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Parliamentary current questions' constituency focus under times of crisis: an examination of the Greek case

Yani Kartalis 

Social Sciences Institute, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Do macro-economic conditions affect legislators' representative focus? This article examines this novel predictor by analysing an original dataset of parliamentary questions from the Greek parliament. Greece is a very informative case since not only is it one of the countries most severely hit by the Eurozone Crisis but it also offers an institutional setting that provides plenty of incentives to re-election-seeking actors for constituency-focused representative work. The data utilised covers an extended period of six Greek legislatures and over 12,000 parliamentary current questions asked pre, during and post-crisis between 2006 and 2019. The stand-alone effect of macro-economic conditions as well as its interaction with known predictors like the legislators' vulnerability is tested. Findings provide evidence that better national economic performance conditions increase the likelihood that MPs with table current questions about their constituency, although other traditional factors like electoral vulnerability remain important.

KEYWORDS Economic crisis; representation; constituency focus; parliamentary current questions; legislative behaviour; Greece

Introduction

The 2009 Eurozone Crisis has led to considerable research investigating its impact on parliamentary representative democracy. The substantial deepening of European fiscal and financial integration that took place and the austerity (and bailout agreements) that Member States, especially in the 'periphery' of Europe, had to implement, could not have left representation untouched. Scholars have often treated it as having an overall negative impact on representative democracy (e.g. Bosco & Verney, 2012; Morlino & Raniolo, 2017). Nevertheless, a decade later, the academic jury is still out on its specific implications for the quality of representation (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020).

Findings on roll-call voting and discourse behaviour on crisis measures overall and during the debates with the most heightened inter and intra-party

CONTACT Yani Kartalis  kartalisie@gmail.com

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tensions showed that economic conditions can: change party stances towards austerity (Maatsch, 2016), reduce the legislative agenda to only bills about the economy (Pedrazzani et al., 2018), increase vote shifting in parliament (e.g. Blumenau & Lauderdale, 2018) and reduce mandate fulfilment (Thomson & Costello, 2017). However, most of these studies consider either the country or the en-bloc party behaviour. With regards to individual legislators' behaviour and how it was affected by the crisis, much less is known.

Our limited understanding and lack of empirical evidence of the effects of the crisis extends to the study of constituency focus in particular for which we know that legislators make strategic use of (Zittel et al., 2019). This article attempts to analyse the impact of international economic conditions of constraint on the individual MPs' representation towards geographic constituents. *Are legislators more or less likely to cater to the needs of their constituents during times of relative prosperity/austerity?*

The constituency focus during parliamentary control is analysed with the use of an original current questions dataset in the Greek parliament from 2006 to 2019, covering both the pre and post-crisis era. It focuses on how the recent crisis might have impacted the behaviour of individual MPs with regards to constituency representation when tabling current questions in particular.

The Greek parliament is a very informative case not least because it arguably suffered the biggest macroeconomic impact and had to implement the lengthiest and largest bailout packages.¹ In a way, Greece is what methodologists have termed as 'a most likely case' (e.g. Gerring, 2007), one where the effects of the Crisis are expected to be present to the greatest extent. Furthermore, the Greek legislature although dominated by party discipline, as will be further elaborated later, operates within an electoral system that offers clear incentives to individual MPs to cultivate a personal vote. This ambiguous context offers important insight in the study of constituency representation.

The analysis unveiled the importance of variables tapping on economic conditions. There seems to be enough evidence to support that better economic conditions increase the likelihood that legislators will cater to the needs of their constituents. This original contribution is relevant for at least two reasons. First, it advances the literature on the political consequences of the recent Eurozone crisis. Second, it contributes to the literature on the Foci of Representation in two ways. On the one hand, by introducing a novel predictor for explaining constituency focus and on the other, by providing empirical data on a relatively understudied legislature, bringing evidence to corroborate previous findings.

Constituency focus in parliamentary questions

The literature has already explored the mechanisms behind legislators' representative choices. Most research departs from rational choice

institutionalism and Strøm's (1997) main theoretical assumption for what drives representative behaviour. He considers the behaviour of parliamentarians as a set of strategic actions aimed at accomplishing goals/preferences (i.e. being re-selected, re-elected and acquiring party/legislative offices). In this line of thought, there are different ways for legislators to embody Hanna Pitkin's (1967) substantive view of representation (i.e. the actions taken on behalf of the representative's principal).

Legislators anticipate potential negative consequences for their goals and instrumentally utilise a repertoire of parliamentary actions/behaviours to deliver benefits to their principals (Mansbridge, 2003). This repertoire mainly includes parliamentary speeches, parliamentary scrutiny/control tools, committee work, legislative proposals and roll-call voting. In their seminal work, Wahlke et al. (1962), suggested that parliamentarians, when performing these actions, can have a local or a nationwide focus of representation and subsequent use of these parliamentary tools.² The term 'focus' refers to the interest defended by representatives. The representational foci then influence the nature of parliamentary actions and behaviour.

Wahlke's distinction of representative foci stems from the two main principals that are competing for legislators' attention; their parties and their constituents (Carey, 2007). On the one hand, parties in European democracies control resources that can be pivotal for legislators' chances of re-election. Parties exert control over important processes in MPs' careers from parliamentary (and cabinet) post occupation (e.g. Martin, 2014), access to the floor (Bäck et al., *in press*), campaign resources (e.g. Farrell & Webb, 2000) and renomination (e.g. Hazan & Rahat, 2010). This makes legislators dependent on their party, act according to internal rules (be it formal or informal) and pay attention to partisan constituents at the national level. Most importantly, however, the proportional electoral rules under which the majority of European elections are held tremendously enhance the importance of the party vote share in deciding individual legislators' fates.

On the other hand, despite proportional representation being the rule in most European democracies, many systems also allow for a personal vote including ballot structures that allow for voters to cast candidate rather than party votes. The proliferation of such mechanisms provides strong incentives for geographic representation and the cultivation of personal votes. They offer a principal that competes with the party and that can hold legislators accountable at the constituency level (Carey & Shugart, 1995; Karvonen, 2010).

As it becomes apparent, legislators' attention to constituency matters is largely and chiefly contingent upon the institutional environment in which they operate (namely whether ballot structures grant voters the ability to cast personal votes). Following our well-founded understanding of the consequences of electoral systems for legislative behaviour in general (e.g. Carey

& Shugart, 1995), a voluminous body of scholarly work has shown how closed-list electoral systems provide less incentives for constituency focus in comparison to open-list systems.

Studies have focused on the oversight function of parliaments and parliamentary questions in particular (e.g. Saalfeld, 2003; Wiberg, 1995 and also within the context of EU Integration e.g. Winzen, 2013). Although not intended to introduce or amend legislation, their use has grown in western European parliaments in the last decades (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010). Questions are primarily thought to be an ex-post government scrutiny tool but are considered an important component of parliamentary activities. It is an instrument available in most West European democracies, that strikes a fine balance between institutionalised visibility and unconstrained participation opportunities, minimally affected by informal party rules (Martin, 2011).

Country-specific studies have shown that, as expected, constituency-focused questions were more common in Ireland (STV electoral system – Martin, 2011) than in Italy or Portugal (Closed-list PR electoral system – Russo, 2011; Fernandes et al., 2018; Borghetto et al., 2020) while mixed-member systems provide equally important constraints from both sides fostering both party discipline and local representation (Baumann et al., 2017).

Studies have also focused extensively on the legislators' electoral vulnerability as a key predictor of their focus. Overall, more vulnerable to electoral defeat legislators (i.e. those that expect to face a greater challenge in the next election, see: André et al., 2015) tend to pay more attention to the policy preferences of their constituents (Bowler & Farrell, 1993; Immergut & Abou-Chadi, 2014). Similarly, the same vulnerable legislators will also perform more constituency-focused work (Heitshusen et al., 2005; Russo, 2011; André et al., 2015). Sufficient evidence from various countries in a series of case studies (Fernandes et al., 2018 in Portugal; Fernandes et al., 2019 in Portugal and Germany; Soroka et al., 2009 in Canada; Zittel et al., 2019 in Germany), supports the notion that electoral vulnerability increases the likelihood that MPs will table constituency-focused parliamentary questions.³

Economic crisis and parliamentary questions – building hypotheses

The question is what happens to this incentive structure for individual legislators' behaviour during times of macro-economic austerity/prosperity. Recent studies have linked worsening economic performance at the country or district level with the observed variation in access to the floor and speechmaking overall.

In particular, Herzog and Benoit (2015), found evidence that during important budget debates legislators from more economically vulnerable

constituencies tended to express more anti-austerity positions. In fact, their findings suggest that political and demographic variables specific to each legislator's constituency can explain the degree of expressed support for austerity measures. Similarly, Bäck and Debus (2018), by looking at access to the floor in terms of number of speeches delivered in debates related to economic policy, showed the importance of economic characteristics of the legislators' constituencies. More specifically, they show that legislators from districts facing severe economic conditions deliver fewer speeches.

Speechmaking was generally subject to disciplinary restrictions during the crisis. When group leaders attach more importance to a debate, they are more likely to speak themselves instead of the dissent-prone MPs (Bhattacharya, 2020; Proksch & Slapin, 2012, 2015). Additional evidence from Greece during the crisis (Kartalis & Lobo, *in press*), corroborated this finding by showing that party leaders tended to limit their MPs' floor access during those hard times.

Meanwhile, some further evidence demonstrated that the mechanism behind fiscal authority delegation is greatly affected during worsening macro-economic conditions (Herzog & Mikhaylov, 2020). Herzog and Mikhaylov brought evidence for the consolidation of fiscal delegation power to the head of the executive in austerity times. By looking at budget debates, they showed that closeness to the prime minister's position on fiscal governance becomes a better predictor for budget allocations.

With regards to parliamentary questions, in particular, the limited evidence available has linked increases in unemployment in the legislator's district (with respect to the previous year) with an increase in the probability of questions being asked by them on the topic (Borghetto et al., 2020).

Overall, it is expected that better national macro-economic conditions should allow legislators to curb party discipline and better represent their constituents. During good economic times, the party label is stronger and thus MPs find themselves in better conditions to dedicate to their constituents and the cost of not utilising resources towards the party goals is smaller. The article thus posits that:

H1: The better the economic performance of the country, the more likely that representatives will cater to the needs of their electoral districts

Additionally, a theoretical proposition that is now relatively well-founded empirically is tested. As the previous section demonstrated, there is enough evidence in the literature to support the notion that electorally vulnerable MPs are more likely to perform constituency-focused work. However certain case studies were not able to empirically support this hypothesis and this article attempts to bring further evidence. The article thus posits that:

H2: The more electorally vulnerable the legislator, the more likely that they will cater to the needs of their electoral districts

The article's novelty in terms of theoretical contribution, however, stems from the examination of the effect of vulnerability in light of the national economic performance effects. Legislators might be ready to curb the strategic need to cater to the needs of their geographic constituents when the economy is doing badly but that might not always be the best strategy. It is possible that legislators with elevated electoral vulnerability have no other strategy but to attempt to represent their constituents in spite of the possible incentives stemming from worse economic conditions. The argument is that vulnerability offers an individual-level incentive that legislators weigh in against the incentives and the conditions that the national economic situation offers as we saw earlier. Vulnerability moderates the potential effect of the national economic performance. The article finally posits that:

H3: The national economic performance's positive effect on constituency focus diminishes as legislators become more electorally vulnerable.

The context of legislative work in Greece

The Greek parliament,⁴ a relatively under-researched legislative institution, comprises of 300 deputies directly elected by universal suffrage for a four-year term. The Greek representative mandate is a national one as the Constitution specifically states that MPs 'represent the nation' (Art. 51.2). Parties are recognised as important elements for the organisation of political and parliamentary affairs and MPs are not constitutionally expected to represent their constituents.

The country is divided into 60 single- and multi-member constituencies.⁵ Electors cast their votes in accordance with an open-list 'reinforced' proportional representation system, whereby 250 seats are distributed proportionally and the remaining 50 seats are attributed to the most-voted party as a bonus. Electors can cast a vote for one of the party lists with the additional option to select up to five candidates on the list depending on the available constituency seats. Such systems, contrary to what their name suggests, do not reinforce proportionality, but rather tend to approximate a majoritarian electoral system that promotes the formation of stable majority governments. In Greece, the first party is given the opportunity to attain a single-party governing majority with around 40 per cent of the votes.⁶

Moreover, the Greek parliament is a traditionally party-dominated legislature (Kartalis & Lobo, *in press*). The party leadership dominance over parliamentary activities is favoured by the fact that, as in most parliamentary regimes, members of government are recruited mostly from parliament

while they retain their seats after taking up office. MPs are previously vetted by parties before entering their lists and generally parties centrally control important resources during the electoral campaign (Freire et al., 2016). Similarly, although party funding is based on public subsidies, private donations to parties and even to candidates is generally allowed (OSCE, 2019). Gemenis and Nezi (2015) tell us that Greek parties have weak ideological cohesion given that they attract candidates on the basis of the size of their political clientele and their ability to exert patronage at the local level. The importance of local party organisations, intra-party competition at the constituency level, extensive clientelistic networks as well as sanctioning of private donations to individual MPs (Kartalis & Lobo, *in press*) offer clear incentives for the individual MP to try to mobilise the vote for themselves and maintain constituency ties once in parliament.

Overall, Greece represents an important case study of the crisis effects on constituency reinforce proportionality representation for all the contextual characteristics of its parliament. Furthermore, data on the Greek parliament is scarce and the analysis of its party-dominated nature along with the incentivising for personal vote-seeking institutional characteristics should bring important evidence to the existing literature.

Research design

Data

In order to test the hypotheses introduced in the previous sections, this article makes use of an original dataset of parliamentary current questions in the Greek parliament. The Greek Parliament's Standing Orders (SO) constitute the legal framework for parliamentary scrutiny.⁷ Out of the available scrutiny tools,⁸ current questions are chosen for their important attributes. First, they are the only way for MPs to individually impact the agenda of the plenary sessions.⁹ Second, they concern matters of immediate relevance, are submitted by individual MPs only and are addressed to the Prime Minister or Ministers, who in turn have to answer orally in the Plenum. Third, despite the heavily disciplined access to the floor in the Greek parliament, all current questions submitted are recorded in the parliamentary proceedings and MPs cannot be prevented by the party leadership from exercising this prerogative.¹⁰ They are a prime tool for MPs to attempt to turn the debate's attention to a specific topic or at the very least signal to their constituents that they tried.

Data on all parliamentary current questions submitted by individual MPs from 2010 to 2019 are readily and publicly available on the website of the Hellenic Parliament and contain information on party affiliation, date submitted, and ministry to which the question was directed to.¹¹ For the

period before 2010, the parliament's library archives have to be contacted and are provided in a machine-readable format. The dataset was further processed using R to drop questions asked by MPs elected at the nationwide constituencies and also those asked by independent MPs, and to add further metadata on MPs' constituencies. The final dataset covers 15 years and six legislative terms¹² of parliamentary activities in Greece in a total of over 12,000 current questions tabled from 2006 to 2019. [Table 1](#) provides descriptive information of total current questions asked per party and legislative period.

Dependent variable

The unit of analysis is the parliamentary current question. The literature has approached the operationalisation of constituency focus in parliamentary questions in two ways. Either as explicit geographic references to the district (e.g. Martin, 2011) or as the level of focus on topics that are of particular interest for the district (Saalfeld, 2011; Soroka et al., 2009; Borghetto et al., 2020). This article employs the first approach because of data availability in the Greek case but also because it allows for a more objective and longitudinal analysis of constituency focus. It does not require relying on sporadic and difficult-to-find data on the importance of specific topics on specific districts or the relatively subjective and very resource-intensive manual coding of topics.

The dependent variable *Constituency Representation* is operationalised as a dichotomous variable that takes the value of (1) if the question's title contains any explicit reference to a geographic unit in the MP's district and the value of zero (0) if it does not.¹³ The term geographic unit refers to either a direct mention of the district itself, an administrative subdivision of the district, or a city/town/village that falls into the district boundaries. The names of all geographic units are accessed through the Hellenic Statistical Authority (*Ελληνική Στατιστική Αρχή - ΕΛΣΤΑΤ*) and their grammatical declensions are then run by each question title for possible matches.¹⁴ A single match of any geographical unit that belongs to the district of the MP is enough to give the current question the value of one.¹⁵ [Table 2](#) shows the share of constituency-focused questions of all MPs per legislative term. Around a fifth and a third of all current questions are normally constituency-focused.

Independent variables

H1 posits that worsening economic conditions lead to the decrease of constituency focus. To estimate the impact of economic conditions, the study calculates the quarterly Economic Performance Index (EPI), a composite index that combines inflation, unemployment, government deficit, and

Table 1. Total number of current questions tabled by party and legislative term in Greece (2006–2019).

Party	Legislative term ^a (Duration in days)						Total
	11 ^b	12	13	15	16	17	
	03/2004–2008/ 2007 (1259)	09/2007–2009/ 2009 (722)	10/2009–2004/ 2012 (920)	06/2012–2012/ 2014 (927)	01/2015–2008/ 2015 (215)	09/2015–2006/ 2019 (1360)	
Independent Greeks (ANEL)	0	0	0	380 (13.5%) (18)	87 (18.47%) (6)	244 (4.51%) (8)	711 (4.96%) (32)
Democratic Left (DIMAR)	0	0	0	407 (14.46%) (16)	0	0	407 (2.84%) (16)
Democratic Alignment (DIMSIM)	0	0	0	0	0	867 (16.01%) (16)	867 (6.04%) (16)
Union of Centrists (EK)	0	0	0	0	0	189 (3.49%) (9)	189 (1.32%) (9)
Communist Party of Greece (KKE)	168 (22.83%) (12)	328 (16.84%) (27)	471 (15.89%) (21)	401 (14.25%) (11)	76 (16.14%) (12)	602 (11.12%) (13)	2046 (14.26%) (96)
Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS)	0	346 (17.76%) (11)	505 (17.03%) (19)	0	0	0	851 (5.93%) (30)
New Democracy	22 (2.99%) (15)	92 (4.72%) (24)	604 (20.37%) (73)	437 (15.52%) (66)	87 (18.47%) (36)	834 (15.4%) (57)	2076 (14.47%) (271)
Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)	392 (53.26%) (55)	883 (45.33%) (76)	862 (29.07%) (91)	307 (10.91%) (21)	48 (10.19%) (9)	0	2492 (17.37%) (252)
The River (POTAMI)	0	0	0	0	64 (13.59%) (14)	127 (2.35%) (10)	191 (1.33%) (24)

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Party	Legislative term ^a (Duration in days)						Total
	11 ^b 03/2004–2008/ 2007 (1259)	12 09/2007–2009/ 2009 (722)	13 10/2009–2004/ 2012 (920)	15 06/2012–2012/ 2014 (927)	16 01/2015–2008/ 2015 (215)	17 09/2015–2006/ 2019 (1360)	
Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)	150 (20.38%) (6)	299 (15.35%) (13)	406 (13.69%) (12)	460 (16.34%) (63)	61 (12.95%) (29)	428 (7.91%) (68)	1804 (12.57%) (191)
Golden Dawn	0	0	0	286 (10.16%) (17)	48 (10.19%) (14)	290 (5.36%) (17)	624 (4.35%) (48)
INDEPENDENTS	4 (0.54%) (2)	0	117 (3.95%) (17)	137 (4.87%) (22)	0	1833 (33.86%) (16)	2091 (14.57%) (57)
Total	736 (100%) (90)	1948 (100%) (151)	2965 (100%) (233)	2815 (100%) (234)	471 (100%) (120)	5414 (100%) (214)	14,349 (100%) (1042)

^aFirst parenthesis is the percentage of current questions in the term. Second parenthesis is the number of MPs tabling the current questions.

^bData for the 11th period were only available from 2006 onwards.

Table 2. Constituency focus by legislative term.

Legislative term	N Total current Qs	N Constituency focus	Share (%) Constituency focus
11 (04–07)	736	219	29.92
12 (07–09)	1948	466	23.92
13 (09–12)	2965	743	26.09
15 (12–14)	2815	530	19.79
16 (15–15)	471	117	24.84
17 (15–19)	5414	866	24.18

GDP growth (Khramov & Lee, 2013).¹⁶ The data is drawn from the OECD database.

For *H2* and *H3*, that bring the focus on the questioning MP's electoral *Vulnerability*, a variable is included in the dataset implementing previous work developed by André et al. (2015). In particular, given the preferential nature of the Greek electoral system, the inter-party defeat measure (i.e. 1 – Vote Share Difference to Second Party) for single-member districts and the equivalent for multi-member districts (i.e. Rank among party elected / Party Seats) are used.¹⁷ This variable captures how vulnerable legislators are, depending on their position in the list or rank preference in the previous election. It ranges from zero (0) to one (1) and the higher the value the more vulnerable the MP.

In terms of controls, a dummy variable called *Econ/Finance Ministry* is included that takes the values of one (1) if the current question is directed towards the ministry of economy or the ministry of finance, and zero (0) if it is directed towards any other ministry. Figure 1, shows the percentage of current questions in Greece that were directed towards the ministries of economy or finance across the years and also the percentage of current questions that have a constituency focus by ministry across the years. It is clear that not only Greek MPs directed more current questions towards the two



Figure 1. Share of current questions in Economy or Finance Ministries per year and share of constituency-focused current questions by ministry and per year in Greece.

Table 3. Variable descriptive statistics.

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pctl(25)	Pctl(75)	Max
Constituency representation	12,250	0.240	0.427	0	0	0	1
Economic performance	12,250	70.405	7.857	56.240	64.588	77.313	85.538
Vulnerability	12,250	0.474	0.384	0.021	0.125	1	1
Government	12,250	0.249	0.432	0	0	0	1
Left-right positioning	12,250	4.710	2.932	0.220	2.000	7.333	9.923
Gender	12,250	0.184	0.388	0	0	0	1
Seniority	12,250	3.344	2.546	1	2	4	15
Frontbencher	12,250	0.613	0.487	0	0	1	1
Economy/Finance Ministry	12,250	0.227	0.419	0	0	0	1
Attica	12,250	0.342	0.474	0	0	1	1

ministries during the crisis but also asked less current questions about their constituents when the question was directed towards the two ministries compared to the others.

Additionally, included control variables on the questioning MP are: their party's ideological positioning with the variable *Left-Right Positioning*, as provided by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey dataset,¹⁸ their parliamentary *Seniority* (i.e. how many times they have been an MP), *Gender*, and their position in the party leadership (i.e. if they are a back- or *Frontbencher*). Similarly, a dummy variable called *Government* is included, that distinguishes between government and opposition parliamentary groups is also included given that the functions of control and oversight are inherent to opposition parties (Wiberg, 1995) which in turn may lead to a disproportionately high number of questions asked by opposition MPs.

Finally, a dummy variable called *Attica* is also included, and takes the value of one (1) if the MP's constituency falls under the Attica region (NUTS2) to account for the very high number of seats that are elected in those constituencies. Table 3 offers basic descriptive statistics for all the variables used in the analyses.

Method

Given the multilevel structure of the data used in this article (i.e. current questions nested within legislators in specific legislative terms) but also the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, random intercepts multilevel logistic regression models are estimated. Such models are similar to those used in previous studies using parliamentary questions (e.g. Fernandes et al., 2018) and permit capturing unobserved heterogeneity due to features not explicitly modelled – notably: legislator's seniority, clientelistic ties, election proximity. No random coefficients/slopes are calculated. Before running the models, the covariates are also centred.¹⁹ The formalised model is:

$$\text{Log} \left[\frac{p_{ij}}{1 - p_{ij}} \right] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \chi_{ij} + \beta_2 u_j + \mu_{0j} + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

where p_{ij} is the probability of the binary outcome dependent variable (i.e. the parliamentary current question i of legislator j) to be one. In other words, the model tries to estimate the Log-odds that the parliamentary current question i of legislator j contains an explicit reference to a geographical unit from the legislator's district instead of not containing it. The term χ_{ij} is the question-level variables and u_j is the legislator/term-level explanatory variables. The β_1 is the fixed slope parameter to be estimated. Finally, ε_{ij} is the question-level error while μ_{0j} is the deviation of the legislator/term-specific slope from the fixed slope.

The empirical analysis of constituency representation in Greece fits models with three specifications (Table 4). Model 1 is an empty model that only includes the two main independent variables. Model 2 includes all covariates while Model 3 includes the interaction term of the main independent variable with vulnerability.

Table 4. Determinants of parliamentary current questions' constituency focus in the Greek legislature.

	Results		
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Constituency Representation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Economic Performance	0.011* (0.006)	0.012* (0.006)	0.015** (0.006)
Vulnerability	0.613*** (0.173)	0.363* (0.160)	0.352* (0.160)
Government		0.182 ⁺ (0.094)	0.192* (0.094)
Left-Right Positioning		-0.013 (0.022)	-0.016 (0.022)
Gender		0.097 (0.145)	0.104 (0.145)
Seniority		-0.003 (0.024)	-0.004 (0.024)
Frontbencher		-0.065 (0.119)	-0.068 (0.119)
Economy/Finance Ministry		-0.394*** (0.067)	-0.391*** (0.067)
Attica		-1.774*** (0.138)	-1.780*** (0.139)
Economic Performance * Vulnerability			-0.029* (0.014)
Constant	-1.510*** (0.068)	-1.882*** (0.086)	-1.899*** (0.087)
Observations	12,250	12,250	12,250
Log Likelihood	-5,758.343	-5,650.518	-5,648.499
Akaike Inf. Crit.	11,524.690	11,323.030	11,321.000
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	11,554.340	11,404.580	11,409.960

⁺ $p < 0.1$.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

Results

Recall that the first hypothesis posited that better economic conditions at the national level increase the likelihood that legislators will cater to the needs of their constituents. Overall, the models bring substantial evidence in support of *H1*. As shown in [Table 4](#), the coefficients of the economic performance index variable are positive and statistically significant across all model specifications. Their effect size however is not so large in comparison to the rest of the variables in the models.

With regards to the second hypothesis which posited that the legislator's electoral vulnerability increases constituency focus (*H2*), according to this data, electoral vulnerability is a very important predictor of constituency focus in current questions in the Greek parliament. Its effect size is statistically significant across all models while it is also the covariate with the third largest effect size. Being positive the coefficient tells us that, as expected, questions tabled by more vulnerable legislators are more likely to be focused on their constituency.

When it comes to the interaction hypothesis, recall that the expectation was that vulnerability moderates the economic performance's impact (*H3*), the article brings some limited evidence. The interaction term involving the two predictors is statistically significant.²⁰ Its negative coefficient in [Table 4](#) means that the positive economic performance's effect on constituency focus becomes less pronounced as vulnerability increases. [Figure 2](#) helps us understand the results for the full range of values in the economic performance covariate. It shows the likelihood of tabling district-focused parliamentary questions across all economic performance values at three different levels of vulnerability. It becomes apparent that the economic

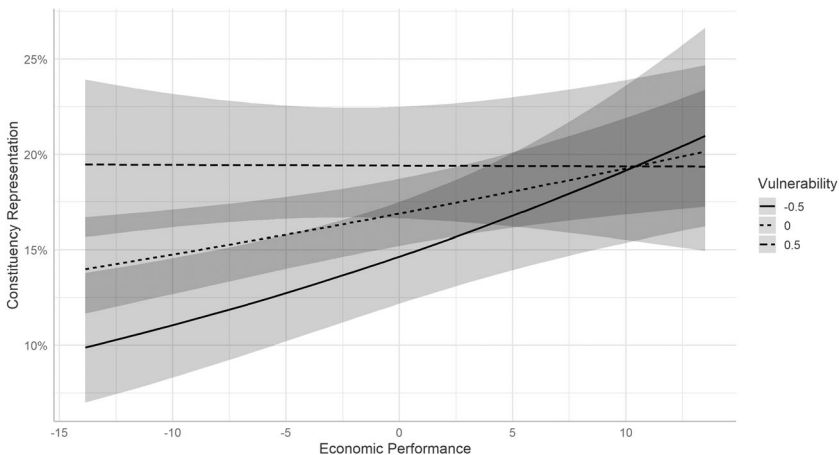


Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of constituency representation with 95 Cis.

performance's positive effect becomes non-existent when legislators are very vulnerable, thus supporting *H3*.

With regards to the study's control variables, whether the question tabled is directed towards the Economy or Finance Ministries substantially reduces the likelihood that a question will have a constituency focus. Furthermore, and in line with previous research (Rasch, 2011), questions tabled by legislators from parties that participate in government tend to be more constituency-driven. This is probably due to the fact that legislators from governing parties, because they dedicate less parliamentary question time for oversight purposes in comparison to their opposition counterparts, have more leeway to devote time to their districts.

Additionally, and again as expected, questions tabled by legislators elected in Attica are exceptionally less likely to be constituency-focused. Being from a constituency that belongs to the Attica region, is by far the most important predictor of constituency focus of current questions in the Greek parliament. Not only its effect size is statistically significant across all models, but it is also the covariate with the largest effect size by far. This is probably due to the fact that all those constituencies have high district magnitudes which not only limit electoral vulnerability but also increase the number of potential legislators that could share the task of representing them. Lastly, the ideological positioning of the legislator's party, as well as the legislator's gender, seniority and position in the party leadership seem to be unimportant.

Conclusions

This article set out to examine the impact of macro-economic conditions on the use of constituency focus during parliamentary control activities. It attempted to do so by looking at all the current questions asked in the relatively understudied Greek legislature from 2006 to 2019. The aim was to answer the question of whether economic conditions of constraint affect the legislators' representation focus. The empirical evidence from this combination of a severely hit Eurozone country before and after the onset of the Eurozone crisis, helps us understand the capacity that legislators have to geographically represent their constituents in times of severe stress for representative democracy.

The article brings important corroborating evidence to previous studies in the literature. Electoral vulnerability has been shown to have a positive impact on the amount of constituency-focused questions a legislator asks (Soroka et al., 2009; Fernandes et al., 2018; Zittel et al., 2019) and the analysis corroborates this finding. The data showed that questions tabled by more vulnerable legislators are more likely to be geographically focused. It also places the Greek parliament and its open-list 'reinforced' proportional representation system within a constellation of cases previously shown to

have relatively elevated levels of constituency focus (Ireland: Martin, 2011; Fernandes et al., 2019 or Italy: Russo, 2011).

More importantly, the article's main overall contribution to the literature is the introduction of a novel predictor for the foci of representation. First, it showed that representation focus is indeed impacted by national macro-economic conditions. The evidence supports the hypothesis that better economic conditions increase the likelihood legislators will cater to the needs of their constituents. However, considering previous findings that have linked worsening economic performance at the constituency level with higher constituency representation (e.g. Borghetto et al., 2020), the article is limited in that it does not account for regional or electoral district level variation. Future studies should aim at disentangling the impacts stemming from both national and local economic performance and their interaction and subject these findings to a more robust examination.

Nonetheless, the article's findings are important for the relatively limited literature on the effects of the 2009 Eurozone Crisis on representation. Additionally, the article showed how economic performance interacts with and how its effect is moderated by the electoral vulnerability. The data tells a story of an important difference in the relative size of the impact of the two variables. It showed that within the Greek context, a vulnerable legislator has no other option but to attempt to signal to their geographic constituents, irrespective of economic conditions.

Notes

1. EU Commission's Financial assistance to EU countries page last accessed on 12 June 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/financial-assistance-eu_en.
2. Kinski and Crum (2020) have recently introduced the notion of 'transnational representation', referring to claims by national parliamentarians on behalf of citizens of other national constituencies.
3. However, it needs to be noted that there are some studies that, although did not reach contrary results, could not provide enough evidence to support this idea in the cases of the UK (Kellermann, 2016), Ireland (Martin, 2011; Fernandes et al., 2019) and Portugal (Borghetto et al., 2020).
4. More accurately, the Hellenic parliament (Βουλή των Ελλήνων – Vouli ton Ellinon, or simply "Vouli", literally meaning: will of the Greeks).
5. More than half the districts elect less than 10 seats while there are a handful of districts that are located in and around Athens with more than 40 seats.
6. see Kartalis and Lobo (in press) for a more detailed description.
7. SO, Art. 53.1.
8. SO, Art. 124.4.
9. Together with the Discussions in the Plenum Initiatives for which data is not available (SO, Art. 132A).
10. It is important to understand however that MPs may never actually get to ask these questions on the parliamentary floor. Parties have important leeway in

selecting those questions that will eventually make it to the floor. The Conference of Parliamentary Chairpersons, the body which decides the contents of each plenary session and which ensures a disproportionate weight to the dominant party in Parliament (Kartalis & Lobo, *in press*) has to approve the suitability of each question (SO, Art. 129.4). Additionally, out of the ones approved, the leaders of each parliamentary group, by order of their group's size, select only two to be discussed in the floor (SO, Art. 130.3) while those not selected, are rescheduled for another session (SO, Art. 130.4) with the possibility to never be discussed at all.

11. Accessible at: <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Koinovouleftikos-Elenchos/Mesa-Koinovouleftikou-Elegxou>.
12. Although data for the 11th Period were only available from 2006 onwards, the empirical design focusing on the current question as the unit of analysis, instead of the mean questions per MP or term, is not affected by its inclusion in the analysis while extending its time frame.
13. Accessing the full body of the questions was impossible for the years prior to 2010 so the study had to rely on the titles only.
14. In the Greek language, each noun belongs to one of three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. Within each of the three genders, there are several sub-groups (declension classes) with different sets of inflectional endings that would cause the automated search to return many false negatives.
15. This geographic approach comes with limitations. For example, it cannot capture cases in which legislators work for their constituents by asking questions about a company operating in the district, an infrastructure project, a school etc.
16. More precisely, EPI is calculated by subtracting the inflation rate, the unemployment rate, the budget deficit as a percentage of GDP and then adding back the percentage change in real GDP from a total score of 100 per cent. The four sub-components are computed as deviations from desired values as Khramov and Lee state (0.0 per cent for inflation, 4.75 per cent for unemployment, 0.0 per cent for deficit/GDP, and 4.75 per cent for growth rate). Additionally, as suggested in the paper, the scores are normalised for comparability across countries and in order to mitigate potential inconsistencies due to high volatility. Each sub-component is weighted by the inverse of its standard deviation multiplied by the average standard deviation of all four sub-components.
17. Elections in June 2012 and September 2015 were both consecutive elections in the same year that were held less than 18 months before the previous election (May 2012 and January 2015 respectively). In accordance with Presidential Decree 26/2012, those elections took place with a closed-list system. In those cases, the equivalent formula (i.e. Rank in party list) for non-preferential systems was used.
18. 1999–2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File. Version 1.2. Available on [chesdata.eu](https://chesda.com).
19. To avoid estimation problems caused by the large differences in the scales of the predictors they are rescaled by centring following Sommet and Morselli (2017). An updated descriptives' table after centring is provided in [Table A1](#) in the appendix.
20. By including the interaction term to the model, the model has improved from the previous one while making both economic performance and government

variables more significant. The AIC value has decreased as Table 4 shows but to further substantiate this improvement, an ANOVA is fitted to compare the two models. The `anova()` function in R returns a statistically significant test of deviance at the 0.05 level.

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Notes on contributor

Yani Kartalis is a PhD candidate in Comparative Politics at ICS-ULisboa. He earned his MRes in Political Science at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. His research interests lie in the fields of representation, parliaments and political parties, and text-as-data and automated data collection approaches for the social sciences.

ORCID

Yani Kartalis  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7006-7978>

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Appendix

Table A1. Variable descriptive statistics after centring.

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pct(25)	Pct(75)	Max
Constituency representation	12,250	0.240	0.427	0	0	0	1
Economic performance	12,250	−0.000	7.857	−14.165	−5.816	6.909	15.134
Vulnerability	12,250	−0.000	0.384	−0.453	−0.349	0.526	0.526
Government	12,250	−0.251	0.432	−0.500	−0.500	−0.500	0.500
Left-right positioning	12,250	−0.000	2.932	−4.490	−2.710	2.624	5.213
Gender	12,250	−0.316	0.388	−0.500	−0.500	−0.500	0.500
Seniority	12,250	−0.000	2.546	−2.344	−1.344	0.656	11.656
Frontbencher	12,250	0.113	0.487	−0.500	−0.500	0.500	0.500
Economy/Finance Ministry	12,250	−0.273	0.419	−0.500	−0.500	−0.500	0.500
Attica	12,250	−0.158	0.474	−0.500	−0.500	0.500	0.500