

Working Papers in International Studies

Centre for International Studies

Dublin City University

No. 4/2010

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Individual legislators differ in the degree to which they work to cultivate personal votes. While conventional wisdom declares that the electoral system typically motivates the choice of legislative role, researchers have found difficulty assessing empirically the role-orientation of legislators. This study suggests using content analysis of parliamentary questions as a mechanism to measure variations in personal vote earning strategies. To demonstrate the usefulness of this approach, and the constituency-orientation of Irish parliamentarians, 123,762 questions tabled by Dáil Deputies between 1997 and 2002 are analysed. While evidence of some orientation toward localism is apparent, the data suggests significant variations in role-orientation within the chamber. Explanations of intra-system variation in personal vote earning effort are hypothesised and tested. Characteristics such as electoral vulnerability, geography, intra-party competition and career only partially explain the variation. The results highlight the need to move beyond using electoral rules as a general proxy for role-orientation.

Introduction

Individual legislators differ in the degree to which they expend effort to cultivate personal votes. Some assign considerable time and resources to local affairs and parochial interests, thereby cultivating a personal reputation among constituents. Other legislators apparently focus more attention on national politics, as policymaker, scrutiniser of the executive, or international statesperson. Conventionally, candidate-centred electoral systems motivate incumbents to cultivate and retain personal votes from constituents, while party-centred electoral systems provide less incentive for legislators to focus on personal vote gathering (Carey and Shugart 1995).¹ The relationship appears imperfect, with indications that considerable variation in role-orientation exists within the same electoral environment (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987, Norton and Wood 1993, Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita 2006). Despite the growing theoretical significance assigned to legislators' behaviour, researchers have had difficulty measuring, empirically, the role-orientation of individual legislators. Instead, increasing reliance accrues to the electoral system as a proxy for local versus party-centred legislative roles (see, for example, Persson and Tabellini 2003).

This study offers two important contributions to the literature on legislative role-orientation. First, content analysis of parliamentary questions, introduced as a novel method for measuring legislators' role-orientations towards personal vote earning and parochial interests at the expense of other legislative roles, provides distinct advantages over existing measures of role activity. The advantage arises from the fact that an analysis of parliamentary questions can provide a quantitative indicator of roles legislators perform free from many of the measurement problems associated with other methods of uncovering legislative roles.

A second contribution of this research is assessment of the common assumption that Irish parliamentarians are constituency-focused. Analysis of each of the 123,762 content-analysed parliamentary questions tabled during the lifetime of the 28th Dáil (1997-2002) reveal the degree of parochial interest among parliamentarians. The evidence suggests lower levels of constituency-orientation than conventionally believed, with significant variation in localism within the same parliament. To address the reasons motivating some Dáil Deputies to be more focused on personal vote earning strategies, regression analysis tests explanations of variations in role-orientation at the individual level. The results call into question many assumptions in the comparative literature which posit an electoral and institutional origin to constituency-orientation.

The next section reviews existing measures of constituency orientation. Section Three explains how an analysis of parliamentary questions can provide a quantitative measure of constituency orientation. Section Four introduces the Irish case and presents the descriptive data. Section Five presents the statistical analysis which employs the original data to test theories of legislative motivation. The paper concludes with a

1. Subfields of political science use different terminology to describe what are effectively closely related phenomenon. Legislative scholars tend to speak of *constituency orientation*, *constituency service* and *parochialism*, while electoral studies scholars and political economists tend to talk of the *personal vote*, *candidate-centred systems* and *localism*. The latter literature differentiate personal vote earning from *party-centred* or *strong-party* regimes, while legislative scholars tend to differentiate constituency orientation from leadership and policy roles. In this study, the terms *constituency-orientation*, *constituency-service*, *candidate-centred*, *personal vote*, *localism* and *parochialism* are used interchangeably.

discussion of the results and the usefulness of parliamentary questions as a tool for measuring role orientation.

Existing Measures of Constituency Orientation

Legislative scholars have employed a number of different methods to measure constituency service. Before highlighting how parliamentary questions provide a way to differentiate between personal vote earning and other roles, this section reviews existing methods of determining role-orientation.

Observational studies: For Fenno (1986: 3) observational studies involve “following politicians around and talking to them as they go about their work.” Despite the significance of Fenno’s (1978) groundbreaking application, observational studies have a number of weaknesses; principally, a certain lack of assurance lies in whether or not observed behaviour corresponds with unobserved behaviour. Even if the subjects do not alter behaviour because they are being observed, what is recorded is merely a snapshot in time. Given that individual behaviour may vary in the short term, building a profile of long-term orientation based on time-limited observations may be problematic. Moreover, the nature of the politician willing to be observed may introduce selection bias, undermining the generalisability of observations.

Ultimately, the greatest obstacle to employing observational methods in legislative studies is the fact that Fenno-style “soaking and poking” is a resource intensive activity requiring legislators’ cooperation. Therefore, unsurprisingly, to date, observational methods have not gained commonality in legislative studies.

Interviews: The elite interview is a more widely used tool to help pattern and understand legislative behaviour. Rather than observing politicians, interviewing and questioning parliamentarians about what they do is undertaken. Based on interviews of 521 British MPs during the 1970s, Searing (1994) uncovered eight different political roles which highlight the competing orientations of British parliamentarians toward constituency, policy and leadership roles.

As with observational studies, selection bias is a key problem with the interview method in legislative studies. Müller et al. (2001) is perhaps exceptional in securing interviews with all 183 sitting (Austrian) MPs. This comprehensive dataset is unusual since research generally involves access to a non-random sample of legislators from any given chamber. Because accepting an invitation to be interviewed is unlikely to enhance a member’s reputation with constituents, constituent-oriented legislators are less likely, all else equal, to allocate time for interviews. The overall results, then, possibly underestimate the true level of constituency-orientation.

A significant problem with elite interviews is that the individuals being interviewed are self-reporting and self-assessing their roles. A legislator may misreport behaviour, perhaps to conform to some normative perceptions, or to align with voters’ perceived preferences regarding roles, or to profess what the interviewee believes the interviewer wants to hear.

Written survey: Written surveys provide a time-efficient and relatively economical way to gain insight into parliamentary role-orientation and motivation. In this tradition, Katz (1997) used data from a survey of candidates in the 1994 European Parliament election to draw inferences about role-orientation, and Norris (1997) used data from the British Candidate Survey to try and explain why parliamentarians in a strong-party

electoral environment nonetheless engaged in constituency-service. Farrell and Scully (2007) surveyed sitting MEPs on their representative role. The response of 314 MEPs was combined with information from face-to-face interviews with British MEPs to test the impact of electoral and other variables on legislative behaviour in the European Parliament (see also, Scully and Farrell, 2003).

Many of the problems associated with the interview method remain relevant when considering the strengths and weaknesses of the survey-based methods for identifying legislative roles. Legislators may misreport their role activities and bias may be inherent, given the selection of respondents to such studies. In addition, in legislative research often, an assistant, rather than the elected official, likely completes the survey.

Analysis of the Parliamentary Record: Among research methods using parliamentary records to discover role-orientation, perhaps the most common has been the analysis of legislative voting records to identify, among other aspects, the competing importance of constituency, party and policy preferences in roll-call voting behaviour. Studies of the United States Congress in particular have tended to focus on explaining patterns of roll-call behaviour, often from the perspective of constituents' preferences (Martin 2008). Beyond congress, roll-call analysis has become an important measure of legislative behaviour in the European Parliament (see, for example, Hix, 2004 and Hix, Noury and Roland, 2007). Even in legislatures recording and making publicly available the data, the choice of which votes to select for plenary roll-call creates difficulty in making inferences from roll-call analysis (Hug 2005).

Moving beyond voting records, the content analyses of parliamentary speeches has become something of a growth industry. While parliamentary records have long been used by scholars in the case study tradition, the advent of computer-assisted content analysis has opened the world of parliamentary debates to quantitative analysis (see, for example, Laver and Benoit 2003, Quinn et al. 2006, and Proksch and Slapin 2008; for criticism see, Budge and Pennings, 2007). Thus far, the application of these techniques has focused on uncovering policy positions (Monroe and Schrodtt 2009). A major, substantive problem arising from coding parliamentary texts is the need to ensure that the coded text reflects the interests, positions, and preferences of the person speaking. For example, in the Irish parliament, the larger political parties typically provide "briefing notes" equivalent to draft speeches for backbench Dáil Deputies to read. A potential mistaken, then, is to infer very much about the preferences of the individual legislator from the content of such debate.

While party leadership may effectively control plenary speeches and legislative voting, other avenues may be available to individual legislators to voice their opinions and interests. In the British House of Commons, for example, Early-Day Motions (EDMs) provide an important avenue for backbench voices to be heard. Ever since Franklin and Tappin (1977) described EDMs as unobtrusive measures for voicing backbench opinions in Britain, scholars have been drawn to them as a measure of the positions of backbenchers. While issues, such as gender have been studied (see, for example, Childs and Withey 2004), the constituency-orientation of EDMs has been largely ignored.

Expenses: In many legislatures, members receive financial support to assist with performance of their duties. Occasionally obtaining copies of these expense claims and inferring priorities from a member's expenditures, is possible. For example, Ingall and Crisp (2001) used data from travel

expenses to measure the home-style of legislators in Colombia. Johnston and Pattie (2009) used money spent on stationary and postage, as an indication of MP-constituent contact in Britain. Such data provides individual-level measures of role-orientation free from self-reporting biases and sampling limitations inherent in other data collection methods. In some jurisdictions such data simply does not exist either because such expenses are not paid or parliamentarians receive a flat rate, a non-vouched expense allowances. In other cases, the data is confidential and not released.

In summary, a number of methods already exist and have been used with some level of success to measure the constituency-orientation of legislators. Yet, all have significant methodological problems including issues of cost and practicality, selection bias, and a range of other issues that could endanger the validity and reliability of findings. To pattern role-orientations of legislators, the current research suggests a new method which has significant fewer disadvantages when compared to conventional methods.

PQs: A Measure of Constituency-Orientation

Parliamentary questions are a feature of almost all national legislatures (Norton, 1993:1). Typically, a member tables a question to a minister of the government; this action requires the minister to provide an answer. While questions can take many forms, the public tends to be most familiar with oral questions posed to the head of government (Salmond 2009). Yet, most queries and answers assume a written form. While some observers question the benefit of questions in terms of the general and vague nature of answers provided (MacCarthaigh 2005), the propensity of parliamentarians to ask questions indicates that the interrogatories are an important tool for measuring an individual legislator's job (Franklin and Norton 1993, Wiberg 1994).

This discussion suggests that a content analysis of parliamentary questions can uncover the role-orientation of individual legislators. The personal-vote earning strategy, if any, of a parliamentarian should be evident in the content of questions asked. Parliamentary questions offer a tool both for questions of policy and questions of a more parochial, constituency-oriented nature. How a legislator chooses to use the questioning tool provides a unique insight into legislative behaviour and role-orientation. To illustrate variation in question types, a comparison of three questions, selected from the proceedings of the Dáil on a random date in the summer of 2009 is revealing:

[1] *Deputy Leo Varadkar asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the Maastricht criteria for entry into the euro could be relaxed to allow one or more of the Baltic states or Iceland to come into the euro area in the event of a major devaluation or debt default; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

[2] *Deputy Leo Varadkar asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the provision of a sports hall and extension for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

[3] *Deputy Edward O'Keefe asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding farm grant payments in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork.²*

2. *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 688 No. 1, Thursday, 9 July 2009.

The first question clearly relates to a general policy issue, in this case the political economy of the euro-zone. In the second question the same Dáil Deputy asks about the provision of facilities for a school in his constituency. In the third question, an individual constituent is the question's focus, regarding payment due to the constituent from a governmental department. The second and third questions are clear examples of a member using the institution of parliamentary questions to advance a constituency's interest or the interest of an individual constituent. The written record of the chamber is replete with such types of questions, with matters ranging from spending projects for a member's district (especially schools and state-funded hospitals) to social welfare and other subvention payments to individuals. Ultimately, these questions form part of a personal vote-earning strategy by the legislator. These locally-oriented questions stand in contrast to the many other written questions in which a legislator inquires about wider governmental policy. In such cases, the legislator could be said to be pursuing a party-vote earning strategy or at the very least, a non-personal vote-earning strategy.

An analysis of parliamentary questions to discover role-orientation provides a number of distinct advantages over existing mechanisms used to identify personal vote earning behaviour:

1. An allocation of scarce resources occurs when a member tables a parliamentary question. A member must research the question, format it appropriately, submit it, and await a reply. This is by no means a costless exercise in terms of time and opportunity costs. A legislator or her staff is effectively limited in the number of questions that can be asked. As such, the uses to which parliamentary questions are put provide an indication of the priorities of legislators. Although the staff assistance available differs greatly between legislatures, even the well-resourced US Senator must make hard choices about the allocation of staffing duties.

2. Unlike most other parliamentary activity, such as legislative voting behaviour and parliamentary speeches, the party leadership does not control parliamentary questions. Hence, these questions provide a more reliable perspective on the choice parliamentarians themselves make for focusing on parochial, national, or international issues.

3. Problems of bias inherent in observational, interview and survey-based research, where legislators must actively select into a study, are eliminated because the role-behaviour of all legislators can be examined through parliamentary questions.

4. Instead of relying on a legislator's recollection and self-analysis of role-orientation, the analysis of parliamentary questions provides a direct and unedited measure of role-orientation. Hence, any differences among a parliamentarian's normative perception of role, empirical perception of role and what action actually occurs, is eliminated.

5. The data is readily available. Parliamentary questions are on record and generally, publicly available, and in many cases, via the world-wide-web, electronically readable, making the raw data easily accessible to researchers.

6. Unlike many other data collection methods in role-orientation studies, replication is possible, thus enhancing the scientific process (King, Keohane and Verba 1996). To aid replication, specific guidelines are used to determine whether or not questions have a national or local focus. Table One reports the criteria for identifying local questions used in this study, rendering the process of data collection open, easily replicable and transferable to other cases.

<Table One around here>

Parliamentary questions have been assumed to be a mechanism to hold the executive branch accountable with little application to cultivating relationships with constituents. However, Rasch (2009) found support for an electoral connection in Norway, despite the party-centred nature of the electoral system. However, only the total number of questions asked is considered, not the nature and content of the questions. Exploring questioning patterns in the French National Assembly, Lazard (2005) found no support for an electoral connection. Again, the independent variable is the total number of written questions submitted by each deputy. The total number of questions asked is, at best, a rough proxy for constituency-orientation and a personal vote earning strategy. Questions can take different forms in terms of the content and role orientation being pursued. The novelty of the suggested approach is to extract the constituency-oriented and extra-constituency oriented questions by means of a relatively simple content analysis.

Parliamentary questions are just one of several tools that legislators can use to represent local interests. Legislators can write directly to a government minister; they can communicate directly with public service providers, and they can petition the public service Ombudsman to investigate a constituent's concern. Perhaps, different legislators choose different tools to cultivate personal votes. If so, looking at one single mechanism to undertake service to a constituency provides an incomplete picture of legislative behaviour. Yet, the content analysis of parliamentary questions indicates that questions are a standard tool for constituency representation and gathering personal votes. Collective needs within the constituency, as well as representation concerning constituents' individual cases, are frequently the subject of questions to government ministers. At the same time, parliamentary questions are also used to obtain information from, and challenges to, the government on national-level policies. Analysis of parliamentary questions, then, is a novel method for gaining insight into variation in legislators' role-orientations and personal vote earning strategies. Nevertheless, it must acknowledge that no one method of uncovering legislators' roles is without limitations.

To highlight the usefulness of content-analysing parliamentary questions to measure constituency orientation, and to better understand the role-orientations and vote-earning strategies of Dáil deputies, the next sections report our content analyses of Irish parliamentary questions. The statistical data analysis follows a brief discussion of the Irish case and presentation of descriptive results.

Case, Data and Descriptive Results

Cultural and institutional variables emphasise that Irish parliamentarians ought to be focused on cultivating personal votes to the detriment of policy advocacy at the national level. A political culture that emphasises brokerage, the small size of Irish society and the administrative structure apparently contribute to a heavy constituent-oriented workload for Irish parliamentarians (Gallagher and Komito 2010). The Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system, where candidates from the same party compete against each other for votes, motivates incumbents to differentiate themselves from co-partisans (Sinnott 2010) and cultivation of personal votes (Swindle 2002, Marsh 2007). Besides these theoretical expectations, little is known about what Dáil Deputies actually do. Both the number and penetration of studies in terms of the sample size is surprisingly limited.

Two comparative studies employed interviews to measure the role-orientation of Irish parliamentarians. In one, Wood and Young (1997) interviewed 40 Irish junior deputies, revealing, on average, those interviewed

spent 2.5 days per week in their constituencies and devoted just less than 50 hours per week to constituency affairs, which accounted for 58.9 percent of their working week. Wood and Young (1997) also found that 22.5 percent of those interviewed would prefer to do more constituency service as compared to 40 percent who would prefer to do less. Although only junior deputies were interviewees, the results provide a significant insight into the working life and role of an Irish legislator.

For the other comparative study, Heitshusen, Young and Wood (2005), between 1998 and 1999, interviewed 245 legislators from six legislative chambers, including 41 Irish parliamentarians. The interviews attempted to uncover the relative significance of, and engagement with, constituency, party and policy activities. Of Dáil Deputies interviewed, 39 percent ranked constituency affairs as their sole, primary focus; 19 percent ranked constituency as their primary focus along with another priority, and 42 percent of Dáil Deputies interviewed ranked constituency below some other priority. The result of both sets of interviews suggests the importance of constituencies in Irish parliamentary life.

Martin (2010) surveyed Irish legislators to discover role-orientation in the Oireachtas. The average proportion of the working week spent attending to constituency-related activities among those Dáil Deputies who responded to the survey was just over 60 percent.

The current study analysed all written questions tabled by Dáil Deputies between the 1997 and 2002 general elections. Oral questions are excluded as these tend to be held in reserve for the party leadership and frontbench. The Ceann Comhairle (presiding officer) and Government Ministers do not table questions by tradition and are therefore excluded from the analysis. To facilitate the statistical analysis of variations in questioning patterns, the analysis also excludes Dáil Deputies who did not serve a full parliamentary term, due to factors such as resignation or death. Dáil Deputies elected at by-elections during the parliamentary session are also excluded.

A team of seven researchers hand-coded each written question, with each question coded separately by two researchers to ensure maximum validity and reliability. Where a dispute arose, the team and the lead researcher discussed the question to reach a final decision. Each question's coding included: (1) the member asking the question, (2) the Minister to whom the question was addressed, and (3) whether or not the question had a "local" focus. The coding criteria for this third element appear in Table One. In total, 123,762 questions were coded.

Table Two reports the main descriptive results by type of question and government ministry. While conventional measures associated with self-reporting by Dáil Deputies indicate high levels of constituency-orientation this study's findings do not fully support such conclusions. Almost 56 percent of written parliamentary questions are characteristically non-local in nature. This finding is surprising given the strength of the conventional wisdom that Dáil Deputies have little incentive to do anything other than constituency work. While a significant proportion of questions relate to constituencies, Dáil Deputies do assign resources and time to asking questions of a non-parochial nature. These results are not heavily biased by opposition frontbencher members asking policy-oriented questions of government, although these certainly do occur. Indeed, backbenchers in each party are just as likely to table written questions as frontbench spokespersons.

<Table Two around here>

Table Three reports the proportion of local questions for which each governmental portfolio accounts. All members of the cabinet,

including the Taoiseach, face questions of a local nature. However, certain trends are evident. The Departments of Education and Science account for almost a quarter of all constituency-oriented questions. A frequent question to the Minister for Education refers to the Department of Education's School Building Programme or the need to provide extra staffing resources in a named school in a Dáil Deputy's constituency. After Education and Science, the Department of Health and Children is next most likely to be the target of constituency-oriented questions, with the issue of staff resources and medical facilities at a hospital being most common. Questions on the non-payment or delay of payment for farm grants account for a significant proportion of questions to the Minister for Agriculture.

<Table Three around here>

Perhaps surprisingly, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs accounts for only 3.2 percent of constituency-oriented questions asked by Dáil Deputies between 1997 and 2002. A priori, the expectation might be that representation by parliamentarians on behalf of individual constituents on issues relating to welfare payments would account for a significant proportion of local questions. This study's results raises issues regarding the degree to which the more disadvantaged groups in society are unrepresented by the representative and political processes in Ireland. Interestingly, questions of grant payments to farmers outweigh questions of social welfare entitlements and payments.

One result masked in the summary statistics is the presence of significant variation in the constituency-content of questions from one Dáil Deputy to the next. To more fully understand such variation, the next section undertakes a simple regression analysis, in an attempt to explain variations in the use of parliamentary questions as personal vote earning strategies.

Explaining Variation in Role-Orientation

Although personal vote earning strategies are generally assumed to vary little within the same legislature, the Irish data has uncovered significant intra-system variation in personal vote earning effort. To help explain this variation a number of testable hypotheses are presented and tested.

Typically, the assumption is that electoral incentives motivate personal vote-earning activities. Yet, re-election is not a proximate goal for all legislators – some incumbents typically retire at or ahead of a general election. All else equal, incumbents seeking re-election are expected to be more constituency-oriented in their parliamentary questions than incumbents who are not seeking re-election (H1).

Personal vote earning effort should also be related to incentives to cultivate personal votes. According to the comparative literature, the incentive to cultivate personal votes is linked directly to the level of intra-party competition as shaped by the electoral system (Carey and Shugart 1995). A significant but understudied feature of the STV electoral system is that the level of intra-party competition varies from candidate to candidate. District magnitude ranges from three to five, but equally important is that larger parties often run multiple candidates in the same constituency while small parties do not. Given this and varying electoral success for the larger parties, the number of co-partisan incumbents from the same geographical constituency differs. In circumstances where Dáil Deputies from the same party compete with each other for votes, the incentive to cultivate personal votes is greatest, given that party is no longer a label by which an incumbent provides differentiation from a party colleague. Greater incentives to cultivate personal votes, as determined by the level of co-partisan

competition, should be associated with higher levels of personal vote earning effort (H2).

It is believed that the margin of victory at the previous election impact legislator behaviour and in particular vote earning strategy (Gaines 1998; Wood and Young 1997). Legislators in relatively safe seats have less incentive to cultivate votes. The expectation then is that more electorally marginal incumbents spend relatively more time cultivating personal votes. Narrower electoral victories at the last general election should be associated with more effort to personal vote earning (H3).

The direction of causality in the relationship between legislative seniority, defined in terms of years served in parliament, and constituency orientation is not simple. Constituency orientation possibly explains continued electoral success. Alternatively, more junior legislators may need to invest greater constituency effort in the absence of a long-developed strong personal base in their constituency. Longer-serving legislators can rely on past reputation for constituency orientation and may have less incentive towards contemporary constituency orientation. Therefore, a negative relationship is hypothesised between years served as a Dáil Deputy and personal vote earning effort (H4).

The geographical location of a physical constituency from the centre of political power is said to shape the demand for constituency service. Comparative research has found greater constituency-orientation among legislators further removed from the location of the seat of government (see, for example, Heitshusen, Young and Woods 2005). Dáil Deputies representing more peripheral geographical constituencies are expected to face greater demand for constituency orientation, all else equal (H5).

The results of the statistical analysis testing each of the five hypotheses appear in Table Four. The unit of analysis is the individual Dáil Deputy with the dependent variable, *PercentLocal*, measuring the percentage of all questions asked by a Dáil Deputy that are parochial and constituency-based in nature. The operationalised independent variables and results are now discussed.

<Table Four around here>

Re-election incentives (H1): *Run2002* is a dummy variable measuring whether or not the Dáil Deputy sought re-election at the subsequent general election. Dáil Deputies who subsequently sought re-election in 2002 did not ask more local questions as a percentage of all questions. This finding potentially calls into question rational-based theories of legislative behaviour where the assumption is that behaviour is shaped by re-election incentives. We return to this point in the conclusion.

Intra-party competition (H2): Competing against an incumbent co-partisan does not have a robust effect on the nature of Dáil Deputies' questions. The variable, *Copartisan*, is not statistically significant at conventional levels in any of the models. *Copartisan* actually decreases the percentage of questions asked that relate to local issues. However, these effects are not robust at conventional levels. Evidence that having a greater incentive to be constituency-oriented actually leads to greater levels of constituency-orientation (in parliamentary questions) is inconclusive.

Electoral marginality (H3): In STV, the percentage of the quota (the quota essentially being the number of votes needed to guarantee election) received is a strong indicator for electoral safety. The percentage of the quota received at the previous election (*Election1997*) had no robust effect on the nature of questions asked by Dáil Deputies. The negative estimated coefficient indicates that the higher the percentage of the quota

the lower the rate of parochial questions asked. However, this effect fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.³

Seniority (H4): As expected, longer service as a Dáil Deputy correlates with a lower rate of local questioning, although this result is not statistically significant. It is not possible therefore to draw conclusions about the true relationship between years in office, rewards for, and incentive to, cultivate personal votes and actual personal vote gathering efforts.

Centre-periphery (H5): Local interest questions represent a larger percentage of all questions asked by Dáil Deputies from outside Dublin, as compared to Dáil Deputies from Dublin. Model One reports that the percentage of questions asked by non-Dublin Dáil Deputies that are local in nature is 15 points higher than for Dublin-based parliamentarians, all else held equal. To explore further the impact of geography on constituency-orientation, the measure of periphery is refined by considering contiguous units away from Dublin. In this measure, constituencies outside but contiguous to Dublin score one; constituencies contiguous to these score two, and so forth until the most peripheral constituencies are coded. No statistically significant difference exists between the percentage of local questions asked by Dublin Dáil Deputies and those representing constituencies contiguous to Dublin (*Periphery* = 1). Dáil Deputies representing mid-peripheral (two, three and four) constituencies ask relatively more local questions as a percentage of all questions asked. The largest difference is in the intermediate category, three. Surprisingly, in the most peripheral constituencies more local questions are not asked. In fact, Dáil Deputies from the most geographically peripheral constituencies ask fewer local questions than Dáil Deputies from the capital city. The results indicate that while a centre-periphery relationship holds with a dichotomous variable (Dublin versus non-Dublin) the relationship between parochialism and geography does not conform to a straight pattern with representatives from constituencies in the mid-periphery being most constituency-focused, rather than representatives from the outer periphery.

In addition to the variables testing the hypotheses, included in the analysis are two control variables that may impact patterns of questioning. Being a Dáil Deputy from a government party has an important impact on the pattern of parliamentary questions. The variable capturing membership of the parties in government, *Government*, is statistically significant at conventional levels. *Government* has a negative sign, indicating that Dáil deputies from government parties ask fewer local-oriented questions than opposition Deputies.⁴ *Gender* explores the impact of the gender of the representative on the propensity to localism. Relative to their male colleagues, women Dáil Deputies have a higher propensity to localism in their questioning. However, this result fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

3. Here, the interest is in understanding the origin of localism in parliamentary questions. When exploring the consequences of localism in questioning patterns, no statistically significant results exists between localism and votes received in the subsequent (2002) general election. This result is less surprising given the endogenous and forward thinking nature of the relationship between constituency casework and electoral success. For example, studies of the United States Congress find spending more time cultivating personal votes has little or no effect on incumbents' subsequent electoral fortunes (for a discussion, see Fiorina 1981).

4. In robustness tests, the variable *Government* was replaced by variables to test for the impact of political party. The political party of the Dáil Deputy had no statistically significant impact on the propensity to localism.

Overall, conventional explanations have largely failed to explain patterns of localism as uncovered from a content analysis of parliamentary questions in the Irish case.

Conclusion

Scholars are increasingly moving beyond studies of elections and campaigns to focus on what legislators actually do once elected. At the heart of this renewed research on legislative roles is the classic debate concerning the underlying motivation of legislators, and in particular whether or not legislators are motivated to build personal reputations with constituents or work towards building a party and a national reputation. These motivations are important as scholars have theorised links between legislative motivation and policy outcomes.

Determining which, if any, of these competing strategies is most typical without being able to empirically measure parliamentary roles is nearly impossible. While observational studies, interviews and surveys have provided a rich source of data, methodological issues with such approaches call into question the accuracy of any conclusion regarding what legislators do. More direct measures of behaviour, such as roll-call analysis or the analysis of parliamentary speeches, often have the influence of party leadership, limiting the independence of individual legislators, and thus, the usefulness of the data to uncover an individual's role-orientation.

This study proposes a novel method for capturing the constituency-orientation of individual legislators. By analysing the content of parliamentary questions, a quantitative measure of role orientation can be extracted. The method is non-intrusive; the data reflects actual behaviour as distinct from self-reported behaviour, and problems associated with sample bias and response rates are eliminated. Unlike other legislative texts, the content of parliamentary questions remains relatively independent, with little or no party control exercised. Moreover, this method allows the possibility of collecting and directly comparing data, over time within the same political system, and among different legislatures.

To highlight the usefulness of parliamentary questions as a tool to measure localism, an analysis of parliamentary questions asked by Dáil Deputies between 1997 and 2002 was undertaken. The findings indicate that Irish parliamentarians are somewhat constituency-focused, but not quite to the degree that some earlier interview- and survey-based studies would have indicated. The immediate implication is that Dáil Deputies may slightly misstate their constituency-roles in studies based on self-assessment, a fact that raises more general concerns about the validity of research instruments in legislative studies that rely on a legislator's self-perception and self-reporting of activities and role-orientation. That constituency orientation is possibly overstated in interviews and surveys have consequences for scholars using these traditional tools to measure competing legislative strategies.

The statistical analysis seeking to explain variation in the use of parliamentary questions as a personal vote-earning strategy produced a number of non-trivial findings. The geographical location of the constituency relative to the political centre has long been considered an important factor in shaping legislators' behaviour. While this relationship holds in part in the Irish case, localism is not perfectly related to distance from the political centre. In fact, parliamentarians from Dublin constituencies and from constituencies on the far periphery are the least parochial in their use of parliamentary questions.

Other variables such as electoral vulnerability, having a co-partisan in the chamber from the same constituency, gender, and seniority do not

perform well as explanations for personal vote-earning parliamentary questions. Likewise, not seeking re-election has no significant impact on a tendency toward localism. The finding that incumbents not seeking re-election tend toward localism in their rates of parochialism could undermine rational-based electoral accounts of elite behaviour. In the Irish case, a relative of a retiring Dáil Deputy will frequently seek to retain the *family* seat. The retiring incumbent still has an incentive to cultivate personal votes – for the family member seeking election. This may partly explain why retiring Irish parliamentarians do not behave completely differently in comparison to parliamentarians seeking re-election.

Although the content analysis of parliamentary questions provides a unique prospect from which to measure role-orientation, the general use of local questions as a proxy for localism has some limitations. At a practical level, content analysis can be time consuming, particularly hand-coding of the type employed in this study. Of course, emerging techniques for machine-coding of texts will greatly enhance the practicality and affordability of coding parliamentary questions.

More substantively, parliamentary questions are just one of several tools that legislators can use to represent local interests. Perhaps, different legislators choose different tools to cultivate personal votes. If so, looking at one single mechanism to undertake service to a constituency provides an incomplete picture of legislative behaviour. Yes, as an unobtrusive measure not dependent on self-reporting, parliamentary questions do offer unique advantages in making inferences about the preferences, priorities and roles of individual legislators. Ultimately, a mixed method approach, combining elements of observational studies, self-reporting through interview or survey and the analysis of recorded behaviour such as parliamentary questions, provide the best opportunity to paint the most reliable possible picture of the life of a legislator. The empirical work presented here should further motivate and encourage scholars to move beyond using electoral systems as a general proxy for legislator role-orientation.

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Table 1: How to Code Parliamentary Questions

To be coded *local*, a parliamentary question should have one or more of the following characteristics:

1. Did the member mention her/his constituency, for example, by saying “in my constituency....” or by identifying the name of her/his constituency?
 2. Did the member mention a geographical location that the coder can confirm to be located in the geographical constituency of the member? So, for example “What is the minister going to do about unemployment in Mullingar?” would be coded as a local question in the Irish case (assuming the Dáil Deputy represented the constituency in which Mullingar was located). “What is the minister going to do about unemployment in Baghdad?” would not be coded a local question by a researcher of Irish questions.
 3. Did the member mention a constituent or particular case surrounding an individual who can reasonably be assumed to be a constituent?
 4. Did the member mention a particular building or facility that the coder can confirm to be located in the geographical constituency of the member?
 5. Did the member mention a particular organization or business that the coder can confirm to be located in the geographical constituency of the member, unless the organisation or business is country-wide and the question is not specifically related to the part of the organisation or business in the member’s constituency?
 6. Did the member mention an event specifically taking place in the geographical constituency of the member, such as, for example, a local festival?
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Table 2: Destination Portfolio, and Type of Question Asked

<i>Portfolio</i>	<i>Total PQs</i>	<i>Percent of All PQs</i>	<i>Total National</i>	<i>Total Local</i>	<i>Percent Local</i>
Taoiseach	1839	1.5	1633	206	11.2
Agriculture, Food and Rural Development	13,617	11.0	5574	8043	59.1
Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands	5571	4.5	2216	3355	60.2
Defense	4986	4.0	3932	1054	21.1
Education and Science	20,901	16.9	7875	13,026	62.3
Enterprise, Trade and Employment	5611	4.5	4567	1044	18.6
Environment and Local Government	10,139	8.2	6156	3983	39.3
Finance	7311	5.9	5215	2096	28.7
Foreign Affairs	4216	3.4	3852	364	8.6
Health and Children	19,983	16.1	10,504	9479	47.4
Justice, Equality and Law Reform	11,468	9.3	6412	5056	44.1
Marine and Natural Resources	4933	4.0	2578	2355	47.8
Public Enterprise	4464	3.6	2824	1640	36.7
Social, Community and Family Affairs	5577	4.5	3836	1741	31.2
Tourism, Sport and Recreation	3146	2.5	1982	1164	37.0
	12,376		69,156	54,606	
All	62	100.0	6	06	44.1

Notes: Written questions only. Figures excludes questions asked by Government Ministers, the Ceann Comhairle (presiding officer) and Dáil Deputies who did not serve the full period 1997-2002. See text for coding of *National* and *Local*. The title of some Government Departments change slightly during the term of the 28th Dáil.

Table 3: Breakdown of Local Questions Asked, by Portfolio

<i>Portfolio</i>	<i>Percent of Total Local Questions</i>
Taoiseach	0.3
Foreign Affairs	0.5
Enterprise, Trade and Employment	1.9
Defense	1.9
Tourism, Sport and Recreation	2.1
Public Enterprise	2.8
Social, Community and Family Affairs	3.2
Marine and Natural Resources	3.6
Finance	3.9
Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands	5.8
Environment and Local Government	7.1
Justice, Equality and Law Reform	8.8
Agriculture, Food and Rural Development	15.3
Health and Children	18.4
Education and Science	23.8
Total	99.6

Note: Total does not equal 100 due to rounding.

Table 4: Explaining Variation in Role-orientation

	Model 1 <i>PercentLocal</i>	Model 2 <i>PercentLocal</i>
Election1997	-0.0405 (0.049)	-0.0368 (0.049)
CoPartisan	-2.198 (3.90)	-3.794 (4.04)
Run2002	3.439 (6.83)	5.011 (6.55)
Government	-8.921** (4.07)	-9.450** (4.13)
Years	-0.00580 (0.27)	-0.00219 (0.26)
Gender	3.113 (5.01)	5.338 (5.39)
Dublin	15.28*** (4.09)	
Periphery = 1		6.789 (5.72)
Periphery = 2		16.25*** (5.16)
Periphery = 3		25.27*** (6.68)
Periphery = 4		17.68*** (5.96)
Periphery = 5		10.01 (6.91)
Periphery = 6		13.83 (9.97)
Constant	43.09*** (12.2)	41.92*** (11.9)
Observations	126	126
R-squared	0.15	0.20

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1