

Regional Variation in the European Parliament: Differences in Parliamentary Questions between MEPs Representing post-Socialist and Western Member States

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Abstract

The European Parliament has seen its responsibilities, visibility, and political salience increase as the EU has sought to address allegations of the democratic deficit. The political decisions of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), therefore, are similarly of increasing importance when looking at political oversight and decision-making at the European level, yet national differences in a multinational legislative context remain understudied. This paper takes a mixed-methods approach to assessing differences in uses of the parliamentary question process between MEPs representing older member states and post-Socialist states that have joined since 2004. Elite interviews conducted with MEPs and senior Commission officials, conducted in Fall 2018, are combined with an original, large N dataset containing 128,192 question-answer dyads of submitted parliamentary questions between 2004 and 2018. These dyads consist of the text of questions submitted by MEPs to the Commission or Council and the answers provided by EU officials, combined with relevant biographical data. Structural topic modeling is used to determine that regional differences affect the way MEPs use the parliamentary question process. Additionally, sentiment analysis is used to show that questions from post-Socialist MEPs have become more Euroskeptic over time.