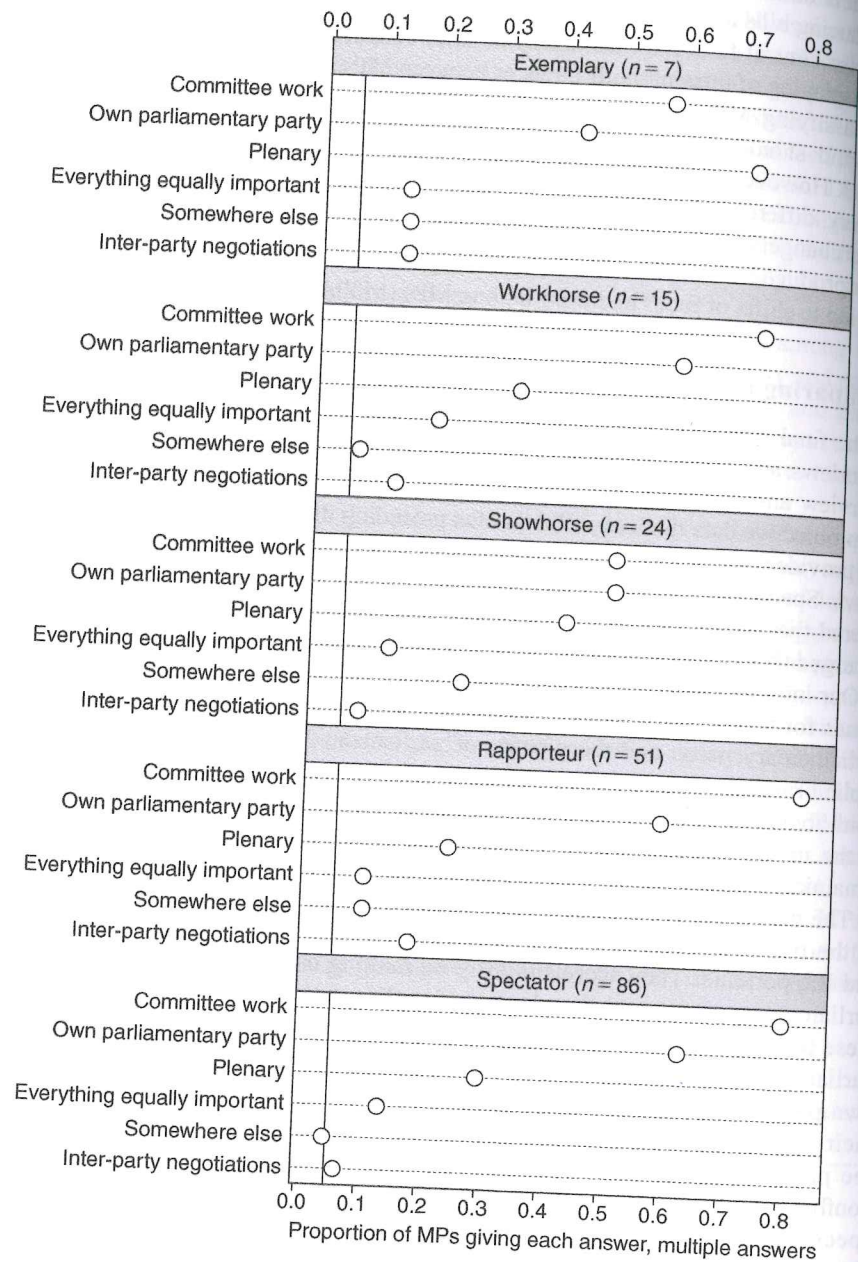


Figure 8.3 Behavioural types of MPs (derived from objective data) and their most important arena for activities as MPs (as revealed in interviews).

mentioned the two arenas that are closed to public observation – committees and work in their own party – less often. The interview answers and our image of a Showhorse MP thus fit nicely. The behavioural pattern derived from objective data also fits well when matched with the interview answers of Workhorse MPs, but they stressed their work in the committees and in their own parliamentary party much more often.

The relative frequencies for the Workhorse MPs are quite similar to the emphasis patterns of Spectators and Rapporteurs. This is surprising. As we mentioned before, measuring the amount of work in two of the three arenas is problematic and we might have underestimated the overall parliamentary activity of Spectators and Rapporteurs. However, for most of these MPs a distinct bias in the answers is the more credible alternative. They might have chosen these non-observable arenas exactly because they knew that their record on publicly observable indicators is not particularly strong relative to some party colleagues. And participation in committee work and in the internal deliberations of their own party are both commendable activities for MPs.

The pattern of emphases that Exemplary MPs revealed in the interviews is distinct. They have the strongest focus on the plenary – which accords well with their record in giving speeches – followed by emphasizing committee work. Note however, that they hardly mentioned their own party as the locus of their activities. We have seen from their behavioural record, that this group is highly active in parliamentary proceedings. Does this mean that they put less value on their own party? That would probably be the wrong conclusion. Their activities – introducing bills and motions, putting parliamentary questions, giving speeches on behalf of their party – require previous approval by the leadership of the parliamentary party. Most of the Exemplary MPs are from small opposition parties, thus the task of convincing their colleagues of their own ideas seems a small one compared to that of MPs in the larger parliamentary group in government. Indeed, they will often be the only ones in their party who are really informed about the policy substance of pending legislation and the only participant observers of committee deliberations, and hence the only ones who can really make an informed decision. And such monopolies tend to create relationships of mutual non-interference among MPs.

Conclusion

Our behavioural data provided precise measurements that allowed us to extract distinctive types of MPs. Indeed, we would have been hard pressed to develop these or any types of MPs without access to such data. The interview data gave a much more blurred, soft-focus image of MPs' roles. Does this imply that interview data are not reliable or are of less value than behavioural data derived from the parliamentary record? Certainly not! And there are many reasons why this is true and our concluding discussion will not cover them all.

To begin with, these two types of data maximize different virtues. They give different information: intentions (from the interviews) and objective evidence (from actual behaviour). Indeed, without evidence from interviews our conclusions from objective data would have been heavily based on mere assumptions. In the same vein we note that the interviews were extremely useful in interpreting the behavioural patterns we found. Data on actual behaviour relate to a specific time period. They begin with the first observation day and end with the last one. We can thus tie behaviour precisely to time-variant objective conditions such as the MPs' offices, whether they belong to a small or large party (when this varies dramatically), or whether their party is in government or opposition. Such precise data cannot be obtained from interviews. Even when interview questions try to specify similarly precise periods, human beings will never manage to respond adequately. Yet, this lack of precision is almost balanced by getting responses that relate to people's life experience under perhaps very different conditions.

Finally, there are many arenas that are – according to all that we know about politics – truly important, but can only be researched using interviews. Most committee and parliamentary party meetings, for instance, are closed to outside observers. Leaving such arenas out of the picture for the sake of precision in studying the remaining ones would lead to a grossly distorted picture of the roles of MPs. As so often, the silver bullet to understanding what MPs do in their job as representatives is to combine empirical evidence generated by different methods.

Notes

- 1 Seasoned MPs explained that the majority's voting-down of opposition proposals does not necessarily mean rejecting their "substance". At least occasionally, parts of their content make it into subsequent proposals of the coalition parties. The weaker the opposition MPs' ownership claims for an idea, the better are its chances of being adopted by the committee majority. A quote from an interview with an opposition MP illustrates the trade-off of visibility against policy influence: "Plunking a finished proposal on the table is a demonstrative act. Then one can claim: I have made 36 proposals. That's a kind of proof of activity. However, if one wants to move something, one needs to do it differently."
- 2 Parliamentary bills, motions, and written questions require the support of five MPs. It is generally agreed that the first MP to sign any of these is the one who is most active with regard to the issue at stake and the measured activity.
- 3 We borrow the labels Spectator (Searing 1994) and Showhorse and Workhorse (e.g. Langbein and Sigelman 1989) from the literature but have our own operational definitions. To the best of our knowledge the remaining labels have never been used before.
- 4 Although there are no formal incompatibility rules, Austrian ministers, with a few exceptions, have not been Members of Parliament since 1983.

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