

Representatives of whom?

Party group coordinators in the European Parliament

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Abstract

We investigate the role of party group coordinators on committees in the European Parliament. Tying in with previous work on committee and rapporteurship assignment, we focus on key party political actors in legislative politics. Party group coordinators are the nexus mediating between individual MEPs, national party delegations that citizens voted for, and the European party group. They assign rapporteurships and compile voting instructions along which MEPs vote very cohesively. Against this backdrop, and in line with partisan theory, we expect the party leadership to closely monitor their performance. Drawing on a novel dataset comprising information on coordinators in the four biggest political groups in EP6 (2004-2009) and EP7 (2009-2014), we provide evidence that coordinators are indeed representatives of the leadership and that more disloyal coordinators are replaced. Since coordinators are essential checks on rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs, these findings alleviate concerns about possible agency drift in trilogues and committee specialisation in general.

I. Introduction

Research has elucidated the workings of the European Parliament and its committees. The central role of the rapporteur in the EP has been pinpointed, and their influence over legislation has been shown empirically. But reports are bid for by party group coordinators, who likewise appoint (shadow) rapporteurs for their groups and who bear ultimate responsibility for voting recommendations to groups along which MEPs vote very cohesively. These individuals thus form a small group of highly influential MEPs, who occupy crucial positions in collective decision-making in the European Parliament (EP). In analysing the role of party group coordinators, we ask the fundamental question of who shapes voting decisions in the EP.

The EP's committee system has been described as its "legislative backbone" and the political parties as its "lifeblood" (Neuhold 2001: 6). Political coordinators constitute the nexus between the thematic organisation of the parliament through committees and the ideological organisation through European party groups as well as national party delegations that citizens voted for. Consequently, political coordinators act not only in their individual capacity as MEP. They are pivotal for the successful functioning of the EP's party groups and smooth committee work in specialising thematically to accumulate expertise. For instance, they compile voting instructions along which MEPs of their group vote very cohesively, despite the fact that each party group in the EP represents a very 'heterogeneous collection of established groups and temporary alliances' (Raunio 2000: 242). To understand the EP as 'an institution that furthers party interests while also privileging expertise and consensus' (Yoshinaka et al., 2010: 24) we need to know more about these pivotal actors, and their interaction with others.

However, knowledge about coordinators is scarce (see Whitaker 2001; Bailer et al. 2009). In this paper we address this by providing insight into coordinators' work, their legislative behaviour and underlying incentive structures. To this end, we draw on partisan theory (Cox & McCubbins, 1993, 2005) in order to assess the role of this partisan post in legislative politics. We show that coordinators' party group loyalty helps explain their appointment. This has important implications for our understanding of committee politics, since it

suggests that the party leadership can shape committee voting decisions. This alleviates concerns about committees and rapporteurs as preference outliers (e.g. Kaeding, 2004), in particular with a view to the privileged position of these actors in trilogues and early agreements.

The paper starts off by positioning the coordinator in research on organisation and specialisation in legislative politics, suggesting that they represent the missing link between sectoral and ideological organisation. It then outlines the selection and tasks of coordinators. Second, we derive several hypotheses from partisan theory. Third, we present a new dataset on party group coordinators and delve into the empirical test, which a concluding section discusses in more detail.

II. Organisation and specialisation in the European Parliament: the role of the coordinator

This section analyses the conduct of legislative work in the European Parliament. Most of the parliamentary work is carried out in the EP's committee structure. There are 20 standing parliamentary committees, two sub-committees (on human rights; security and defense) and one special committee (on *Tax Rulings and Other Measures Similar in Nature or Effect*). In the following, we set out the institutional environment and the position therein of the party group coordinator. In highlighting insights from previous research, we moreover situate this research in the broader research agenda on EU legislative politics.

1. Party coordinators in the European Parliament: a missing link

The EP has been able to manage the increase in powers due to mainly two organisational reasons: internal legislative thematic specialization (Bowler and Farrell, 1995) and ideological coordination by political parties (Hix et al., 2007). Party group coordinators occupy the nexus between these levels for collective decision-making in the EP that facilitate expertise and consensus.

Party groups as organising units

In 2009, more than 140 national party delegations from the 27 Member States joined one of seven party groups in the EP, representing a heterogeneous collection of established groups and temporary alliances (see Raunio 2000).

At the same time political groups are remarkably cohesive, and their voting cohesion has increased over time (Hix & Noury, 2009). The relatively high voting cohesion of the political groups is, at least partly, explained by the similar ideological preferences of their members. “Party groups at the transnational level not only operate in a similar policy space as do national parties, but also tend to be formed mainly as coalitions of parties that are like-minded on matters of policy” (McElroy and Benoit, 2010: 396; McElroy and Benoit, 2011).

Thus, “politics in the European Parliament is very much like politics in other democratic parliaments, dominated by left–right positions and driven by the traditional party families of domestic European politics” (Hix et al. 2007: 181). While increasing party group size to gain resources and maintaining party group cohesion work in opposing directions, party groups need to implement measures to reconcile these two dynamics.

Specialisation in committees

Legislative specialisation in committees plays a vital role in the production of EU legislation. In particular, scholars analyse the composition of parliamentary committees (Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003; Settembri and Neuhold 2009; Yordanova 2009; Whitaker, 2011), where much of the detailed legislative work of the EP is carried out. McElroy (2006: 5) concludes that committees are “highly representative of the EP as a whole, in terms of both party and policy representation”. However, Parliamentary seniority seems to matter. Whereas Bowler and Farrell (1995) discover no impact in the early 1990s, Mc Elroy (2006) and Yordanova (2009) show that previous membership on the same committee had the strongest impact on the distribution of committee seats in more recent legislatures.

But most decision-making processes actually involve only a sub-set of the members of the EP. Some actors are in a position of authority that might privilege them in the legislative process. Within committees, Neuhold (2001: 5) identifies chairs and vice-chairs, (shadow) rapporteurs, and party group coordinators as “key players”. Committee chairs have been studied with a view to their proportional allocation across groups, and have, together with

the two largest groups' agreement to share the spoils of the EP presidency, usually provided an example for the consensual nature of the EP (see Hix, 2008).

In particular rapporteurs and rapporteurship allocation have attracted scholarly attention, given their prominent role in the inter-institutional decision-making process. Drawing on Crozier and Friedberg (1977), Farrell and Héritier (2004) identify them as so-called "relais actors" representing the EP in negotiations with the Commission and Council. Therefore, "they control the flow of information from their own organization to the other and vice versa", acting as "gatekeepers" and "information brokers" endowed with "power in the intraorganizational bargaining of outcomes" (Farrell and Héritier 2004: 1188).

Accordingly, the most important leadership role on any given proposal is arguably held by the rapporteur of the responsible committee (Kaeding, 2004; Benedetto, 2005; Farrell and Héritier, 2004; Hausemer, 2006; Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003; Rasmussen, 2008; Yoshinaka, McElroy and Bowler, 2010; Hurka and Kaeding, 2012; Jensen and Winzen, 2012) and respective shadows (Judge and Earnshaw, 2011, Hurka et al. 2014). They have considerable impact on EP opinions and final legislative outcomes (Costello and Thomson 2010, 2011; Judge and Earnshaw, 2011). Accordingly, rapporteurs are identified "as the most important relais actors" within the EP in particular "when they are closely linked to large political groups and power brokers within the larger political groups in Parliament" (Farrell and Héritier, 2004: 1200–1). The continued strong trend towards early agreements has further increased the reliance on rapporteurs (and increasingly their shadows) to negotiate on behalf of the EP (see Reh et al. 2013; Reh, 2014).

The allocation of reports is controlled by EP party groups. Party group coordinators on the committees secure reports for their group through a bidding process. Benedetto (2005) identifies a positive correlation between the number of assigned reports and EP party size; Hausemer (2006) shows that salient reports go to party groups closest to the centre of the political spectrum. But whether they win a report or not, coordinators need to allocate these as well as shadow rapporteurships among the MEPs from their group on the committee, heeding to some extent the wishes of national parties and individual colleagues (Mamadouh & Raunio, 2003: 339). Nevertheless, Yordanova highlights,

“There are no rules on how the coordinators should allocate reports. The lack of any formal procedures assuring the proportional allocation of reports to national (party) delegations gives more freedom to party group coordinators to accommodate individual legislators’ interests or use the allocations strategically” (2011:101).

Accordingly, Yordanova (2011) investigates the strategic considerations underlying the allocation within rather than across party groups. Likewise, Høyland (2006) finds that MEPs from governing national parties receive more reports than their peers from opposition parties.

While it is often appreciated in passing that coordinators distribute reports between individual MEPs from national delegations, the office of the coordinator has received only little scholarly attention (Neuhold, 2001; Yoshinaka et al., 2010; Whitaker, 2001; Yordanova, 2011). The following section therefore sheds light on the role of coordinators.

2. Selection and responsibilities of political party group coordinators in the European Parliament

Within every parliamentary committee a significant part is played by party group coordinators. Only recently recognised in the EP’s rules of procedure (Rule 205, see below), party group coordinators influence the work of the EP’s committee system to a considerable extent.

Tasks: constraining members and providing opportunities

Coordinators are sometimes known as party groups’ ‘spokespersons’ on the policy area their committee deals with. Their office comes with specific tasks within the committee and party group, which can be divided along three categories:

First, with their counterparts from the other political groups, they discuss the day to day business, including the committee agenda and plenary votes. In particular, they bid for reports so as to distribute them to one of the party groups. In addition these meetings

provide a forum to informally discuss party group positions and priorities, as well as to negotiate possible compromise amendments (e.g. Corbett et al., 2011: 151).

Rule 205: Committee coordinators [...]

1. The political groups may designate one of their members as coordinator.
2. The committee coordinators shall if necessary be convened by their committee Chair to prepare decisions to be taken by the committee, in particular decisions on procedure and the appointment of rapporteurs. The committee may delegate the power to take certain decisions to the coordinators, with the exception of decisions concerning the adoption of reports, opinions or amendments. [...] The coordinators shall endeavour to find a consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, they may act only by a majority that clearly represents a large majority of the committee, having regard to the respective strengths of the various groups.
3. The committee coordinators shall be convened by their committee Chair to prepare the organisation of the hearings of Commissioners-designate. Following those hearings, the coordinators shall meet to evaluate the Commissioners in accordance with the procedure laid down in Annex XVII.

[...]

Source: Rules of procedure of the European Parliament (February 2015)

Second, among their party groups' committee contingent, they convene preparatory meetings before the start of the committee meeting to settle on a party line (Corbett et al., 2011:117). In addition, in case of absences, they nominate the substitute members who can fill up the remaining votes for the party (ibid.: 151). In particular, as discussed, they allocate (shadow) rapporteurships for legislative and non-legislative acts.

Finally, with regard to the plenary, coordinators' tasks concern the optimal preparation of votes and representation of the party. They establish the speakers' lists for plenary sessions (Corbett et al., 2011: 151; see also Slapin & Proksch: 2010), maximise their party group's presence during key votes in committee and the full plenary, and ensure voting cohesion. Thus, they support the party groups whipping systems (Hix & Hoyland, 2011: 57; Corbett et al., 2011: 151). In particular, they bear ultimate responsibility for voting instructions to their groups' MEPs.

Selection

Kreppel (2002:204) suggests that coordinators in EPP and S&D are distributed across national (party) delegations using the d'Hondt method. Neuhold highlights that "in most groups the committee members elect the co-ordinators, and they allocate tasks to the members of their own group" (2001: 7). Indeed, coordinators are elected by each party group's members on every committee at the start of each legislative term and mid-term, coinciding with other committee and EP leadership positions. Sometimes, the workload is divided by creation of co-coordinators, deputy coordinators, or pre-arranged switches at mid-term. In particular in large groups, the post is often hotly contested and MEPs canvass their colleagues in series of personal meetings in order to gain their votes.

Interaction with other authorities

The interaction with other authorities and MEPs can be analysed with regard to influence and role expectations. First, considering the committee's bureau (chair and vice-chair persons), "the balance of power between chairs and party group coordinators appears to vary in terms of personality and size of the groups from which the holders of these offices are drawn" (Whitaker, 2011: 91). Influential coordinators have been argued to be able to "usurp" the role of chairs (Whitaker, 2001). It is instructive to realise the different role expectations that specific posts in the parliament and party hierarchy trigger with office holders. Whereas the bureau "plays a very integrative role in achieving a consensual atmosphere within committee", coordinators "need to establish unity within the respective groups" (Neuhold, 2001: 10). Thus, for coordinators party unity may take precedence over consensus in committee, for which a committee chair and rapporteurs may more often be willing or forced to make concessions. At the same time, coordinators need to work constructively with the other groups' coordinators.

Legislative influence

Practitioners have recognised the importance of coordinators over legislative outcomes. Marshall (2010) finds that interest representatives ascribe higher importance to lobbying coordinators than authoritative committee posts such as chairs and vice chairs.

“Taken at face value these results appear to indicate that lobbyists overestimate the influence that party coordinators have over the committee process. But the more likely reading ... is that lobbyists take account of the often decisive yet unobservable role that party coordinators play in defining their party’s position over which amendment to support” (2010:570).

Perceived preference coherence of MEPs has been identified as a mechanism accounting for parliamentarians’ voting decisions (Ringe, 2005, 2010). Given limited resources, MEPs rely on the expertise of their colleagues in a division-of-labour arrangement resulting in them usually following others’ advice on how to vote. Coordinators support for specific amendments thus amounts to a quasi proxy vote of large group components.

Corbett et al. (2011) argue that coordinators’ influence, often brought to bear in party group meetings, has decreased with the move towards first-reading amendments (Reh et al., 2012), which de facto rule out group amendments at plenary stage and reduce the group decision to rubberstamping (or not) a pre-cooked compromise. However, this may only be one part of the picture. First, coordinators usually take part in the decision to enter into negotiations on a first reading agreement in the first place. Second, they frequently take part in trilogues and can closely follow the negotiation through the (shadow) rapporteur. Finally, they play an important role in the acceptance of the compromise in committee. Therefore, while their channels of influence may have changed, coordinators seem far from relegated to the sidelines of legislative work.

Differential roles across parties

The challenges to party group coordinators vary across groups and depend on the size of committee and party group contingents. While for the Greens/EFA, currently two members sit on the International Trade committee, there are eleven from the EPP group representing eight national delegations. In order to find a common party position, coordinators for large

groups need to mediate between individual MEPs and various national party delegations on the committee. Those for smaller groups will often need to find compromises without immediate feedback from colleagues, and thus need excellent knowledge of their colleagues' preferences in order for their group to support the deals and to protect their very own credibility. While coordinators from large groups will thus spend much of their time in meetings with MEPs from their own group, they can rely on colleagues support for (shadow) rapporteurships. Their counterparts in smaller groups in contrast often need to engage in a higher number of these themselves, and thus take part in many informal trilogues with Commission and Council to draft amendments and negotiate with them.

Coordinatorships: a party post in need of scrutiny

The discussion so far has revealed that coordinators hold a core position in the party and committee, and that it is very much a party post. The need to satisfy different national delegations, and to constructively work with colleagues despite ideological differences, means that coordinators occupy a position that prepares for posts in the higher echelons of the parliamentary and party hierarchy. Faced with high additional workload, coordinators are usually very committed, ambitious MEPs, characterised by expertise, interpersonal and negotiating skills paired with credibility to represent the party group line. Pulling the strings from behind the scenes, coordinators are thus key players in the Parliament, and better understanding their role will help us with understanding EU policy-making.

III. Developing hypotheses

A growing body of research has investigated questions of committee and rapporteurship assignment by testing theories of legislative organisation developed in the context of the U.S. Congress (e.g. Kaeding, 2004; Yordanova 2009). These distributional, informational and partisan theories (Shepsle & Weingast, 1987; Krehbiel, 1991; Cox & McCubbins, 1993) allow for deriving certain postulates as to the composition and preference distribution of rapporteurs, committees and the plenary vis-à-vis each other. Here, our primary objective is assessing a "party post" by partisan theory (Cox & McCubbins, 1993). While self-selected

committee members may be preference outliers (in line with distributional theory) or specialists (in line with informational theory), party group coordinators' task is to keep them in check. More than for other prominent posts, such as rapporteurs, we expect the selection of party group coordinators to take place with a view to party group objectives.

While some coordinators serve for many consecutive terms, seniority does not seem to be a necessary condition for obtaining a position as coordinator. About one quarter of the coordinators of the four largest groups at the outset of the 7th legislative term were newcomers to Parliament. A party's successful management of a policy area depends on the coordinator, so members on the committee have a strong incentive to select the person they deem best fit for the job. In line with Kreppel (2002:200), who referred to chairs serving more often than others as "superchairs", "super-coordinators" do exist. For instance, Contanze Krehl (S&D, DE) has been coordinator on the Regional Development Committee since 2004. This provides some anecdotal evidence motivating an enquiry into the reasons as to why fluctuation and continuity on these posts seem to go hand in hand.

Partisan theory (Cox and McCubbins, 1993) posits that parties influence behavior by using offices that they control as sticks and carrots inducing party group loyalty in voting. Party posts are thus prizes for loyal voting behavior, and can be withdrawn if actors perform unsatisfactorily. Indeed, MEPs are expected to pursue the interests of their party group because they depend on the group for promotion within the EP (Hix & Hoyland, 2011: 55). But we can also think of coordinators as the leaderships' helping hand in exerting agenda control by exerting influence on what amendments are proposed (Cox & McCubbins 2005). In sum, party coordinators, in particular of the larger groups, are crucial both as agents of the party group leadership controlling fellow MEPs and reporting back to the leadership, and as checks on the party line. Backbenchers will look to coordinators for information on how to vote, making them important proxies.

Accordingly, we expect coordinators to be held to the highest standards by their group leadership. They are prime targets to be assessed, i.e. rewarded and punished, based on their party group loyalty.

H1: The higher the party group loyalty of an MEP, the higher the odds of serving as group coordinator.

IV. Analysis

We compiled a dataset on party group coordinators, their characteristics and voting behaviour. The data covers the sixth and seventh legislative terms (2004 – 2014) for all party groups. We collected information from Corbett et al. (2005, 2007, 2011) as well as party group websites and publications and combined with data extracted from the website of the EP. The dataset comprises all MEPs in EP6 and EP7, of whom 179 served as coordinators in EP6, and 188 in EP7. Our key explanatory variable is party group loyalty. European party group (EPG) loyalty measures the whether an MEP voted with the majority of their party group. The same was also measured for MEPs' national party (NP). Attendance measures the share of roll-call votes an MEP took part in. These measures are taken from Votewatch Europe for EP7 and calculated from roll-call data (Hix et al 2007, Hix & Noury 2009) fro EP6. We complemented this information with basic information on MEPs' gender, party group and committee affiliation, the number of speeches they delivered in the plenary, and the share of the term they served.

We use logistic regressions to explain appointment as group coordinator. We run four models each for EP6 and EP7: model 1 seeks to explain appointment as coordinator in the first half term by behaviour in that term, while model 2 does the same for the second half term. Model 3 explains appointment in the second half term by behaviour in the first half term. Model 4 explains appointment in either half term by behaviour throughout the full term. The key differences are thus the assumptions we make about the party leadership's information about the ideological fit of the candidate with the party group line. For models 1 and 2 we assume that the leadership has perfect information about the candidates' qualities. While incumbents have an EP track record, newcomers do not. Model 3 takes into account the fact that the leadership can replace coordinators at half term if they proved wrong choices. In other words, they can now reward loyal MEPs based on their track record in the first half term. Model 4 is a combination in that it looks at appointments in the two half

terms. Tables 1 and 2 present the models with exponentiated coefficients to ease interpretation.

TABLE 1:

VARIABLES	(1) Coordinator 6a	(2) Coordinator 6b	(3) Coordinator 6b	(4) Coordinator 6
EPG loyalty (6a)	2.309 (3.196)		18.20** (25.34)	
EPG loyalty (6b)		13.14* (18.56)		
EPG loyalty (6)				15.20** (19.93)
NP loyalty (6a)	106.2* (269.8)		600.5** (1,780)	
NP loyalty (6b)		12.78 (28.19)		
NP loyalty (6)				11.74 (25.09)
Attendance (6a)	23.22*** (20.48)		21.45*** (20.74)	
Attendance (6b)		1.180 (0.804)		
Attendance (6)				2.340 (1.886)
gender	1.426 (0.378)	1.300 (0.342)	1.228 (0.336)	1.293 (0.312)
Speeches	1.001 (0.000853)	1.000 (0.000768)	0.999 (0.000788)	1.001 (0.000815)
Share of term served	0.371 (0.326)	21.42*** (16.88)	7.985* (9.932)	6.550** (5.251)
Size nat. delegation	1.009** (0.00373)	1.008** (0.00369)	1.010*** (0.00377)	1.007** (0.00340)
GUE-NGL	1.732 (0.745)	2.730** (1.211)	2.268* (1.037)	2.406** (0.984)
Greens/EFA	1.471 (0.624)	2.699** (1.144)	1.857 (0.814)	2.178* (0.891)
IND/DEM	6.245*** (3.992)	19.91*** (14.72)	18.21*** (12.65)	23.23*** (15.99)
PPE-DE	0.175*** (0.0613)	0.255*** (0.0904)	0.184*** (0.0681)	0.233*** (0.0742)
PSE	0.211*** (0.0752)	0.298*** (0.108)	0.241*** (0.0896)	0.234*** (0.0776)
UEN	3.675*** (1.681)	2.783** (1.249)	3.702*** (1.816)	3.854*** (1.594)
Committee FE	yes	yes	yes	yes
Constant	0.000261*** (0.000708)	7.47e-05*** (0.000177)	3.67e-07*** (1.17e-06)	0.000167*** (0.000375)
Observations	740	894	768	935

Standard errors in parentheses. ALDE is the reference party group.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

TABLE 2:

VARIABLES	(1) Coordinator 7a	(2) Coordinator 7b	(3) Coordinator 7b	(4) Coordinator 7
EPG loyalty (7a)	1.002 (0.0129)		1.052** (0.0266)	
EPG loyalty (7b)		1.051* (0.0273)		
EPG loyalty (7)				1.004 (0.0173)
NP loyalty (7a)	0.999 (0.00732)		0.988 (0.00820)	
NP loyalty (7b)		0.995 (0.00936)		
NP loyalty (7)				0.990 (0.00777)
Attendance (7a)	1.012 (0.0126)		1.009 (0.0137)	
Attendance (7b)		1.024** (0.0120)		
Attendance (7)				1.022** (0.0110)
Gender	0.797 (0.210)	0.831 (0.222)	0.849 (0.231)	0.950 (0.225)
Speeches	1.000 (0.000419)	0.999** (0.000566)	0.999* (0.000554)	0.999 (0.000429)
Share of term served	1.718e+11 (4.851e+12)	31.19*** (27.44)	20.17* (35.59)	41.44*** (36.16)
Nat. delegation size	1.008** (0.00380)	0.999 (0.00390)	1.000 (0.00391)	1.004 (0.00350)
GUE-NGL	3.819** (2.005)	10.73*** (5.963)	7.024*** (3.880)	6.727*** (3.448)
EFD	2.892* (1.701)			2.108 (1.354)
ECR	1.892 (0.785)	1.838 (0.771)	1.968 (0.834)	1.907* (0.736)
EPP	0.258*** (0.0967)	0.201*** (0.0747)	0.195*** (0.0724)	0.199*** (0.0672)
Greens/EFA	2.316** (0.980)	1.545 (0.658)	1.662 (0.703)	1.850 (0.733)
S&D	0.386** (0.147)	0.302*** (0.114)	0.303*** (0.114)	0.351*** (0.118)
Committee FE	yes	yes	yes	yes
Constant	0 (0)	5.81e-05*** (0.000163)	0.000566** (0.00169)	0.00372*** (0.00742)
Observations	702	701	642	764

Standard errors in parentheses. ALDE is the reference party group.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The analysis of the two terms reveals very similar patterns with regard to our key explanatory variable. Loyalty to the party group is not significant in model 1, but in models 2 and 3. This suggests that the party leadership seems to make wrong choices at the start of a new term, when the sheer number of coordinators required means that newcomer MEPs have to be appointed as coordinators. However, the party leadership has little reliable information about the ideological line and expected legislative behaviour of these MEPs. This is different in the second half term. Knowing the extent to which MEPs have been loyal, the leadership now has a solid basis for their decision. The significant effect of party group loyalty in model 3 suggests that they make full use of this information. The lower coefficients in model 2 suggest that once selected, party group loyalty does not remain at the same high level. The key difference across the two terms is that in EP6 the leadership's correction at midterm results in an overall significant effect of loyalty across the full term, while this is not the case in EP7. Overall, the findings provide support for our hypothesis.

National party loyalty has been included in the models based on the same motivation as party group loyalty. While there are two strong findings in EP6 that suggest that national party loyalty might also positively affect the selection of coordinators, it fails reach statistical significance in EP7, and even points in the opposite direction. This would suggest that party groups have more firmly established the selection of coordinators as their prerogative. Attendance in plenary has an overall positive effect on the odds of becoming group coordinator.

The other variables suggest that the gender balance has reversed itself, with women now being less frequently selected as coordinators. The share of the term served has an expectedly large and significant positive effect. Finally, MEPs from larger member states were more likely to serve as coordinator in EP6, but not anymore in EP7.

V. *Discussion*

We shed light on the role of coordinators and their central function in EP decision-making. As a key actor at the committee level, where most legislative work takes place, coordinators bear responsibility that the party line be heeded and reflected in voting decisions of the group. Thus, they are crucial in achieving the legislative outcomes for which their constituent national party delegations can be held to account by citizens in elections.

We find that an increase in party group loyalty increases the odds of appointment as committee coordinator. In particular, the party leadership seems to be able to evaluate coordinators performance at midterm and to select new coordinators that are closer to the party line. This supports partisan theory suggesting that parties will punish and reward their members based on their loyalty.

However, different standards might be applied to rank-and file MEPs. Raunio suggests that “MEPs may vote against their group, but they are expected to make this known to the group before the vote” and that “group cohesion is based more on voluntary compromises and legislative majority requirements than on disciplinary measures by the group leadership” (2000: 212). This might not apply to the leaderships’ extended arms in the committee, who have particular importance in shaping the party line.

By holding coordinators to account, who are essentially proxy voters for large contingents of their group, the leadership can go a long way to implementing a coherent platform. This is for two reasons. First, coordinators choose rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs who negotiate on behalf of the group. Thus, they can ensure that the most important files go to MEPs who represent the party line on the issues at stake. Second, in case there is risk of (shadow) rapporteurs deviating from the party line, they have the final say on voting recommendations and can correct them if necessary. In sum, this alleviates concerns about the potential policy drift given the powers of the rapporteurs in negotiations in the EP as well as with Council and Commission.

Future studies of legislative politics should take account of the role of the coordinator in legislative politics. So far, the relation of the party group coordinator and (shadow) rapporteur is in the dark (but see Yordanova 2011) – we know little about how these interact, which relation they have to each other, and who ultimately decides in case of conflicts. Thus, better understanding of coordinators provides us with leverage for analysing (shadow) rapporteurship assignment, as well as legislative decisions of political groups.

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