



The conditional effect of personal vote-seeking behaviors on MPs electoral performance: Evidence from an open-list PR system

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ABSTRACT

Considerable research argues that voters reward personal vote-seeking behaviors. The expected electoral gain would be the primary driver of MPs' action. Nevertheless, empirical evidence is scarce, and the findings do not always match the theoretical expectations. This article examines the electoral impact of personal vote-seeking behaviors, arguing in favor of integrating party electoral performance into the models. I also propose a new measure of electoral performance based on the evolution of MPs electoral results. Drawing on data from Finland, the findings globally support the theoretical arguments. MPs benefit from personal vote-seeking behaviors, primarily when their party improves its results. The findings have important implications for our knowledge of the personal vote and, more generally, the personalization of politics.

1. Introduction

Do members of parliament (MPs) benefit from personal vote-seeking strategies? Considerable research argues that the expected electoral rewards are the main drivers of MPs' activities. Specifically, the literature explains that MPs are incited to cultivate a personal vote when voters select a particular candidate besides casting a list-vote (Carey and Shugart, 1995). It leads to flourishing literature examining the electoral system's effects and the incentive it produces (André and Depauw 2014; André et al. 2014; Dudzinska et al., 2015). However, the empirical evidence of an electoral benefit is scarce (Martin 2010). Only a few studies examine the impact of personal vote-seeking strategies on the MP's actual electoral performance (Chiru 2018; Johannes and McAdams 1981; Martin 2010; McAdams and Johannes 1988). Their findings do not always confirm the expectations. According to King (1991), it is mainly due to the methodological limitations of a dependent variable measuring the incumbent votes. Also, most of the scholarship measures the direct effect of MPs' behavior on their vote share at the upcoming election without considering other interfering elements. For example, MPs also gather support thanks to their pre-parliamentary career and individual features (Karvonen 2010; von Schoultz and Papageorgiou 2021). Similarly, the outcome of an election also depends on district- and party-specific features. It is particularly true in OLPR systems, where the impact of MPs' behaviors on their electoral performance has not been extensively explored. The scope of intra-party competition, for example, is a critical element on which depends the relevance of the

personal vote (Carey and Shugart, 1995). However, with one exception (Martin 2010), it is not included in the models.

Considering the limitations in previous literature and drawing on data from Finland, I propose a new measurement of the electoral benefits based on the individual electoral performance evolution from one election to another. The models also include the party electoral performance as a factor mediating the effect of personal vote-seeking behaviors. The results show that they only matter when the MPs' party substantially improves its score. This finding has significant consequences for our knowledge of the personal vote and, more broadly, on the personalization of politics.

The remaining part of the article is organized as follows. In the two following sections, I discuss the literature on the personal vote, electoral rewards, and the theoretical expectations. Then, I introduce the data and method. In the fourth section, I display the empirical findings before concluding with a discussion of the implication of the results.

2. Personal vote-seeking behaviors and electoral performance

The personal vote refers to the share of electoral support, which originates in candidates' personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and records (Cain et al. 1987). It thus opposes the part of support stemming from party membership. A growing literature focuses on the activities that allow MPs to cultivate this personal vote by developing name recognition among their constituents. Many scholars have gathered all these activities under the label "constituency service" (Arter

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2011; Däubler 2020; Martin 2010; Russo 2011). According to this literature, MPs invest time and resources in these activities to improve their chance of re-election (Mayhew 1974). It is particularly true when citizens can vote for a particular candidate instead of (or in addition to) a party list (Norris 2004).

However, when it comes to observing the personal vote, the evidence is scarce (Shugart 2005). Only a few studies measure the effect of these activities on incumbents' electoral performance, and the few research tackling this question provides only mixed results, mainly in SMD systems. On the one hand, the literature has neglected OLPR systems, where the relevance of the personal vote is attested. On the other hand, the empirical observations do not always fit the theoretical expectations (Gaines 1998; Johannes and McAdams 1981; McAdams and Johannes 1988; Papp 2018). Johannes and McAdams explain this result by the "ingratitude" of voters (1981, 537), but it may also disclose profound contrasts between voters' expectations regarding the work of their MPs and how MPs themselves perceive them (Soontjens 2021).

Interestingly, most evidence comes from outside the United States (Chiru 2018; Däubler et al. 2016; Loewen et al., 2014). Moreover, other scholars, measuring the perception of incumbents using survey data, find support the personal vote approach since MPs who deliver constituency service are, generally, better evaluated by respondents (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2003; Jones 2016; Sulkin et al. 2015).

There is, thus, no real consensus in the literature, and the causes of the variations are rarely discussed. King (1991) points to three interconnected methodological limitations in the seminal works. First, using survey data is suboptimal. Second, early works do not consider the partisan predispositions of the voters. Finally, seminal research calculates the incumbency vote instead of the incumbency advantage, which is more than the number of votes. Hence, measuring the number or the share of votes may lead to biased estimations about the impact of the work done during the term under study. Elsewhere, Chiru (2018) and Papp (2018) discuss the role of the electoral system and the need for personalized electoral rules.

Moreover, the literature suggests an exclusive link between personal votes-seeking strategies and the actual vote share. Other elements, like local political experience and, more generally, the advantage of being from the area, influence MPs' name recognition and eventually improve their electoral performance (Put and Maddens 2015; von Schoultz, 2018; Tavits 2010). Candidates' policy positions also matter in both SMD and open-list MMD (Ames 1995; von Schoultz and Papageorgiou 2021). Similarly, most of the literature posits a direct effect of MPs behavior on electoral performance. With two exceptions, the empirical analyses do not include mediating and/or conditioning factors. Chiru (2018) shows that MPs behavior is better rewarded when government approval is weak. Martin (2010) highlights the conditional and unexpected effect upon low intraparty competition. Constituency service is rewarded when incumbents face no co-partisans. There is thus a need for additional analyses.

To account for these limitations, I propose a measure based on the evolution of MPs electoral performance from one election to another and apply it drawing on data from the Finnish OLPR system. The research relies on previous work about personal vote-seeking behavior and its payoffs. Precisely although the interest is linked to the broader question of the efficiency of personal vote-seeking behavior, the article explores MPs inclination to (co-)sponsor private motions. Earlier works highlighted an electoral connection of private motions in various polities (Bräuninger et al. 2012; Däubler et al. 2016; Williams 2018; Williams and Indridason 2018), making them an efficient strategy for cultivating a personal vote. The strategic aspect of private motions comes from the use that is made by MPs. The formal role of this instrument is to influence policymaking and amend the national budget (Pajala 2011). However, MPs have a different goal in mind when sponsoring a private motion (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2003; Däubler et al. 2016). Despite the low adoption rate, they can signal and claim credit for addressing issues that matter for constituents and, thus, developing name recognition

(Däubler et al. 2016, 423). It signals to constituents that their representatives are active and take care of issues (Däubler et al. 2016; Grimmer et al. 2012). Private motions fit thus the definition of a personal vote-seeking behavior since they are strategically used not to influence policymaking but to improve name recognition among constituents. This process was highlighted by the comparative literature (Bräuninger et al. 2012; Däubler et al. 2016; Williams and Indridason 2018), but is also valid in Finland (Arter 2011; Solvak and Pajala 2016). Consequently, the studies using motions as an indicator for personal vote-seeking behavior are also those highlighting the most robust findings regarding the electoral payoffs (Bowler 2010; Däubler et al. 2016; Loewen et al., 2014; Williams and Indridason 2018). The main reason is the communication made by MPs of their bill initiation activity. They are advertised in the local press, and MPs publish them on their website (Arter 2011). Private motions offer the opportunity to reach a large share of constituents with diverse profiles (André and Depauw 2013).

3. The mediating effect of party performance

As underlined by Däubler et al. (2016, 421) most literature has examined the effect of MPs behaviors on their electoral performance in systems using plurality electoral formula in single-member districts (SMD). This lack of literature in other systems may look surprising considering that the incentives to seek for personal votes are, at least, as strong in flexible- and open-list PR systems as they are in SMD (Carey and Shugart, 1995). However, the nature of the incentives differs from the ones in SMD, because of the second layer in political competition. Besides competing with candidates from other parties, candidates also compete with candidates from the same list, which provides MPs with even more incentives to cultivate a personal vote (Crisp et al., 2004). The literature dealing with the electoral consequence of MPs behavior in non-SMD systems (Däubler et al. 2016; Tavits 2010) does not, however, directly tackle this question.

Previous literature has mainly focused on the methodological issues occurring when separating the personal from the party votes (Däubler et al. 2016; Wauters et al. 2010). However, by doing so, the literature considers that the two elements are independent while they are interconnected. The (expected) success (or failure) of the party also has consequences for the individual candidates and legislators (Crisp et al. 2007). The party vote defines the scope of the intra-party competition, which, eventually, provides candidates and incumbents with more or fewer incentives to cultivate a personal vote (Arter 2015; De Winter and Baudewyns, 2015). However, its impact on MPs' electoral performances remains uncertain. The single publication including intra-party competition finds unexpected results. Martin (2010) shows that MPs facing fierce intra-party competition are rewarded less than incumbents facing no co-partisans, when he hypothesized the opposite pattern. He, however, does not provide explanations for this finding.

There is thus a need for further analyses, considering the crucial role of intra-party competition in defining the relevance of the personal vote in OLPR (Carey and Shugart, 1995). This article provides new insights based on the literature on intra-party competition and argues that personal vote-seeking behaviors impact MPs electoral performance when MPs party improves its electoral performance.

Carey and Shugart (1995) seminal work highlights the strong incentives to cultivate a personal vote when the electoral system allows voters to select particular candidates instead of a party list. The incentives are a function of the degree of party control over access to and rank on ballots (Crisp et al. 2007, 734). OLPR systems are among the systems where the personal vote is the most relevant, as attested by the rich literature on voting behavior (von Schoultz, 2016; von Schoultz and Papageorgiou 2021), candidate selection (Arter 2013, 2014), and politicians work (André et al. 2014; Crisp et al., 2004; Ruostetsaari and Mattila 2002).

However, institutional explanations are not sufficient since they do not account for within-group differences. In OLPR systems, not all MPs

face the same incentives. The electoral fate of an incumbent is a function of his/her performance but also depends on other challengers and his/her party (Arter 2013, 2021; Crisp et al. 2007; Put et al. 2020).

The phenomenon has been extensively explored (André and Depauw 2013, 2014; Chiru, 2021; Wessels 1999) using district magnitude as a “fixed and identifiable determinant of the scope of intra-party competition” (Carey and Shugart, 1995, 431). However, This proxy implies that all parties in a given district experience the same level of intra-party competition, which does not reflect the reality and, more crucially, does not account for what intra-party competition is: a party factor (Crisp et al. 2007).

Crisp et al. (2007) argue that the incentive to engage in personal vote-seeking behaviors depends on the expected performance of the party in the next elections. When a party betters its electoral performance or is expected to win additional seats, intra-party competition is fiercer since more co-partisans compete for these seats (Arter 2015, 544; De Winter and Baudewyns, 2015, 298). In this situation, challengers may have a better chance to get elected and will thus invest more resources in the campaign. It might eventually jeopardize the incumbents' position and force them to bolster their reputation to handle the increasing competition (Arter 2012, 284). MPs use thus the results of the previous election(s) (Arter 2013; Crisp et al. 2007) and consider the events occurring, mainly polls, during the term (Crisp et al. 2007, 732) to predict the scope of the competition.

Not all MPs are equal, they do not face the same incentives, and the election context varies from one district and from one party to another. OLPR systems enhance the relevance of the personal vote, with voters valuing candidates' reputations instead of party reputation (Carey and Shugart, 1995). There is strong evidence of a personal vote and personal vote-seeking behavior (Däubler et al. 2016; Loewen et al., 2014). However, as explained above, the betterment of party performance induces a fiercer intra-party competition that, in return, boosts the relevance of the personal vote (Arter 2015; De Winter and Baudewyns, 2015). Hence, an MP's behavior would more substantially affect the election outcome when his/her party expands its electoral support. The hypothesis is: *Personal vote-seeking behaviors have a more substantial impact on an MP electoral performance when his/her party improves its electoral score than when it reiterates or disimproves its score.*

4. Empirical strategy

With notable exceptions (Akirav 2015; Chiru 2018; Däubler et al. 2016; Loewen et al., 2014; Williams 2018), research on the role of MPs behavior and voters' evaluation of MPs' track records makes use of survey data.

Here I focus on the effect of actual personal vote-seeking behavior on Finnish MPs electoral performance in the election following the term under study. Two reasons motivate the choice of Finland. First, the open-list proportional electoral system is strongly candidate-centered with high intra-party competition (Arter 2013; Ruostetsaari and Mattila 2002; Solvak and Pajala 2016). Voters have to cast a preferential vote, and about half of them choose first the candidate (von Schoultz, 2018). Second, literature highlighted an electoral connection of parliamentary activities (Poyet and Raunio 2020; Solvak and Pajala 2016) and constituency service (Arter 2011; Raunio and Ruotsalainen 2018), showing that Finnish MPs are reacting to electoral incentives and that voters are aware of the work of their representatives.

The literature uses various indicators of individual MPs' electoral performance. Chiru (2018) calculates the percentage of votes received by an MP in the election following the term under study. Däubler et al. (2016) disentangle the party and personal votes by calculating the share of all personal votes that goes to a particular candidate. They use this operationalization to control for voters who do not use their right to express a preference vote. In Finland, since selecting a specific candidate is mandatory, such distinction is not required. However, in addition to the limitations of variable measuring the number/share of votes (King

1991), it is crucial to take into account the time factor. I thus build a continuous index based on the evolution of the preferential votes from one election to the next:

$$MP \text{ electoral performance} = \text{LN} \frac{\text{PrefV}_e}{\text{PrefV}_{e-1}}$$

PrefV_e stands for the number of preferential votes received by an MP at the election e. PrefV_{e-1} stands for the number of preferential votes received by the MP at the previous election. When an MP gets the same number of votes, his/her score on the index is “0.” All MPs with a negative score have lost support. The further the score is from “0”, the greater is the loss. Positive scores indicate a gain in support. The higher is the score, the greater is the profit.

Without a logarithm, the index would create a variable that grows exponentially with an undefined maximum. It undoubtedly implies a significant number of outliers impacting the estimations. To account for this, I take the logarithm of the index to account for the disproportionate effect of outliers. Robustness checks (table R1 in the supplementary files) include a replication of the analyses with a non-logged dependent variable. This measure has three advantages: First, it allows to assess the impact of events and MPs activities that occurred during the term under study. Second, this measure considers the various individual performances. For example, two MPs may have a similar number of votes, but their actual performance may vary. One may have improved his/her performance when, for the other, it may be showing a loss of support. Empirically, it displays two different situations. A measure that considers this element is necessary to robustly assess the effect of MPs' work on electoral support. Finally, it allows the comparison between districts with different sizes and magnitudes. However, the new variable does not eliminate all biases. One major limitation is that it does not account for the general level of support an MP enjoys. It does not identify MPs who can maintain a high level of electoral support nor differentiates them from MPs who hold a lower support level.

To measure the effort an MP dedicates to personal vote-seeking activities, I use the number of private motions (s)he submitted during the term under study. The literature provides extensive evidence of an electoral connection of private motions (Bowler 2010; Däubler et al. 2016; Solvak and Pajala 2016). Even though the parliament rarely adopts them, MPs can use them for credit, claiming to show constituents they act on their behalf (Bowler 2010; Pajala 2011). Finnish MPs are particularly active in drafting private motions (Pajala 2011). Voters can identify the author of a private motion and thus reward or punish legislators. In addition, unlike other instruments, they are also particularly adapted for credit-claiming since the local press advertises them and MP publishes them on their website (Arter 2011).

According to the Finnish Constitution (article 39), three legislative instruments correspond to the general concept of private motion. First, the legislative motion (*lakialoite*) is a proposal for a new act. It is similar to the UK House of Commons' private members' bill. Second, the two types of budget motions (*talousarvioaloite* and *lisätalousarvioaloite*) are proposals to append the state budget. Third, an action motion (*toimenpidealoite*) is a request to the government to act on a matter within the government's competence (Pajala 2011). Not all motions are analogous in their scope, but they share similarities justifying pooling them. First, they all allow individual MP to influence the policymaking without the support of their party group and/or the government. Second, regardless of the type, their use is hassle-free and fast (Arter 2011). The process from their conception to the parliamentary decision is similar from one type to another (Pajala 2011). On this criterion, action motions slightly differ since they do not require proposing a “turnkey” project. The cabinet later makes the concrete decision. Finally, Pajala (2014) did not identify any specific behavioral pattern related to one particular type of motion. Similarly, the success rate is more a matter of who is (co-)sponsoring the motion than a function of the type of motion (Pajala 2012). The variable is the sum of all types of motions (co-)sponsored by an MP per term. All motions from 1999 to 2015 are included in the

analysis. The variable being positively skewed and containing several outliers with a high number of private motions per term, the analyses include a logged variable. The motions were compiled by [Pajala and Kause \(2018\)](#).

Not all MPs have the right to (co-)sponsor private motions. Hence, the empirical analyses drop ministers and the speakers who were in office during the term. While ministers cannot use private motions, speakers generally do not use traditional parliamentary instruments as long as they are in office. Hence, the study contains 733 observations/MPs. 593 were ultimately candidates in the upcoming election.

The second independent variable is the party electoral performance. As for individual candidates, I measure the evaluation of the party's performance from one election to the next with an index like the one used to measure MPs' performance. The party score is the addition of the votes for all candidates running on the list, including the non-elected. However, a party's performance is more than the addition of preferential votes, and OLPR systems make no exception. In Finland, about half of the voters choose first the party ([von Schoultz, 2018](#)). It means that this variable also captures phenomena like retrospective ([Söderlund 2008](#)) and economic voting ([Söderlund and Kestilä-Kekkonen 2014](#)). Also, it reflects the votes related to the party's policy proposals ([Kestilä-Kekkonen and Söderlund, 2014](#)). The index is:

$$\text{Party electoral performance} = \text{LN} \frac{PV_e}{PV_{e-1}}$$

PV_e stands for the votes for the party in the election e . PV_{e-1} stands for the votes for the party at the election preceding the election e . As for MPs' performance, the variable grows exponentially and includes several outliers. The analyses use, thus, a logged index.

The analyses also include two sets of control variables. The first set gathers MPs characteristics that have been identified by previous literature as affecting MPs electoral support. First, I measure the share of days an MP spent in parliament to account for the general level of presence and activity in the house. Second, a variable measuring the government-opposition dichotomy is added to the models. This variable serves as a proxy to control the government's support. Third, I include a dummy for all possible leadership positions within the party (party and party group chairs) and parliament (committee chairs) with front-benchers coded 1. Fourth, the models include a dummy for gender with female MPs coded "1". Fifth, parliamentary experience is measured by the number of terms the MP served in parliament. Finally, we add party family dummies to control for the effect of party membership.

The second set of controls is contextual variables that affect the election's outcome (at both the party and candidate levels). First, I measure the change in turnout at the district level. The implicit expectation is that a surge in turnout would increase the pool of available preferential votes and eventually affect the evolution of an MP's electoral performance. Second, the models include the change in district magnitude. As for turnout, redistricting and/or change in the magnitude induces an alteration of the electorate, eventually affecting the distribution of preference votes. Also, this variable accounts for the change in the number of co-partisans running on the same list. In OLPR systems, parties generally run a number of candidates equivalent to district magnitude ([Arter 2021, 340](#); [Bergman et al. 2013, 322](#)). Hence, a change in the magnitude will likely lead to a change in the number of co-partisans. The descriptive statistics of all the variables are in [Table 1](#).

The dependent variable being continuous and logged; I run OLS regression models. In the analysis, there is a different sample for each election and data do not include missing values. In addition, the variations between the terms make it difficult to consider the data as an unbalanced panel. Wooldridge (2010) suggests running pooled models instead of random- or fixed-effect models in the absence of proper longitudinal data. However, since one MP/candidate may appear more than once in the dataset, not all observations are independent. I thus include robust standard errors clustered by individual MP/candidate. All analyses also include term-fixed effects to control for time effects.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Evolution of the MP's electoral performance	-.034	.406	-1.70	1.71
Number of private motions	182.98	154.67	0	1694
Evolution of MP's party's electoral performance	.015	.269	-.696	1.84
Share of days an MP spent in Parliament	.962	.152	.060	1
Government-Opposition dummy (1 = government MP)	.588	.493	0	1
Party chair (dummy)	.027	.163	0	1
Parliamentary party group chair (dummy)	.050	.219	0	1
Committee chair (dummy)	.111	.314	0	1
Gender (1 = female MP)	.385	.487	0	1
Seniority	2.53	1.68	1	10
Change of turnout	.339	1.82	-4.7	5
Change of district magnitude	.461	1.68	-2	11

Data source (private motions): [Pajala and Kause \(2018\)](#).

5. Empirical results

The empirical results are displayed in [Table 2](#). The first model includes only the control variables. The second model consists of all variables without the expected interaction. The empirical test of the hypothesized interaction is in model 3.

Model 1 shows that party office positively affects MPs electoral performance. Party leaders and party parliamentary group chairs are more likely to improve their electoral performance than "back-benchers." The size of the effect remains constant across models, but the p-value slightly increases. Hence, holding a position may influence an MP electoral fate, but the effect decreases when actual behaviors are included in the models. Finally, the proxy for MPs' parliamentary

Table 2
The effect of personal vote-seeking behavior on electoral performance.

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Number of private motions (logged)		.022 (.026)	.022 (.025)
Evolution of MP's party's electoral performance		.411 (.090)***	-.301 (.213)
Number of private motions (logged)* Evolution of MP's party's electoral performance			.130 (.039)***
Share of days an MP spent in Parliament (logged)	-.125 (.042)**	-.176 (.058)**	-.154 (.055)**
Government MP	-.132 (.034)***	-.035 (.051)	-.048 (.051)
Party chair	.368 (.148)*	.280 (.125)*	.279 (.126)†
Parliamentary party group chair	.133 (.049)**	.149 (.055)**	.144 (.053)**
Committee chair	.052 (.048)	.047 (.049)	.043 (.049)
Female MP	.054 (.034)	.051 (.035)	.053 (.034)
Seniority	-.057 (.012)***	-.056 (.012)***	-.054 (.012)***
Change of turnout	-.028 (.017)	-.023 (.020)	-.023 (.020)
Change of district magnitude	-.001 (.010)	-.023 (.011)†	-.016 (.012)
Term-fixed effects	YES	YES	YES
Party dummies	YES	YES	YES
Obs.	593	584	584
Adj. R-square	.091	.132	.141
AIC	567.24	536.42	530.84

Data source (private motions): [Pajala and Kause \(2018\)](#). OLS Regressions. Robust standard errors clustered by individual MP/candidate are in parentheses. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, †p < 0.1.

activity and seniority negatively correlates with MP's electoral performance change. I can explain this result by the operationalization of the dependent variable that measures the electoral performance evolution. Nevertheless, junior MPs are more likely to improve their performance after their first terms, which are precisely dedicated to building trust and support among constituents (Fenno 1978).

Turning to the variables of interest, models 2 and 3 provide contrasting results. Model 2 shows that sponsoring private motions does not contribute to improving an MP's electoral performance. However, it does not mean that personal vote-seeking behaviors do not affect an MP electoral performance. As expected, the effect depends on the party's electoral performance (model 3). To better appreciate the interaction, I plot the average marginal effects (Fig. 1), and the predictive margins (Fig. 2) of the number of (co-)sponsored private motions.

Fig. 1 shows that personal vote-seeking behaviors only have a significant and positive effect when the party sufficiently improves its score. Precisely, MPs' work does matter when the percentage increase of the party performance is at least 21. Then, the size of the effect slightly increases following the betterment of the party performance. This threshold is relatively high. As seen from the histogram included in Fig. 1, to a certain extent, only a minority of MPs will, thus, be affected by their behavior in parliament. Hence, personal vote-seeking behavior impacts an MP electoral performance mostly when the intra-party competition is very fierce. It gives credit to the literature on intra-party competition, but it also shows that one should not overestimate its effect.

The left-hand panel of Fig. 2 illustrates the effect of personal vote-seeking strategies when the party's performance has decreased. The difference between inactive and very active MPs is negligible and not significant. The pattern emerging from the right-hand panel is different. When an MP's party improves its score by about 32%, the effect of personal vote-seeking strategies is significant. It shows that MPs who (co-) sponsor only a small number of private motions will lose preferential votes at the upcoming elections. The data show that MPs who sponsored only one private motion will, on average, gather only 78% of their previous number of votes.

This panel also shows that MPs must (co-)sponsor about 54 private

motions to start gaining electoral advantages, a relatively low amount. However, the gain associated with each additional motion is limited. For example, MPs (co-)sponsoring an average number of private motions (183) can expect 6% more votes. When 338 (mean + 1 standard deviation) motions are (co-)sponsored, the average electoral gain is 11%. Hence, an MP needs a relatively strong effort to improve its electoral performance significantly. There is, however, a rational calculus there. Finnish parliamentary elections are very competitive, and Finnish MPs are, on average, more electorally vulnerable than any other MPs in Europe (Poyet and Raunio 2020). Hence, even a slight loss or gain of votes may impact the electoral fate of the MPs.

6. Discussion

The article explored the conditional effect of personal vote-seeking behaviors on MPs' electoral performance. Building on the limitation of previous scholarship, I have proposed a new operationalization of electoral performance based on electoral support change from one election to another. Besides, I argued that expected changes in party performance influence how personal vote-seeking behaviors affect an MP electoral fate. A shift in party performance was expected to condition the effect of personal vote-seeking behaviors on MPs electoral support. In open-list PR systems, when the party performance is expected to increase, incentives to cultivate a personal vote also increase (Arter 2015; De Winter and Baudewyns, 2015). Thus, I argued that personal vote-seeking behaviors should have a more substantial effect on MPs running on the list of a party that increased its vote share.

Drawing on data from Finland, the findings support the expectations. (Co-)sponsoring many private motions does not significantly improve individual performance. The results show that the effect mainly depends on where MPs are running as candidates and how well their party performed compared to the previous election. Precisely, from 1999 to 2015, cultivating a personal vote does matter most when MPs' party does improve its vote-share by about 21%, a rather substantial change. The findings also show that the gain/loss in votes induced by every additional motion remains modest. However, considering the tightness of the electoral competition, every extra vote may impact the electoral

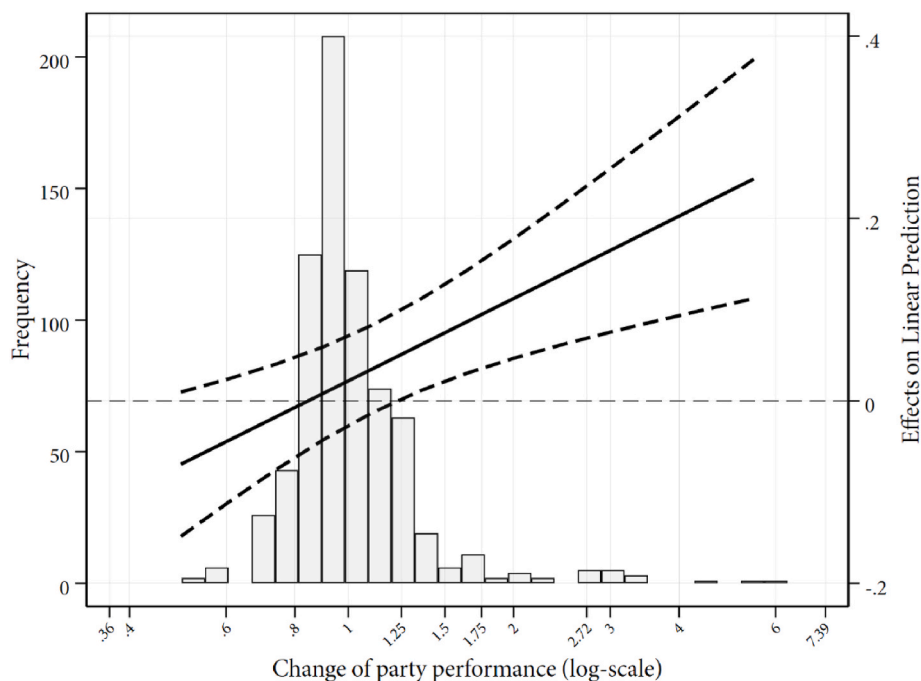


Fig. 1. Average marginal effects of the number of (co-)sponsored private motions (X-axis value labels are observed values). The dashed lines are the 95% confidence interval.

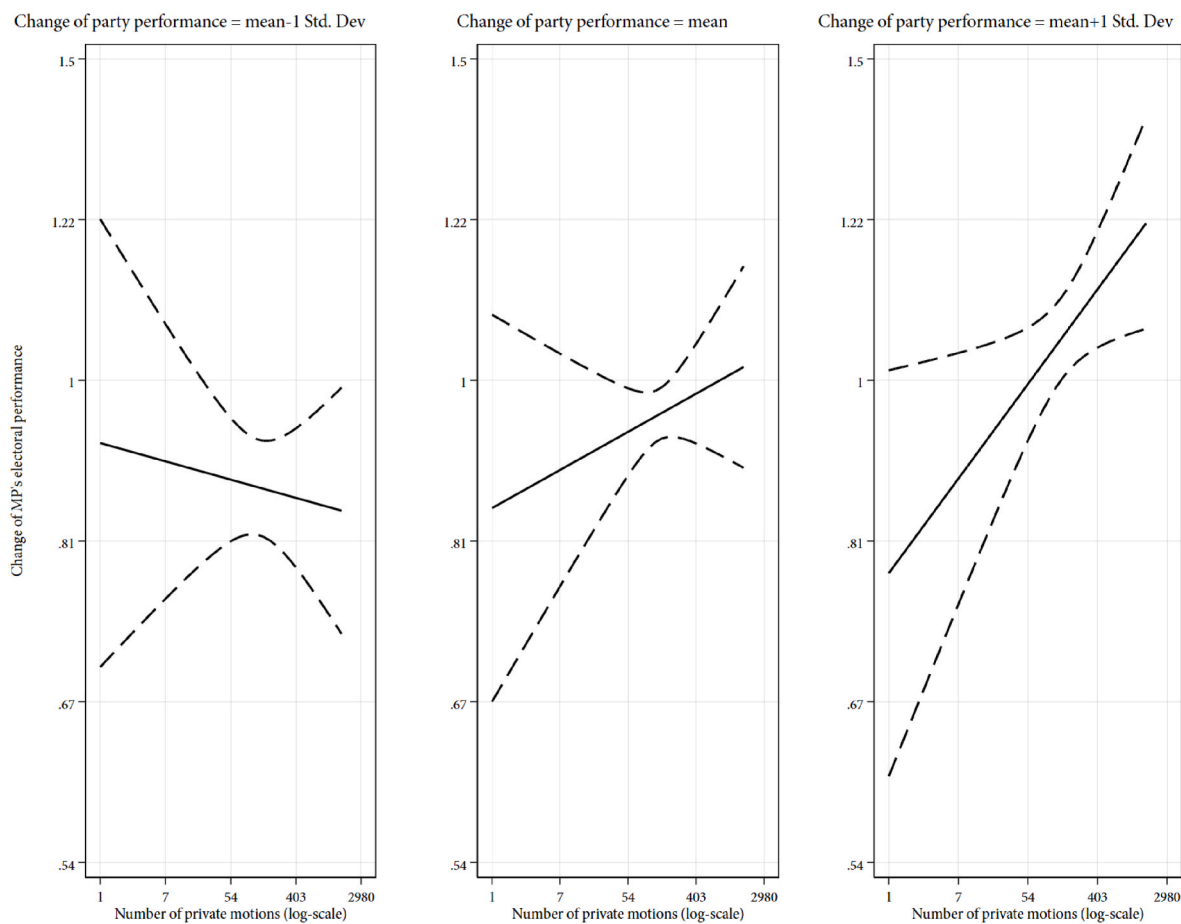


Fig. 2. Predictive margins of the number of (co)-sponsored private motions (value labels are observed values). The dashed lines are the 95% confidence intervals.

outcome.

The findings have three implications: First, they provide further insights on the personal vote and its link with political parties. Perhaps paradoxically, the study shows that we first need to observe a growing party vote to observe direct evidence of a personal vote – to paraphrase Shugart (2005, 46). The results do not necessarily challenge the concept of personal vote. However, they provide a new understanding of the context in which it emerges. The article shows that voters reward personal vote-seekers when the number of potentially eligible candidates is increasing. Thus, individual track records are a way to identify hard-working MPs from a party that collectively improved its support. Therefore, it incites scholars to examine the relationship better and/or the interaction between collective party support and the personal vote. The results may suggest that MPs' records may be firstly valuable for citizens who vote for the party for the first time to sort out the candidates. More research would be, however, necessary to better understand this process.

Second and more generally, the literature has argued that the individualization of legislative behavior has become more prominent among European legislators in response to a change of the matrix of incentives (Thomassen 1994). Personalization of the electoral systems and decline of party membership are cited as the main drivers of change (Renwick and Pilet 2016). The findings do not necessarily contradict these statements, but they incite to temper the expected consequences. Renwick and Pilet (2016) explained that there is only a little knowledge about the effects of this change on both MPs and voters' behaviors. The study contributes to the discussion by showing that MPs' behavior has an electoral impact only in concomitance with party electoral performance. Thus, the findings help understand why the expected effects of personalization are not always observed. In other words, when investigating

these effects, scholars should not forget the other side of the coin: the party.

Finally, the article contributes to the literature on intra-party competition, one of the most crucial factors driving MPs behavior (Carey and Shugart, 1995). When the electoral formula enhances intra-party competition, the relevance of the personal vote increases. The findings do not invalidate this point. However, it shows that enhancing intra-party competition may not be a sufficient condition. The article indicates that the competition must reach relatively high levels to observe an effect of personal vote-seeking behaviors on an MP performance. Therefore, the finding should incite subsequent research to go beyond the distinction between open- and closed-lists PR electoral systems. It also shows the pertinence of considering intra-party competition as a *party-in-a-district* element (Crisp et al. 2007). The relevance of the personal vote depends not only on the electoral formula but also on the performance of a specific party in a particular district.

The article has three limitations that subsequent studies should address. First, the analyses are based on only one – yet most-likely (Raunio and Ruotsalainen 2018) – case. The external validity of the study may remain, thus, limited. However, the research design can be replicated in countries using an open- or flexible-lists proportional system. Moreover, the arguments about party performance and intra-party competition are based on the comparative literature and, in this respect, are not limited to Finland. Passarelli (2020) showed important similarities between the Finnish electoral systems and other countries using OLPR as an electoral formula. Second, I focused on the intensity of the behavior, namely the number of private motions. Further studies should also investigate the content and mainly their use for constituency service. A reasonable expectation is that MPs who (co)-sponsor many private motions with district-related content would be better rewarded.

Similarly, it would be necessary to examine the impact of co-sponsorship strategies on MPs' electoral performance. Finally, the article highlights one explicative model. An MP's electoral performance is more than the conditional effect of personal vote-seeking behaviors. Factors other than the party performance – like electoral vulnerability and voters' characteristics – may moderate the impact of MPs behaviors. Moreover, the article focused on one parliamentary instrument, while others can also be used to cultivate a personal vote (André and Depauw 2013). Repeating my study with other indicators would benefit our knowledge of the personal vote.

Nevertheless, the article has provided robust evidence of the link between the personal vote and party performance. Further studies on the incumbency advantage and the reward for constituency service need to consider their conditional effect upon party vote. This article has shown the importance of not overestimating the opposition between the party and personal votes. Finally, the measure of electoral performance may be used to explore the effect of other factors.

Data availability

The data are already publicly available (link in the paper).

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102414>.

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