

Working in unison: Political parties and policy issue transfer in the multilevel space

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Abstract

In this study, we examine whether and how policy issues addressed by political parties travel across the national and European legislative arena. We define ‘party policy issue transfer’ as the articulation of similar issues in the work of political parties at different parliamentary venues in short distance of time and argue that issues particularly transfer within the same party. This is mainly so for three reasons: exchange of information between parties across levels, national parties’ attempts to influence European Union policies, and career incentives of representatives at the supranational level. We test our theoretical framework using unique data on parliamentary questions asked by Danish representatives (the Folketing and the European Parliament, 1999–2009) and a dyadic data structure. Our results show that parties’ policy issues—in particular those over which the European Union holds legislative power—transfer across the national and European levels on a regular basis and that issues are more likely to travel within parties.

Keywords

European Parliament, multilevel politics, parliamentary questions, policy diffusion, political parties

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Introduction

In modern democracies, political parties are the crucial actors linking citizens to elected representatives (Müller, 2000; Strøm et al., 2003). Political parties recruit candidates, offer policy alternatives, mobilize voters, and adapt their behavior to public opinion (Adams et al., 2004; Dalton et al., 2011; Miller and Stokes, 1963; Stimson et al., 1995). Yet, political systems have become increasingly complex. New international and supranational institutions have entered the political arena and parties are facing the globalization of a range of domestic interests (Hellwig, 2014). In addition, parties increasingly operate at multiple levels which make them concerned with local, national, and international problems at the same time. This especially applies to the multilevel system of the European Union (EU), in which parties are potentially represented in national legislatures and the European Parliament (EP). A large body of literature examines how parties at the national and European levels adapt to European integration, such as their legislative behavior and party organization (Aylott et al., 2013; Rasmussen, 2008). In sum, there is a high degree of correspondence between the two levels, which creates both challenges and opportunities for political parties (Caramani, 2015).

National parties often have to deal with a remote European agenda that they do not always control. For example, they need to enact and discuss decisions made at the European level that are unfavorable for them and difficult to communicate to voters. However, neglecting the European level would mean that a national party risks being ignored at EP elections. This would also cause serious problems for the democratic quality of the EU as domestic political actors' participation is crucial to its legitimacy (Thomassen, 2009). Yet, national parties' involvement in EU affairs entails the opportunity to pursue policy goals beyond domestic politics. This means that parties do not necessarily need to follow the EU agenda but try to transfer policy issues to the EU level that they also address at the domestic level. As a result, we might observe positive implications for the representation of voters' interests as they become salient at more than one important level of political decision-making. Taken together, the issues parties address at the national and European levels give indications of domestic parties' responsiveness to the EU agenda, their attempts to set the EU agenda, and the quality of democratic representation in the EU more generally. However, so far, party behavior at the two levels has not been examined simultaneously. Instead, scholars focus on the European and national agendas of political parties individually (Greene and Cross, 2017). In this study, we investigate whether and how parties link policy issue priorities across the national and European levels. In particular, we are interested in 'party policy issue transfer'. We define party policy issue transfer as the articulation of similar policy issues in the work of political parties at multiple parliamentary venues in a short distance of time. The two venues in our study are the Danish *Folketing* and the EP. Our core hypothesis is that party policy issue transfer occurs between party representatives with the same party affiliation.

There are several reasons why parties might adjust their issue priorities across domestic and supranational parliamentary venues. First, national parties regularly exchange information with their representatives at the EU level. Hence, arrangements might be made to streamline issue priorities (Raunio, 2000). Second, the increased competence of the EP created incentives for outsiders such as national parties to influence its agenda (Hix and Høyland, 2013). Third, MEPs' careers hinge on their national party to a great extent. This might make them act according to the policy priorities of their home base. Finally, recent research shows that diffusion mechanisms make parties responsive to what happens abroad (Böhmelt et al., 2016; Gilardi, 2010).

In addition, we suggest that issue transfer is not equally distributed across policy areas, but is contingent upon the legislative authority of the EU. To test our conjectures, we use written parliamentary questions (PQs) tabled by members of parliament (MPs) in the Danish *Folketing* and Danish MEPs during the EP's fifth and sixth terms (1999–2009). However, since our conceptual and empirical contributions relate to party behavior, we observe PQs at the party level. PQs are established instruments of agenda setting and issue competition that are extensively used in Western European democracies and therefore well suited to investigate policy issue transfer of political parties across parliamentary venues (Green-Pedersen, 2010). We link parties across levels by reshaping both panels into a dyadic data structure.

The results show that policy issue transfer between parties at the national and European levels is not a rare event but takes place on a regular basis. It occurs in 15% of our monthly party dyads; particularly in policy areas where the EU is substantially involved in the decision-making process. Our regression results underpin that transfer across levels especially processes within parties. Dyad pairs that have the same affiliation transfer policy issues around 1.5 times more often than those with different party affiliations. In addition, we find that policy issues are more likely to be transferred from the domestic level to the European level which has important implications for understanding domestic actors' involvement in EU politics. In particular, our study contributes to recent findings about nonlegislative behavior of MEPs and their relation to the national party (Proksch and Slapin, 2011, 2015) as we show that MEPs pay attention to the issue priorities of their national parties and address them in the EP. Our results are robust to contextual factors such as public opinion and external party agendas. Sensitivity analyses demonstrate that we still find support for within-party transfer between the national and European levels if we control for issue priorities of the Danish public and issue priorities of political parties in another EU member state (Sweden).

Policy issue transfer and political parties

Our concept of party policy issue transfer across legislative levels speaks to an extensive body of literature on policy transfer (Bulmer and Padgett, 2005; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Evans and Davies, 1999). Policy transfer can be defined

as ‘processes by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system’ (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 5). Party policy issue transfer is distinguished from policy transfer as we investigate transfer of policy issue agendas of political parties across parliamentary venues instead of general transfer of public policies. This means that our concept captures whether and how policy issues that are addressed by parties at one level occur on the agenda of political parties at another parliamentary venue. However, what we have in common with policy transfer is that we are interested in the mechanisms that lead to increasing similarities across actors. This stands in marked contrast to output-oriented concepts such as policy convergence.

Scholars of policy transfer assume that similarities do not occur at random but that common affiliations, negotiations, and institutional membership matter (Simmons and Elkins, 2004). For example, we know that institutions of the EU stimulate policy transfer by expediting isomorphic processes (Radaelli, 2000). In our case of policy issue transfer between parties at the national and European levels, the crucial link is the common party brand. Hence, we believe that a party strategically focuses on similar policy issues at both levels. Therefore, we assume that within-party transfer is a strong driver of similarities between party agendas at the national and European levels. Research provides ample evidence for strategic agenda-setting activities of parties in parliament, both at the national (Bischof, 2017b; Green-Pedersen, 2010) and European levels (Jensen et al., 2013; Proksch and Slapin, 2011; Slapin and Proksch, 2010). Yet, party activities at the two levels have not been studied simultaneously, although previous results suggest close relationships between national parties and MEPs (e.g. Faas, 2003; Hix, 2002; Rasmussen, 2008; Whitaker, 2005).¹ This means that we do not know whether and how ties across levels have repercussions on parties’ policy issue priorities.

Policy issues transfer within political parties

Our assumption for party policy issues to transfer within parties is based on three reasons. First, there is regular exchange between national parties and their MEPs. For national parties information about EU policies and the political system of the EU in general is considered as the most relevant gain that they earn from contacts with their MEPs (Raunio, 2000). MEPs are EU specialists and can provide valuable information (Poguntke et al., 2007). In recent years, MEPs have gained recognition within their national parties, especially because of the growing importance of the EU for domestic politics. National parties have to implement an increasing number of EU policies into domestic law. To avoid irregularities they need information and expertise on the often very technical aspects of EU legislation. MEPs, through their work in the plenary and committee system of the EP, have expertise to assist their colleagues in the domestic party.

However, exchange of information between domestic parties and MEPs is not unidirectional. MEPs represent the citizens of their member state. It is logical that they hold close ties with their constituencies and show interest in the issues and problems that are salient at home. Hence, they will follow the media and political landscape in their member state very closely. Yet, time is a scarce resource and representatives are not able to keep themselves informed about all issues on the political agenda (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Especially, when they need specific information about a political issue they will approach their own political party. These contacts, in further consequence might affect MEPs' work and behavior in the EP.

Second, during the course of European integration the EP has increased its powers within the institutional setting of the EU, especially through its role in co-decision-making (Hix and Høyland, 2013; Selck and Steunenberg, 2004). Moreover, policy issues included in the EU decision-making process have expanded from trade to almost all policy areas. Hence, the frequency with which MEPs can exert power has grown extensively (Aylott et al., 2007). Unsurprisingly, the power to influence policies attracts actors who wish to assert their interests, including national political parties. Several studies find evidence that domestic parties attempt to control their MEPs' voting behavior in the EP (Faas, 2003; Klüver and Spoon, 2015; Whitaker, 2005).

However, national parties also influence nonlegislative aspects of the EP agenda. For example, MEPs are more likely to hold speeches in the EP plenary if there is conflict between the national party and the European party group (Slapin and Proksch, 2010). We assume that national parties are well aware of the potential of their MEPs to influence the EP agenda and would like them to represent issues that matter to the party. In particular, as soon as an important election at the domestic level approaches, national parties might wish to present a coherent policy focus to the electorate and therefore '(...) put pressure on their MEPs to "toe the party line" in their behavior at the European level' (Hix et., 1999: 16).

Our third argument considers career ambitions of MEPs. The literature suggests that expectations about future office benefits influence legislators' behavior (e.g. Hibbing, 1986). MEPs typically follow one of two career tracks. Some wish to advance within the EP and others wish to return to a position in their home country (Daniel, 2015). No matter which track is chosen, MEPs' career paths are highly dependent on national parties. Most member states apply electoral rules that give the national party a strong say about who will be listed as candidate for EP elections (Corbett et al., 2011: 17).² Thus, in an effort to secure reselection, MEPs are expected to coordinate their behavior with the national party. Therefore, they might promote party interests in their day-to-day work. However, reselection-seeking MEPs must balance the needs of their national party with those of the European party group. The latter is considered a gatekeeper to access key leadership positions in the EP. Since it is, therefore, likely that they vote with their European party group, MEPs will also stay in close contact with their national party in order to be informed about its needs and expectations. MEPs who wish to

pursue a career at home have even stronger incentives to represent interests of the national party (Faas, 2003).

In sum, we present three arguments that ties between national parties and their MEPs mutually influence policy issue priorities at the national and European levels. Therefore, our main expectation concerning party policy issue transfer across multiple levels is as follows:

H1: The policy issues addressed by political parties at the national and supranational levels are more likely to transfer within parties that belong to the same branch.

Is it valid to assume that party policy issue transfer is equally distributed across all policy areas? We suggest that the amount of issue transfer in a given policy area depends on the distribution of competences between domestic and European politics. Over the last decades the EU has enhanced in its scope (Börzel, 2005). Yet, several studies show that there is variation in EU authority across policies (e.g. Brouard et al., 2012). In areas such as agriculture, environment, and trade, the EU has wide-ranging competences and produces a high number of legislative output. Other policy areas such as social welfare, education, and defense are predominantly decided at the domestic level. We expect differences in the distribution of competencies between the domestic and European levels to affect the amount of party policy transfer across levels. In particular, we assume that issues are more likely to transfer if both levels are involved in the legislative decision-making process. This implies that issue transfer should occur in the areas where member states are constrained by the EU's legislative outputs and bargaining power. Here, parties at both levels have incentives to address the issue because they are directly involved or affected by EU decision-making. In areas where the EU can be considered as de facto decision-maker, such as agriculture, national parties have strong incentives to address the issue at the domestic level, for instance, because of the distribution of EU funding that affects constituents and interest groups. Thus, transfer is likely to occur also in these policy areas. If the EU has no authority at all, we should see little incentives for parties to transfer across the two levels. Therefore, our second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Party policy issue transfer is more likely if the supranational level is involved in the policy-making process.

The direction of party policy issue transfer

Our theoretical conjectures also make statements about the direction of transfer. For example, exchange of information can lead both levels to adapt to the other. A national party might decide to ask a question to a minister who is negotiating an EU proposal after it received information about the state of affairs based on a question from one of its MEPs. Alternatively, we might see MEPs asking questions

on the same issues as recent questions from their national party after being informed about the party's current issue strategy. In contrast, the two other reasons favor transfer from the national to the European level, either because of the national party's wish to set the EP agenda or the MEPs' responsiveness to the domestic party due to career incentives. Opposition parties are another reason why it is likely that the national level dominates party policy issue transfer. They might actively shift policy issues to the EU level because they do not receive relevant information or feel ignored at the national level (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). In the EP, they have better chances to receive information and influence the policy agenda (Jensen et al., 2013). One can even think of reasons why national parties wish to address issues in the EP even though the EU holds limited decision-making powers, as parties might address issues to encourage the European Commission to become active in a certain policy area. This is a good example that within-party transfer is not always the most obvious mechanism but that there are also motives for nonpartisan policy transfers between parties. The dominance of national government party interests might lead MEPs from national opposition parties to address an issue at the European level and not only MEPs who belong to the national government. Similarly, different national government and opposition parties might pick up an issue based on a question from an MEP because of its relevance for the national interest. In sum, our conjectures suggest that transfer from the national to the European level is more likely. However, there are also reasons for transfer from the EU to the national level.

Denmark and the EU: Party landscape and questioning procedures

We test our expectations using written PQs in the Danish *Folketing* and the EP during the period from 1999 to 2009. Denmark has a unicameral legislative system with political parties actively engaging in party competition within parliament (Green-Pedersen, 2010). The rules and usage of questions in the Danish parliament are similar to most other (lower) chambers in Western European democracies (Strøm et al., 2003). The Danish case is particularly telling as its party system contains parties from all major party families and has a mix of pro-European and anti-European parties represented at the national and European levels. Thus, we expect the scope of issue competition resulting from the different ideological views represented by Danish political parties to closely resemble other European legislatures. As a result, we consider Denmark as a case that is broadly representative of Europe in general which allows us to test our key theoretical expectation under ordinary circumstances. Nevertheless, there are features of the Danish case that are important to address.

Denmark holds several opt-outs from EU policies that might influence the extent of issue attention devoted to these areas. However, differences between EU policies regarding their territorial spread—also referred to as horizontal

differentiation—have become more prominent, and Denmark is definitely not one of a kind (Schimmelfenning, 2016). In addition, it is important to stress that opt-outs from certain EU policies do not automatically translate into parliamentary inactivity as parliamentarians still have incentives to closely follow new developments in the given policy areas. Questions both at the national and European levels are therefore still likely to occur.

In the past 50 years, elections have brought changes to the Danish party system. These include an increase in the number of parties as well as in the support for right-wing parties. Two other features of Danish politics are the frequency of minority governments and the continuing dominance of the left–right conflict, which is represented by the bloc nature of party politics in parliament (Green-Pedersen and Thomsen, 2005). The left-wing red bloc is led by the Social Democrats and includes the Socialist People’s Party, the Red-Green Alliance, and more recently also the Social Liberal Party. The Liberals, the Conservative People’s Party, the Liberal Alliance, and the Danish People’s Party are counted among the right-wing blue bloc. The period under study is dominated by blue-bloc governments. The Social Democrats and the Social Liberal Party formed a left-wing coalition only from 1998 to 2001. In total, 11 parties have been represented in parliament during the period between 1999 and 2009, and seven of them have been in parliament throughout the entire period. Table 1 lists all parties and provides information about party status, vote share, and the number of seats at both levels.

National parties sometimes fail to secure a seat in the EP. In 1999, three parties that held seats in the *Folketing* did not manage to win a mandate in the EP. In 2004, it was the Christian People’s Party only. Denmark has a separate party system for EP elections since two euro-skeptical movements only run for the EP without competing at national elections. Both in 1999 and 2004, the June Movement and the People’s Movement against the EU secured a considerable share of votes. However, questions from MEPs affiliated with the two movements are excluded from our analysis because of our focus on political parties. In sum, our study considers PQs from 11 parties with six of them represented at both levels.

PQs are central means of democratic accountability. Asking questions in parliament allows parties to monitor political decision-making processes. However, PQs are also a way of communicating issue priorities and are therefore well-established instruments of issue competition. Parties not only influence the party system agenda but also attempt to manipulate the political agenda at large (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010; Vliegenthart et al., 2013). Questioning procedures are widespread and increasingly used to understand the behavior of parties and their MPs (Bevan and John, 2016; Senninger, 2017). However, forms and rules of questions vary across legislatures and there are no two parliaments with exactly the same procedures (Russo and Wiberg, 2010). In this article we focus on PQs in the Danish parliament and the EP, two procedures with very similar features.³ In sum, we believe that PQs are suitable for testing our theoretical conjectures about party policy issue transfer as they provide information about the topics parties wish to address.

Table 1. Party status, vote share, and seats in the Danish *Folketing* and the European Parliament, 1998–2011.

Cabinet		Rasmussen N IV		Rasmussen F I		Rasmussen F II		Rasmussen F III		Rasmussen L		EP (99) fifth term		EP (04) sixth term	
Party name	status–vote (%)–seats	status–vote (%)–seats	status–vote (%)–seats	status–vote (%)–seats	status–vote (%)–seats	status–vote (%)–seats	status–vote (%)–seats	status–vote (%)–seats	status–vote (%)–seats	status–seats	status–seats	vote (%)–seats	vote (%)–seats	vote (%)–seats	vote (%)–seats
Center Democrats	opp–4.3–8	out–1.8–0	out–1.0–0	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3.5–0	–	–	–
Christian Democrats	opp–2.5–4	opp–2.3–4	out–1.7–0	out–0.9–0	out–0.9–0	out–0.9–0	out–0.9–0	out–0.9–0	out–0.9–0	out–0	out–0	2.0–0	1.3–0	1.3–0	1.3–0
Conservative People's Party	opp–8.9–16	gov–9.1–16	gov–10.3–18	gov–10.4–18	gov–10.4–18	gov–10.4–18	gov–10.4–18	gov–10.4–18	gov–10.4–18	gov–18	gov–18	8.5–1	11.3–1	11.3–1	11.3–1
Danish People's Party	opp–7.4–13	opp–12.0–22	opp–13.3–24	opp–13.9–25	opp–13.9–25	opp–13.9–25	opp–13.9–25	opp–13.9–25	opp–13.9–25	opp–25	opp–25	5.8–1	6.8–1	6.8–1	6.8–1
Danish Social Liberal Party	gov–3.9–7	opp–5.2–9	opp–9.2–17	opp–9.2–17	opp–5.1–9	opp–5.1–9	opp–5.1–9	opp–5.1–9	opp–5.1–9	opp–9	opp–9	9.1–1	6.4–1	6.4–1	6.4–1
Liberal Alliance	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	opp–4	opp–4	–	–	–	–
Liberals	opp–24.0–42	gov–31.2–56	gov–29.0–52	gov–26.2–46	gov–26.2–46	gov–26.2–46	gov–26.2–46	gov–26.2–46	gov–26.2–46	gov–47	gov–47	23.4–5	19.4–3	19.4–3	19.4–3
Progress Party	opp–2.4–4	out–0.6–0	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.7–0	–	–	–
Red-Green Alliance	opp–2.7–5	opp–2.4–4	opp–3.4–6	opp–2.2–4	opp–2.2–4	opp–2.2–4	opp–2.2–4	opp–2.2–4	opp–2.2–4	opp–4	opp–4	–	–	–	–
Social Democrats	gov–35.9–63	opp–29.1–52	opp–25.8–47	opp–25.5–45	opp–25.5–45	opp–25.5–45	opp–25.5–45	opp–25.5–45	opp–25.5–45	opp–45	opp–45	16.5–3	32.6–5	32.6–5	32.6–5
Socialist People's Party	opp–7.6–13	opp–6.4–12	opp–6.0–11	opp–13.0–23	opp–13.0–23	opp–13.0–23	opp–13.0–23	opp–13.0–23	opp–13.0–23	opp–23	opp–23	7.1–1	7.9–1	7.9–1	7.9–1
June Movement	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	16.1–3	9.1–1	9.1–1	9.1–1
People's Movement against the EU	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	7.3–1	5.2–1	5.2–1	5.2–1

EP: European Parliament; EU: European Union.

Table 2. Issue transfer example.

19. August 2008 Social Democrats, MP Benny Engelbrecht

CAP issue: 4 Agriculture

Question:

Does the minister agree with the Consumer Council that it would be helpful for consumers if fruits like apples and pears are date-marked with the date of picking?

3. September 2008 Social Democrats (EP), MEP Christel Schaldemose

CAP issue: 4 Agriculture

Question:

Denmark's food authorities have now authorized the use of Smartfresh on fruit and vegetables, and so for Danish apples and other Danish fruit. Smartfresh is a type of gas that can extend the shelf life of fruit and vegetables. Use of this gas is new in Denmark and Danish consumers do not therefore know about the gas with respect to Danish fruit. Foreign fruit is, however, often sprayed or surface treated in some other way. Up until now, however, this has not therefore been the case for Danish fruit. I therefore think there is a risk of Danish consumers buying Danish fruit in the future with the expectation that it has not been treated. In order to avoid misleading consumers, a requirement could be introduced on the marking of fruit, either by saying that it has been treated with Smartfresh or by indicating the date on which the fruit was picked. This would make it easier for consumers to determine whether the fruit is really fresh or only fresh because it has been treated. I would therefore like to ask the Commission if there are any EU rules preventing Denmark from introducing a requirement that fruit and vegetables should be marked with the date on which they were picked? This would not of course be a barrier to trade, but simply a way of providing consumers with reasonable information.

EP: European Parliament; EU: European Union.

Data and modeling strategy

We compiled a dataset based on the coding of Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), which provides information about policy issue priorities across European democracies and various instruments. In our study, we make use of primary and secondary data. Issue codes for PQs in the Danish *Folketing* have already been assigned by the Danish CAP. We downloaded all PQs by Danish MEPs during the fifth and sixth term of the EP and manually coded them according to the main issue categories of the EU Policy Agendas Project codebook.⁴ The advantage of this procedure is that policy issue codes at both levels match perfectly. Both codebooks include 21 main issue categories, such as macroeconomics, health, education or labor, and unemployment. A list of issue categories is to be found in the Online appendix. Admittedly, the main issue categories are rather broad. One might argue that specific contents that are transferred from one level to the other do not match perfectly. Even though this might be the case, representatives from a given party still decide to spend time and resources on paying attention to the same policy issue instead of addressing a completely different one. Thus, our coding procedure fits the theoretical concept of party policy issue transfer. Table 2 provides anecdotal

but meaningful evidence for our concept of party policy issue transfer. The example shows how the content of a question from a Social Democratic MP is picked up by a Social Democratic MEP in the following month. In total, there have been 33,857 written PQs tabled by Danish parliamentarians in the period from September 1999 to May 2009, 33,071 in the Folketing, and 786 in the EP.

Since we are interested in how parties' issue priorities correlate across levels, we decided to use a dyadic data structure instead of the more common time-series-cross-sectional setup. Instead of examining each party at a given month separately, we *directly* observe how issues travel across a pair (*dyad*) of parties. Thus, dyadic datasets allow a straightforward implementation of our theoretical concept of party policy issue transfer. The use of dyadic data is common in international relations literature—specifically conflict studies (Bell and Miller, 2013)—but also in the study of policy diffusion (Fink, 2013; Gilardi, 2010; Gilardi and Füglistler, 2008; Volden, 2006).

Our data consist of *directed dyadic data*, with each unit of analysis being a pair of two political parties (Neumayer and Plümper, 2012: 146). This means that each party is present as a *sender* ($party_j$) and as a *receiver* ($party_i$). Thus, the dyad 'Center Democrats $_t$ -Liberals EP $_j$ ' is distinct from the dyad 'Liberals EP $_t$ -Center Democrats $_j$ '. The Center Democrats are the follower in the former dyad and the leader in the latter dyad. Our analysis relies on a dyadic setting across levels only. Thus, we excluded all observations composed of same level dyads such as 'Center Democrats EP $_t$ -Liberals EP $_j$ '.

The unit of analysis in our model is dyads per month. The number of observations is the sum of all possible multilevel dyads per month between 1999 and 2009. Our dependent variable is the *policy issue transfer* between two parties. First, we created a transfer variable for each of the 21 issue categories in the CAP data. Each of these 21 variables has a value of 1 if $party_i$ raises one or more questions on the same issue as $party_j$ had already asked in the preceding month, and 0 otherwise.⁵ We then aggregate the 21 variables to receive a counter of the amount of issue transfer from $party_j$ to $party_i$. This count variable of issue transfer is then used as our dependent variable in the analysis. Theoretically, the dependent variable runs from 0 (no issue transfer at t) to 21 (perfect issue transfer across all 21 issues at t). However, empirically, the variable never reaches its maximum, but is instead heavily right-skewed and overdispersed with a maximum of 7 ($\mu = 0.25$; $\sigma = 0.69$).

Our core independent variable *same party* is binary and coded 1 if $party_i$ in a dyad belongs to the same party branch as $party_j$ (e.g. Social Democrats EP $_i$ and Social Democrats $_j$). Furthermore, party size might matter for party policy issue transfer. Larger parties have more resources than smaller parties, and they are also involved in a broader range of policy issue areas. As a consequence, larger receiver parties might be better capable of picking up issues from other levels. Therefore, our models control for the size of $party_i$ measured as the absolute number of seats in parliament. As already mentioned, opposition status matters for asking PQs at the national and European levels. In addition, national opposition parties have reasons to move policy issues to the European level. Hence, we control for

party status by including a dummy variable which equals 1 if $party_i$ is in government at the national level. Furthermore, the ideological difference between parties might play a crucial role for the transfer of party agendas. Thus, we use the left–right score from the Comparative Manifesto Project and the Euromanifesto Project to measure the absolute ideological difference between $party_i$ and $party_j$ (Budge et al., 2001).⁶ We expect that issue transfer becomes less likely with increasing ideological distance within a dyad. In addition, we include a dummy variable that takes the direction of party policy issue transfer into account. The variable is 1 if an issue transfers from the national to the supranational level. Finally, we control for time dependence using time splines and dummies that take EP term differences, the reform of the questioning regulations in the Danish parliament, and summer breaks at both levels into account.⁷

Classical estimation of parameters of a distribution based on observed data is subject to sources of uncertainty. To be confident that our proposed mechanism of within-party transfer is robust we apply sensitivity analysis. In particular, we consider whether our results are robust to exogenous events that might cause reactions from political parties at both levels without any form of within-party coordination. To do so, we use two different data sources. First, we control for issue priorities in PQs of parties in the Swedish parliament. The data also come from the CAP project and allow us to check whether the effect of within-party coordination holds in the presence of issue priorities of political parties from another EU member state that shares many similarities with Denmark. This allows us to be more confident in observing an actual link between Danish parties that belong to the same branch and not two independent issue priorities of parties at the national and European levels. In addition, we investigate whether within-party transfer is robust to the inclusion of issue priorities of the public by controlling for survey data regarding the ‘*Most important problem*’ in Denmark. We use the ‘Survey about the formation of public opinion’ for the period between 1999 and 2002 and biannual Eurobarometer data from 2003 to 2009.

We have to address a range of statistical issues in our models. For one, our dependent variable is overdispersed which means that the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean of the distribution. We decided to run negative binomial regression analysis.⁸ Furthermore, dyads are not statistically independent of each other. Previous studies often deal with this issue of interdependence by clustering the standard errors by dyads. However, such a solution is not appropriate to control for the complex relationship of the dyads. Even though robust standard errors have been under intense scrutiny recently (King and Roberts, 2015), clustering by dyad will not result in unbiased estimates. The assumption of independence is not only violated within dyads but also across them since observations are also clustered within $party_i$ and $party_j$, respectively.

To address these issues, we follow Gilardi’s (2010: 654–656) suggestions in most regards. We use a nonnested multilevel model in which we model the interdependence structure outlined above by using two intercepts (Gelman and Hill, 2007: 289–293)

$$y_{ij} \sim NB(\gamma_i + \delta_j + X\beta) \tag{1}$$

$$\gamma_i \sim N(\mu_{\gamma_i}, \sigma_{\gamma_i}^2) \tag{2}$$

$$\delta_j \sim N(\mu_{\delta_j}, \sigma_{\delta_j}^2) \tag{3}$$

Thus, we include a set of predictors (X) and two intercepts drawn from a multivariate normal distribution for $party_i$ (γ_i) and $party_j$ (δ_j). To test our second hypothesis we fit individual models for all policy issue areas that transfer at least in 1% of the dyads. The dependent variable in these models is a binary response, which is why we run multilevel logistic regression models.

Results

How often does policy issue transfer occur across the 21 issue categories?

A first striking result is that transfer is not a rare event, but takes place in 15% of the dyads included in our analysis. Even though parties ask PQs independently across institutional levels, the issues addressed are fairly often interrelated at an interval of one month. Figure 1 reports the percentage of transfer for all individual issues that are aggregated in our dependent variable. According to our second

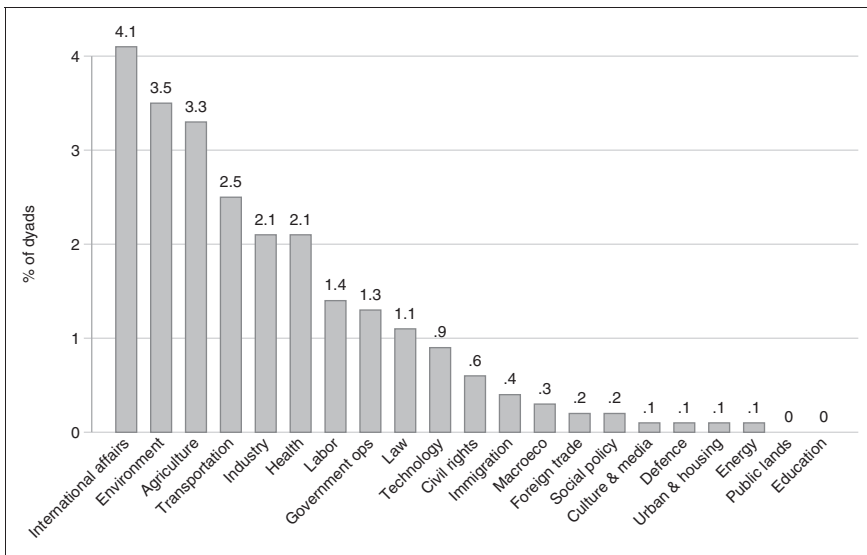


Figure 1. Percentage of dyads that experience transfer across policy area, Danish Folketing and EP (1999–2009).

Note: EP: European Parliament.

hypothesis transfer between levels will occur in policy issue areas where the EU is substantially involved and has considerable legislative authority.⁹ We see that issue transfer emerges most frequently in the areas of international affairs, agriculture, and environment: three policy fields that are considerably affected by decision-making at the European level. The EU's authority in agriculture has grown over time and today accounts for one of the largest shares of EU legislation across policy fields. Environment is one of the policy fields where the EP has a strong say. International affairs include topics such as human rights, terrorism, and EU member states' relationship with Russia. All these are issues on which the EU is increasingly called to position itself and to act accordingly. In contrast, there is no party policy issue transfer within the issues of culture and media, and public lands and education. Given that member states still hold most policy competence in those areas, it comes as no surprise that the topics are not transferred across levels. In sum, the amount of issue transfer across policy areas seems to correspond to our assumption outlined in the theoretical section.

Table 3 reports the results of our regression models. Models 1–5 are negative binomial models, using the counted issue transfer between parties as the dependent variable. Model 6 is a robustness test that replaces the dependent variable with a binary measure. All count models report incident rate ratios.

The results underpin our theoretical arguments in most regards. Opposition status is a crucial driver for issue transfer between parties in our dyadic setting. If a party is in government it is significantly less likely to transfer issues. This effect is statistically significant across all models that we calculated. However, we believe that this is partly because PQs are mainly used by opposition parties both at the national and supranational levels. Party size leads parties to transfer more frequently. Again this finding is stable across all model specifications. This is not the case for ideological distance. The estimate is not statistically significant in model 3. This might be driven by measurement errors, an issue extensively discussed elsewhere (Hansen, 2008). It might even be amplified by the fact that parties draft different manifestos for the national and European levels. Even though both projects (CMP and Euromanifesto) apply the same coding rules, issue salience on the European and national levels differ significantly and, thus, also parties' left–right placements.

What is the result for our core expectation about within-party transfer? We find ample evidence that issue transfer across levels is more likely if parties within a dyad have the same party affiliation. Dyad pairs that include parties with the same affiliation transfer around one and a half times more often than those with different party affiliations. The estimates are statistically significant across all models and relatively stable in size. Furthermore, our results provide some evidence that issues are more likely to travel from the national to the European level and not the other way around. This result suggests that parties do not only attempt to influence 'their' MEPs' voting behavior but also care about the issues they address in the EP. Looking at issue transfer over time, we see that transfer occurred more often in the sixth term than in the fifth term. We know that the reform in 2007 had a

Table 3. Explaining policy transfer, pooled regression results.

	baseline	party controls	level controls	reforms	breaks	binary DV
party _i = party _j	1.58*** (0.12)	1.43*** (0.11)	1.39*** (0.11)	1.39*** (0.10)	1.39*** (0.10)	1.44*** (0.11)
seats _i		1.01*** (0.00)	1.02*** (0.00)	1.01*** (0.00)	1.01*** (0.00)	1.02*** (0.00)
government _i		0.21*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.01)
ideology _i - ideology _j			0.98 (0.14)	1.33* (0.18)	1.35* (0.19)	1.91*** (0.29)
national _j → EU _i			1.29*** (0.10)	1.18* (0.10)	1.10 (0.10)	1.14 (0.10)
6th term				5.17*** (0.30)	5.40*** (0.31)	
6th term _{postreform}				3.74*** (0.25)	3.73*** (0.25)	
break EU					0.51*** (0.05)	
break DK					0.46*** (0.04)	
constant	0.18 (0.00)	0.18 (0.00)	0.15 (0.01)	0.05 (0.00)	0.06 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
ln _α	1.44 (0.05)	1.33 (0.05)	1.33 (0.05)	0.82 (0.06)	0.77 (0.06)	
σ _{party_i}	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
σ _{party_j}	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
log likelihood	-7759.9	-7559.8	-7553.9	-7132.4	-7069.8	-4598.6
χ ²	37.95	353.9	367.7	1132.8	1228.6	1197.1
N	13,304	13,304	13,304	13,304	13,304	13,304

Note: DK: Denmark; EU: European Union.

Exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

Models 1–5 nonnested multilevel negative binomial model.

Model 6 nonnested multilevel logit model with time splines (omitted from table).

5th term = reference category in model 4.

p* < 0.05, **p* < 0.001.

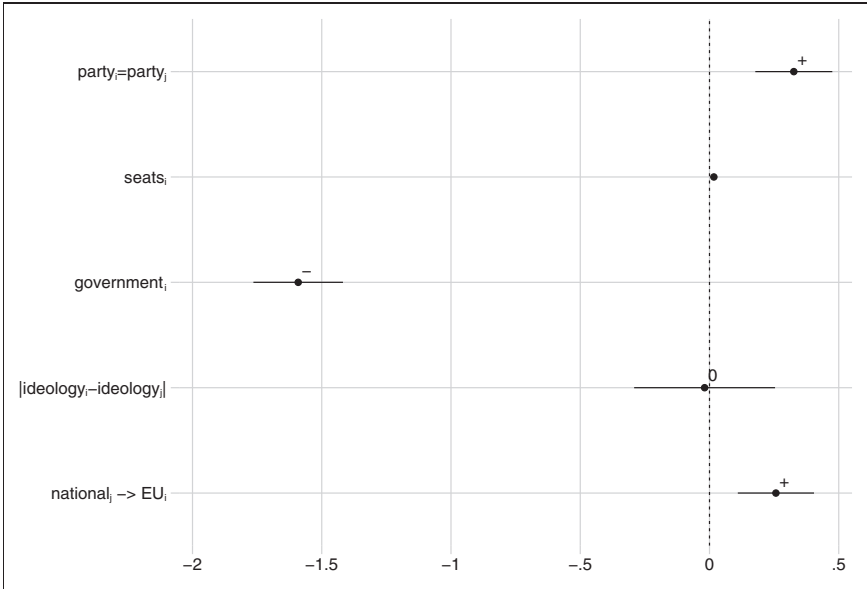


Figure 2. Coefficient Plot (Model 3).
Note: Hypotheses: 0 no effect, + positive effect, - negative effect. Markers are coefficients, spikes represent 95% confidence intervals.

decreasing effect on the overall level of written PQs in the Danish parliament. Our findings show that it also reduced the level of issue transfer when compared to the beginning of the sixth term. However, in comparison to the fifth term, we still see more transfer. Finally, the slightly different schedules of the two parliaments unsurprisingly decrease the level of issue transfer. However, our results remain stable in significance and coefficient size when we include summer breaks in the model.

In sum, the test of our *within-party issue transfer* hypothesis is positive and stable across all model specifications, such as the binary setting in model (5) and several robustness tests reported in the Online appendix. Visual evidence is given in the coefficients plot of model 3 reported in Figure 2.

Figure 3 takes up the descriptive results for policy issue transfer discussed above for all policy issue areas that transfer at least in 1% of the dyads.¹⁰ All models are binary regression models in which the response variable is 1 if transfer has occurred in the given month and 0 otherwise. The models include the same set of independent variables as model 4 in Table 3. The results show significant positive effects for international affairs, environment, agriculture, industry, and labor. While the results for the first four policy areas seem reasonable considering the level of legislative activity (or negotiations in the case of international affairs) at the European level, it comes as a surprise to find a significant result for labor. Member states have been very hesitant to transfer legislative authority in the area of employment, compared to other policy areas, to the European level. However, the EU defines

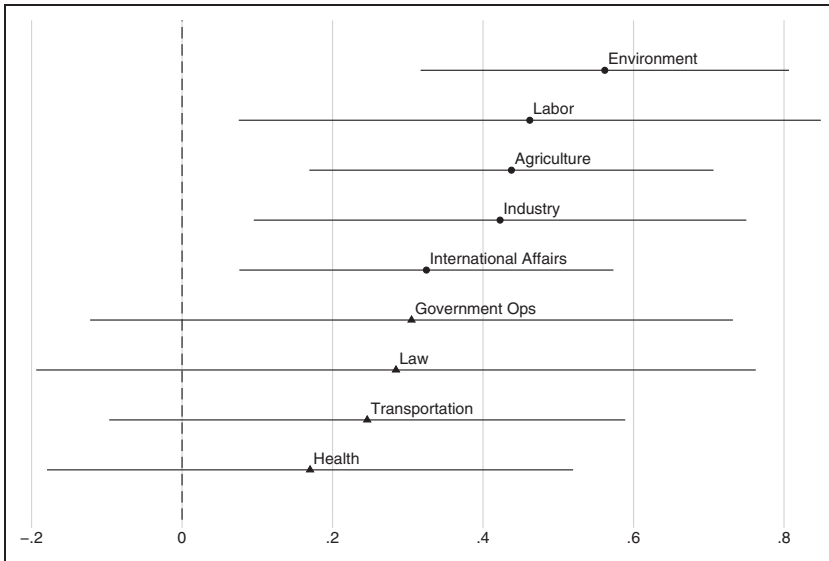


Figure 3. Plotted coefficients of *sameparty* for single-issue models.

Note: Based on models reported in column (1) in Table A3–A11 in the Online Appendix.

Markers are coefficients, spikes represent 95% confidence intervals. Models are multilevel logistic regression models.

many minimum requirements in the field of working conditions that appear to be salient for Danish MPs and MEPs. For the remaining policy areas including transportation, health, government operations, and law, we find no significant effect of within-party transfer—a result according to our expectations. For example, it would be more than surprising to find within-party transfer in the area of government operations since the policy issue area considers specificities related to the executive of the respective level.

Finally, we present the results of our robustness tests considering exogenous factors that might influence issue attention in PQs from Danish parliamentarians for the same nine policy issue areas as before and report several regression models addressing within-party transfer. Figure 4 provides information about the estimates of our main independent variable across four different model specifications. In addition, it presents the coefficients for the number of PQs in the respective issue area tabled in the Swedish *Riksdag* and the share of respondents that mentioned the respective issue area as one of the most important problems in Denmark in the given month. As already mentioned, PQs from Sweden have been assigned by the Swedish CAP team using the exact same policy issue categories as for other CAP countries. We matched MIP answer categories with the CAP codes. However, three CAP codes (agriculture, government operations, and law) have not been assigned because of lack of an appropriate MIP category. Our findings regarding within party-transfer are overall robust to exogenous agenda factors. The changes in the

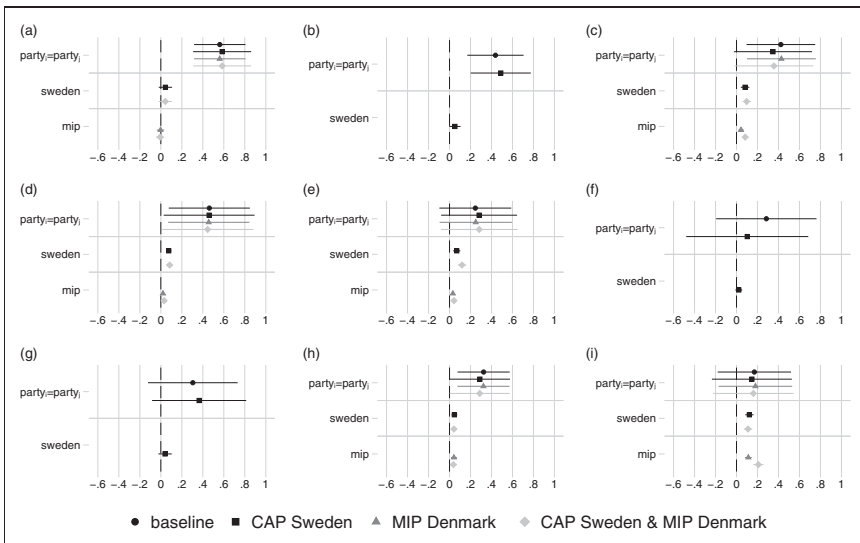


Figure 4. Issue-based models across four different model specifications. Note: (a)=environment; (b)=agriculture; (c)=industry; (d)=labor; (e)=transportation; (f)=law; (g)=government ops; (h)=international affairs; (i)=health. Based on models reported in Table A3–A11 in the Online appendix. markers are coefficients, spikes represent 95% confidence intervals. Models are multilevel logistic regression models.

direction and size of coefficients are marginal for most policy issue areas. Only in the policy issue areas of international affairs and industry the *same party* coefficient becomes smaller. For most models, policy issue attention of parties in the Swedish parliament and public opinion in Denmark shows only minor effects. However, we see that some issues are considerably driven by external agendas. This is especially the case for issue areas where within-party transfer is not apparent such as transportation or health.

Conclusion

In the EU, many national parties also have seats in the EP and are therefore represented at more than one level of political decision-making (Caramani, 2015; Lindberg et al., 2008). This means that they can pursue policy goals beyond domestic politics. We investigate whether and how parties make use of multilevel representation to position their policy issue priorities. In particular, we study the transfer of policy issues addressed by political parties across the national and European levels in close proximity of time. We argue that common party affiliations create close ties between representatives at the national and supranational levels. As a consequence, we should see transfer of policy issue priorities between MPs and MEPs that belong to the same party branch.

To test our theoretical argument we build on a unique data collection of PQs at the national and European levels using Denmark as a case study. We rearrange our data into a dyadic panel dataset and show that party policy issue transfer is not a rare event but occurs in 15% of all monthly party dyads between 1999 and 2009. Thus, we demonstrate that policy issues indeed travel between parliamentary venues at the national and European levels on a regular basis. The mechanism that drives transfer across levels is the common party affiliation of representatives. We show that party policy issue transfer is especially likely if MPs and MEPs are affiliated with the same party. In addition, we provide evidence that issue transfer is contingent on the EU's involvement in a given policy area. Parties are more likely to transfer if the EU has a say on the issue, whereas policies that are exclusively decided on the national level are rarely transferred.

Our results suggest that ties between MPs and MEPs who belong to the same party have important implications for issues addressed at the two levels. This means that national parties not only care about the voting behavior of their MEPs, but that they also wish to control their nonlegislative behavior. We believe that our finding has important normative implications. If the issue priorities of MEPs are linked to the issues addressed by MPs in the national parliament, this means that the interests of European citizens are coherently represented at two very important levels of decision-making. Thus, the behavior of MEPs seems to represent the interests of national principles in a more direct way than we know from studies that are exclusively based on MEPs' voting behavior. Our study, therefore, contributes to a growing literature that attempts to understand democratic representation in the EU by investigating nonlegislative behavior at the national and European levels (Proksch and Slapin, 2011, 2015).

However, our effort needs to be seen as a starting point. While we show that the concept of policy issue transfer is relevant in the daily routines of MPs and MEPs, we do not provide an analysis of the fine-grained coordination mechanisms that shape policy issue transfer yet. Future research should delve deeper into the mechanisms linking policy issue priorities across countries and institutional venues as our knowledge on these mechanisms is still in its infancy. This also demands new ways of capturing data about the links between levels. For example, automated methods of text analysis have the potential to offer new insights into the topical similarities between transferred issues. In addition, we suggest that future research investigates party policy issue transfer from a comparative perspective—also in an effort to capture possible variation in the use of nonlegislative parliamentary activities—and considers potential effects of individual-level characteristics.

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Notes

1. Many scholars who study multilevel links rely on surveys that focus on MEPs' contacts to the national party. These findings suffer from low response rates and potential social desirability bias (Bundi et al., 2016). In sum, they do not allow to answer questions about the actual activities in the EP that follow from the relationship to the national party.
2. Exceptions are Ireland applying the single transferable vote system as well as Finland, Luxembourg, and Malta having open lists. In Denmark, parties have a strong emphasis on the top-candidate position, and candidate selection is a central party decision.
3. Detailed information about the questioning procedures is to be found in the Online appendix.
4. We applied Krippendorff's alpha testing for intercoder reliability. After two rounds of coding we reached a value of .81 for the main issue category, which is similar to CAP country project teams.
5. We opted for months because issue transfer per week or per day is very unlikely because of the independent parliamentary calendars of the EP and the *Folketing* and the frequency of contact between the national party and its MEPs. However, we note that the construction of the dependent variable captures cases of transfer that are below and above one month. For example, an issue addressed in a question at the national level on 2 April 2008 and a question addressing the same issue at the European level on 15 May 2008 would be counted as transferred as the difference between the two months in which the questions were tabled is 1, i.e. the difference between April and May. The use of transfer periods beyond a one-month difference would stretch the periods to observe transfer too far as MPs and MEPs would have several months to address the same issue. As a consequence, transfer observations would artificially increase, which, in return, would no longer reflect our proposed concept because transfer needs to occur shortly after the initial issue emphasis.
6. We divide both scales by 10. The original scale runs from 0 to 100, which makes comparison to the coding of the remaining variables in our models more difficult. It is important to note that because of the quasi-sentence approach applied by the Comparative Manifesto and Euromanifesto Project, political parties that belong to one and the same party branch (e.g. Social Democrats at the national and European levels) can vary in their ideological position and, thus, can have ideological distances greater than zero.
7. Another issue regarding time relates to the dependence between observations of the dependent variable at different points in time, e.g. t_0 and t_1 . Even though lagged dependent variables (LDV) have different meanings in count models (Brandt and Sandler, 2012), we present LDV models as a form of robustness test in the Online appendix.
8. As shown in the Online appendix, the distributional assumption of the negative binomial model fits our data better than a Poisson regression model (Figure A1).
9. All figures were produced using the plotting scheme in Stata (Bischof, 2017a).
10. We excluded issues with less than 1% because of convergence issues of the models and the limited information on issue transfer contained in these variables.

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