



Electoral competition and political selection: An analysis of the activity of French deputies, 1958–2012



Nicolas Gavoille^{a,b,*}, Marijn Verschelde^{c,d}

^a Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, Strelnieku iela 4a, Riga LV-1010, Latvia

^b Condorcet Center for Political Economy, Université de Rennes 1, Faculté de Sciences Economiques, Economiques, 7 place Place Hoche, 35000, Rennes, France

^c IÉSEG School of Management, LEM (UMR-CNRS 9221), Department of Economics and Quantitative Methods, Socle de la Grande Arche, Arche, 1 Parvis de La Défense, 92044, Paris La Défense cedex, France

^d Center for Economic Studies, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Etienne Sabbelaan 51, 8500, Kortrijk, Belgium

ARTICLE INFO

JEL classification:

D72

J45

C14

Keywords:

Competition

Election

Political selection

French parliament

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we study the relation between electoral competition and political selection, using a unique dataset containing detailed yearly information about members of the French National Assembly from 1958 to 2012. First, we innovate by proposing a measure of deputy activity to obtain insight into political selection. As we gathered information on the many aspects of deputies' individual work, we use a nonparametric composite indicator of deputy activity that fully acknowledges the multidimensional nature of parliamentary work. We argue that this measure of activity is positively correlated with competence and intrinsic motivation, two components of politicians' quality. Second, we exploit the large time span of our dataset to study the evolution of the relationship between electoral competition and political selection over time. Overall, our results show that deputies elected in a priori contested districts have a higher overall activity, with the intensity of this relationship reaching its peak in the 80's but constantly decreasing since then.

1. Introduction

Political economy scholars recently evidenced that individuals, and not only institutions, matter for economic outcomes (Besley et al., 2011; Jones and Olken, 2005). This implies that politicians are not all of the same quality. Admitting differences in quality amounts to acknowledging that the behavior of politicians in office is not only shaped by incentives. This emphasizes the need not only to shape institutions in order to discipline incumbent politicians, but also to design efficient political selection mechanisms. Several theoretical factors have been shown to affect political selection: the wage of politicians (Besley, 2004; Messner and Polborn, 2004; Poutvaara and Takalo, 2007), the transparency of politics (Mattozzi and Merlo, 2007), the institutional flexibility (Acemoglu et al., 2010), and reservation quotas (Besley et al., 2005). In addition to a well-known disciplining effect (Barro, 1973 for instance), electoral competition is also likely to enhance this selection process, by pushing the competing parties to select candidates of higher quality in order to seduce sufficiently enough unaligned voters to ensure electoral success (Galasso and Nannicini, 2011).

This paper extends the empirical investigation between electoral competition and the quality of politicians exploiting a unique dataset focusing on the deputies of the Vth French Republic, from its birth in 1958 to the end of the XIIIth legislature in 2012, covering more than 2,400 deputies for a total of 24,011 observations. The French National Assembly is an ideal testing ground for

* Corresponding author at: Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, Strelnieku iela 4a, Riga LV-1010, Latvia.

E-mail addresses: nicolas.gavoille@sse.riga.edu (N. Gavoille), m.verschelde@ieseg.fr (M. Verschelde).

this in many respects. First, the institutional context remains (quasi) stable since 1958, allowing meaningful comparisons over such a long period. Second, this institutional stability is paired with a highly heterogeneous political context, with left-wing majorities following right-wing ones. Finally, this institutional context fits the theoretical framework of Galasso and Nannicini (2011), which we adopt.

We bring two main contributions to the literature. First, we provide an individual measure of MPs' *activity*, i.e., of what deputies *do*. We argue that in our context, activity is a positive function of competence but also of intrinsic motivation, two dimensions defining the quality of a politician, and thus a matter of political selection (Besley, 2005, 2006). It complements previous research proxying quality by the level of schooling (e.g. Daniele and Geys, 2015; Kotakorpi and Poutvaara, 2011; De Paola and Scoppa, 2011), which is likely to capture competence but not necessarily intrinsic motivation. For this purpose, we gathered from the *Assemblée Nationale* archive all the information that has been systematically collected over the years for each deputy and for each year from 1958 to 2012: (i) propositions of law, (ii) oral questions, (iii) reports and (iv) debates in which the deputy has been involved in. From these four aspects of parliamentary work, we compute a composite indicator of activity using an α -domination estimator, based on Aragon et al. (2006) and Daraio and Simar (2007). As it is a fully nonparametric estimator, no arbitrary weights are imposed on the different activity items. Compared to proxies such as education, a potential drawback of this activity-based measure is that incentives may also influence the level of effort, affecting activity. As we shall discuss, this issue is mitigated by the inner organization of the parliamentary work, which provides competence-based gatekeeping mechanisms. We further consider this issue by taking into account reelection incentives into the analysis. This activity-based approach thus offers an insightful complement to the existing literature.

To measure political competition, our favorite measure is based on a Herfindahl index of the vote shares at the first round of the legislative elections, as in Larcinese (2014) and De Paola and Scoppa (2011) for instance. After discussing the relevance of this specific measure to the French context, we provide evidence that it is a good indicator of the probability for the jurisdiction to swing at the next election.

The second innovation of our empirical analysis is that we fully exploit the large time span of our dataset to test whether the discussed relationship is time-varying. In France as in Europe, the progressive convergence of the competing political platforms over the second part of the *XXth* century, marked by the reconciliation of the left with the market in the early 80's, suggests that the electorate became more ideologically neutral, hence more sensitive to the quality of the candidates (Green, 2007; Knapp and Wright, 2001). We test whether the intensity of the competition/selection relationship increased (or not) over time. For this purpose, we adopt a fully nonparametric framework, which provides the warranted flexibility to reveal how this relationship evolved over the half-century covered by our sample. To our knowledge this is the first exploration of drivers of political selection over time.

Overall, our results point a clear positive relationship between electoral competition and political selection. Deputies elected in ex ante competitive districts exhibit a higher level of activity, *ceteris paribus*, which is not driven by reelection incentives. This relationship is robust to various specifications. The overall activity of deputies is continuously increasing over time, but the intensity of the relationship between competition and quality, after having increased till the early 80's, is continuously decreasing since then, and turns insignificant since the beginning of the 2000's. The political context of the 70's and 80's is the closest one to the theoretical hypothesis of the Galasso and Nannicini (2011) model, providing support to their formalization of the link between competition and selection.

The remaining of the paper is structured as follows. In Section 2 we present the theoretical background. Section 3 describes the French political and institutional context. We introduce our measure of activity and of electoral competition together with the dataset in Section 4. The results are detailed in Sections 5 and 6 concludes.

2. Related literature

Since at least the seminal work of Downs (1957), the point has been made that political competition influences economic outcomes. More recently, Besley and Preston (2007) have shown that governments elected in a competitive political market tend to be less partisan in their policy-making, respectively in the case of English and Spanish local governments. Besley et al. (2010) propose a model showing that political competition increases the efficiency of implemented policies: reducing the bias favouring a party enhances the electoral accountability of the government, pushing the incumbent party to reduce its rent by adopting more efficient policies. Exploiting the exogenous shock in the political competitiveness in the US States provoked by the Civil Right Act of 1964, they are able to establish a causal link between political competition and economic performance supporting the theory. Padovano and Ricciuti (2009) obtain similar results by studying the case of Italian regions.

The transmission link between competition and the adoption of efficient policy is however left unspecified. Electoral competition is traditionally seen as way to discipline the government, for instance by reducing rent-seeking (Polo, 1998) or increasing the resistance to lobbies (Solé-Ollé and Viladecans-Marsal, 2012). But a growing literature emphasizes the importance of the leader's identity in policy making. Jones and Olken (2005), followed by Besley et al. (2011), establish a causal link between the identity of national leaders and economic performance by investigating the change in GDP growth after the unexpected death of a leader. If identity matters, the performance of the government is not only shaped by incentives, but also by the political selection process: politicians are not all of the same *quality*, as discussed by Besley (2005) who defines politicians' quality as a combination of competence and intrinsic motivation.¹ It is not always clear whether competition plays a disciplining role (incentivizing incumbents

¹ Intrinsic motivation is motivation not driven by incentives (see Bénabou and Tirole (2003), Besley (2006)).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5066313>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5066313>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)