

## **The Impact of Parliamentary Specialisation on Cosponsorship**

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### *Abstract*

This study seeks to establish the effect of parliamentary specialisation on cosponsorship of parliamentary proposals in parliamentary systems with high levels of party unity. Existing studies on presidential systems suggest that cosponsorship is mainly related to legislators' policy preferences. We propose that in parliamentary systems cosponsorship is, in the first place, structured by the division of labour in parliamentary party groups: MPs who do not have overlapping policy portfolios will not cosponsor proposals. Other explanations, such as policy distance and the government-opposition divide, only come into play when MPs are specialised in the same field. We test this expectation using data from the Netherlands, a parliamentary system with a clear division of labour between MPs. We find that specialisation has a very large impact on cosponsorship.

Keywords: cosponsorship, parliamentary behaviour, parliamentary system, party unity, specialisation, legislative politics

## Introduction

The study of parliamentary behaviour has traditionally focused on explaining patterns in MPs' voting behaviour, but not so much what is voted on. There is a rich tradition of studying Congressional votes in the United States, as well as many European systems (Sieberer 2006; Hix & Noury 2013; Hix, Noury & Roland 2006; Hansen 2008; Hug & Schulz 2007; Rosenthal & Voeten 2004; Spirling & McLean 2007). Most of what MPs vote on is proposed by their colleagues. In presidential systems, most bills are proposed by MPs and in parliamentary systems MPs propose resolutions, amendments, and private member bills. Therefore, the study of parliamentary behaviour should not be limited to the final stage (voting), but should also look at the question who initiates these proposals and, specifically, how MPs work together in introducing proposals: *cosponsorship*.

While there is an emerging literature on cosponsorship in presidential democracies, especially the United States, very little is known about patterns of cosponsorship in parliamentary democracies. Studies on the US Congress find a strong relationship between patterns in MPs' voting behaviour and the degree to which they cosponsor bills (Campbell 1982; Fowler 2006; Kessler & Krehbiel 1996; Koger 2003; Peress 2013; Talbert & Potoski 2002; Wilson & Young 1997). The only studies of cosponsorship outside of the United States concern other presidential systems, namely Argentina and Chile, also find a strong relationship between voting and cosponsorship (Alemán et al. 2009; Crisp, Kanthak & Leijonhufvud 2004). There are, to our knowledge, no studies of what structures cosponsorship in systems with parliamentary government and strong party unity. This paper seeks to address that gap in the literature.

We propose that in parliamentary systems with unified parties, cosponsorship is driven by specialisation: MPs introduce resolutions and amendments together with those who work on similar topics (Andeweg & Thomassen 2011). We develop and test a theory of cosponsorship in parliamentary democracies with unified parties in which specialisation is a *conditio sine qua non*: alternative explanations, such as ideological proximity and the divide between government and opposition, only play a role insofar as MPs are specialised in similar topics. This highlights an important difference between presidential democracies and parliamentary democracies that is relevant beyond the study of cosponsorship: in particular, how the specialisation of MPs in parliamentary systems shapes their behaviour is an oft-neglected element in the study of parliamentary behaviour (but see Andeweg & Thomassen 2011).

We examine cosponsorship in the Dutch lower house. This case is in many respects very different from the presidential systems that have been examined in the literature on cosponsorship so far. Like many other European democracies, the Dutch political system is characterised by parliamentary government and strong party unity. This provides a good test for our theory concerning the relationship between specialisation and cosponsorship in parliamentary democracies. Because private members bills are rather uncommon in the Netherlands (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling 2010, p. 214) we look at the cosponsorship of legislative amendments and resolutions, both of which play an important role in the legislative process and the relationship between government and parliament (Visscher 1994, p. 118-120).

### **Explaining Patterns of Cosponsorship**

It is important to note the difference between *sponsorship* and *cosponsorship*.

Sponsorship entails an MP supporting the introduction of a resolution, bill, motion or

other type of parliamentary proposal, usually by signing it.<sup>1</sup> This is a voluntary act that shows that an MP favours a particular policy (Alemán et al. 2009). If, however, an MP does not sponsor a proposal this does not mean that he or she does not favour it: rather it may indicate a lack of knowledge of the proposal or a lack of affinity with subject.

We focus on *cosponsorship*, which we understand in terms of dyadic relationships: the extent to which two MPs sponsor proposals together. Cosponsorship usually has no formal effect on the legislative process: in the United States Congress and the Dutch parliament there is no minimum required number of sponsors for a proposal to be considered. Nonetheless, MPs invest considerable work in soliciting cosponsors (Koger 2003). Cosponsorship forms an important part of the informal coalition-building phase for policy proposals that precedes the vote.

We develop a theory of cosponsorship in parliamentary democracies with cohesive parties, that focuses on the effect of specialization on cosponsorship. As it is problematic, from a methodological perspective, to assess the (causal) impact of multiple independent variables at the same time, we focus on the impact of one factor that in our view is pivotal in parliamentary democracies: specialisation (Gelman & Hill 2007; Mahoney & Goertz 2006). It is not our aim to explain all variation in cosponsorship, but to test the theory that specialization has a large impact on cosponsorship.

We argue that patterns of cosponsorship will be different in these systems than in the presidential systems that have been studied previously. The United States Congress, and especially the Senate, is characterised by representatives and senators who are comparatively independent from their parties and rely on their own track record for re-election (Mayhew 1974). Therefore, a senator or representative can act

relatively independent of his or her party. Moreover because of the strong separation of powers between the executive and the legislature, MPs act in a relatively independent way from the government. This means that patterns of cosponsorship will reflect the ideological positions of senators or representatives. Party unity is somewhat higher in the other cases studied in the literature, the Chilean and Argentine National Congresses (Crisp, Kanthak & Leijonhufvud 2004; Alemán et al. 2009). Still, party discipline is notably lower in those countries than in most West European parliamentary parties (Sieberer 2006; Carey 2007). We will argue below that in parliamentary systems characterised by almost perfect party unity cosponsorship patterns are likely to be reflective of mechanisms that ensure this party unity, in particular the division of labour within parliamentary parties.

#### *Party unity, specialisation and cosponsorship*

As government survival in parliamentary democracies relies on continuing support from the legislative, party unity in these systems is generally high (Sieberer 2006). One of the mechanisms to achieve this high level of unity is the division of labour between MPs (Andeweg & Thomassen 2011). Policy specialists act as spokespersons of their party on their own issue (Van Schendelen 1976). They prepare plenary debates with colleagues from other parties in their particular parliamentary committee. MPs give voting cues (or instructions) to fellow party members on his or her own issues (Matthews & Stimson 1970; Mishler, Lee & Tharpe 1973, Van Schendelen 1976). MPs follow the voting cues of their fellow party members on portfolios other than their own. This mechanism strengthens party unity. Parliamentary party groups act in a unified way: they vote as one bloc. This may be the result of a tit-for-that strategy; that is, MPs accept the influence they lose for having to vote as their

colleagues on other issues as the cost for the influence they gain by determining how their party acts on their issue. It may also be a way to reduce the workload, especially in smaller legislatures (Svensson 1982; Skjæveland 2010; Andeweg & Thomassen 2011). Specialisation does not just reward MPs by giving them influence over policy but also by providing them the opportunity to build their reputation: it allows MPs to claim credit for specific legislation or amendments, which increases their public profile and their profile within parliament. As Mayhew (1974, p. 95) puts it, “[t]he quest for specialisation is the quest for credit”. Assigning MPs to specific policy areas, finally, also has a disciplining effect: it discourages them to act or even formulate their own opinions on issues outside of their policy portfolios, preventing deviations from the party line.

Existing studies of cosponsorship in presidential systems do, to an extent, find support for the thesis that specialisation has an impact on cosponsorship. Talbert and Potoski (2002) found that cosponsorship in the US Congress is structured by policy positions of legislators as well as three separate substantive dimensions: a dimension concerning foreign affairs, crime and civil rights, a dimension concerning agriculture and the environment, and a dimension concerning fiscal policies. This suggests that Members of Congress are likely to cosponsor bills with colleagues who share the preferences of the MP *and* are also active on that policy issue. Fowler (2006) has likewise found that issue ties between MPs increase the likelihood of cosponsorship.

We expect the impact of specialisation on cosponsorship to be even larger in parliamentary systems with high levels of party unity. In those systems, MPs do not cosponsor proposals on any issue they want with any one they want to: MPs are likely to cosponsor proposals with MPs who have the same policy portfolio. For example, foreign affairs specialists will only cooperate with foreign affairs specialists of other

parties and are unlikely to cooperate with the healthcare spokespersons from other parties. In order to be able to cooperate MPs must be specialised in similar issues. The impact of cospecialisation on cosponsorship might be strengthened further due to the impact of external agents (such as lobbyists) and institutions (media) on parliaments: as MPs working in the same issue area are likely to be subject to similar outside pressure, they might end up working together to introduce proposals on the same issue.<sup>2</sup> We expect that this explanation is particularly strong in countries with high degrees of specialisation, for example those with a strong committee system, such as the Danish *Folketing* or Dutch *Tweede Kamer*. Therefore, our main research hypothesis regards the impact of policy specialisation on cosponsorship:

**1. Specialisation Hypothesis:** MPs who share a policy specialisation are more likely to cosponsor proposals than MPs who do not share the same policy specialisation.

Specialisation also has a different impact on cosponsorship, namely that MPs from the same party are *less* likely to cosponsor a proposal. MPs are party delegates rather than independent political actors. The parliamentary party acts in unity. Decisions to undertake actions in parliament are not made by individual MPs but by party leaders or party committees (Andeweg 2000, p. 98-103). The MP is the party's *representative* of the party on a particular issue. This has implications for what a signature of an MP means. In the American Congress the signature of a representative or senator means that he or she supports the bill. In a parliamentary system with strong party unity (and specialisation), his or her signature signals the support of *his*

*entire party*. If MPs primarily behave as party delegates, MPs of the same party are unlikely to cosponsor proposals together:

**2. Party Hypothesis:** MPs belonging to the same party are less likely to cosponsor legislative proposals, than MPs belonging to different parties.

*Specialisation as a 'conditio sine qua non'*

While we argue that specialisation is a very important factor in determining cosponsorship in parliamentary democracies with high party unity, there are various other explanations of cosponsorship. Our aim here is not to explain all of the variation in cosponsorship, but rather to test the theory that some of the factors that have shown to impact upon cosponsorship in presidential democracies do also matter in parliamentary democracy, *but only when* two MPs are also specialised in the same issues. Research has shown that the ideological positions and the divide between government parties and opposition parties structures legislative voting behaviour (Hix & Noury 2013). This makes it plausible that these factors also affect cosponsorship.<sup>3</sup> These divisions reflect that parliament as an *arena* in which MPs fight along policy dimensions and among the divide between government and opposition (King 1976, Andeweg 1992, 1997). We need to control for these factors because these might impact on specialisation: this might depend on the ideological stance of the party as well as its status as a government or opposition party. As we will outline below, we expect that these factors do indeed have an impact on the degree to which two MPs cosponsor proposals, but only if these MPs are also specialised in similar policy areas. Cospecialisation is the *conditio sine qua non* of cosponsorship in parliamentary democracies.



The impact of ideological proximity on cosponsorship has been at the centre of the study of cosponsorship in presidential systems (Peress 2013). Two MPs who are ideologically close work together more often than two MPs who are ideologically distant. In the literature on cosponsorship different motivations for this policy-oriented behaviour have been proposed. Parliamentary behaviour may be motivated by the need to signal constituents and other MPs. In the electoral connection literature cosponsorship is a low-cost way to send information to voters, NGOs and donors (Kessler & Krehbiel 1996; Alemán et al. 2009; Krehbiel 1995). In a district system, MPs in vulnerable electoral districts will be more likely to cosponsor bills and those who receive less media attention will cosponsor more, in order to boost their public profile (Koger 2003; Campell 1982). An alternative explanation is that MPs cosponsor bills in order to signal their approval with the proposal to other MPs (Kessler & Krehbiel 1996). Cosponsorship may be a way to build and maintain a reputation with parliament: the signature of an MP with a more senior position or with policy expertise under a bill is more expensive than the cosponsorship of junior MPs (Campell 1982). This higher price is also reflective of a higher value: the number of MPs matters only marginally in getting a bill passed but that the expertise of the cosponsor matters significantly (Wilson & Young 1997).

These two perspectives are not completely exclusive: Crisp, Kanthak and Leijonhufvud (2004) bring them together by proposing that cosponsorship is a way for MPs to share a policy position and its electoral rewards and punishments with their fellow MPs. MPs cosponsor bills that represent the ideological position they wish to communicate to their voters and to their colleagues (Alemán et al. 2009). There is considerable evidence that patterns of cosponsorship are related to the policy

positions of MPs in presidential systems (Talbert & Potoski 2002; Alemán et al. 2009; Crisp, Kanthak & Leijonhufvud 2004; Krehbiel 1995).

We expect that in parliamentary democracies the effect of ideological proximity on cosponsorship is *conditional* on cospecialisation: MPs who are ideologically close will propose more proposals together *if* they are specialised in the same issue area. For example, two healthcare spokespersons will probably cosponsor proposals more often if they tend to agree on policy. An education and defence specialist may agree on a particular healthcare measure, but specialisation discourages them from acting upon it. Thus while we expect that specialisation has a major impact on cosponsorship, we do not expect that specialisation carries so far that sectorial interests are a sufficient explanation for patterns of cosponsorship (Andeweg & Irwin 2009). Rather, specialisation leads individual MPs to work together with other MPs *on the issue in which they specialise*, but policy positions do play a role in choosing *which* of their fellow committee members they sponsor proposals with. If we would find no evidence of an interaction between policy distance and specialisation that would imply that sectorisation has surpassed ideological conflict:

**3. Ideological Proximity-Specialisation Interaction Hypothesis:** MPs who are ideologically proximate are more likely to cosponsor proposals, than MPs who are ideologically distant, if they share a policy specialisation.

A second aspect of parliament as a party political *arena* is the distinction between those parties that support the government of the day and those that do not. If party unity is strong, it is likely that MPs will cooperate in two camps: MPs from government parties will cooperate in order to secure the stability of government and

MPs from opposition parties will cooperate in order to destabilise it. Parliamentary systems are characterised by a government-opposition divide. The government-opposition divide is among the most important explanatory factors of voting behaviour (Hix & Noury 2013; Spirling & McLean 2007). This is particularly clear in countries with multiparty government coalitions. In these systems, MPs from government parties have two different considerations for cosponsoring. On the one side they wish to see their policy goals realised, but they also want to remain in government. Whether the coalition government breaks down depends upon the trust between coalition partners. A coalition partner will certainly not accept another coalition partner sponsoring bills that go against the coalition agreement (Holzhacker 2002, 472). On issues outside of this agreement, parties have, in principle, more liberty to pursue their own policy goals (Holzhacker 2002, 472). MPs from opposition parties do not need to consider the coalition agreement: they can sponsor any proposal they see fit. Opposition parties may work together on resolutions that criticise government policy, even if their policy stances are very different. This means that a government-opposition divide is likely to be present in the patterns of cosponsorship: two MPs from a government and an opposition party are less likely to cosponsor bills together than two MPs from government parties. Moreover, the institutionalised cooperation between coalition partners may mean that, in general, government MPs are more likely to cosponsor proposals together. This is certainly rational from the perspective of majority formation: if an MP has sponsors from each of his coalition partners he obtains a parliamentary majority for his proposal (under majority cabinet rule). MPs from the opposition also have a reason to cooperate; they have a shared interest in changing the agenda: MPs who are dissatisfied with the current legislative

agenda, because they are in the minority or do not have a leadership position, tend to cosponsor more often (Koger 2003).

Again, we expect that the effect of the government-opposition divide is conditional on specialisation: whether two MPs are on the same side of the government-opposition divide basically only plays a role for cosponsorship *if* these MPs are specialised in similar issues. In other words: specialisation can be thought of as a *conditio sine qua non*: without cospecialisation, the government-opposition divide is expected to barely influence cosponsorship patterns:

**4. Government/Opposition-Specialisation Interaction Hypothesis:** MPs who are both from a government party or both from an opposition party are more likely to cosponsor proposals than MPs who are from a government and an opposition party, if they share a policy specialisation.

### **Case Selection and Method**

Our theory concerns the impact of specialisation on cosponsorship patterns in parliamentary systems of government with comparatively high levels of party unity. The Netherlands meets these characteristics. Dutch MPs hardly vote against party lines: the *Tweede Kamer* has a Rice index of voting unity of almost 100%, making it the highest in the world (Andeweg & Irwin 2009). In addition, the Dutch parliament has a highly specialised committee system (Andeweg & Thomassen 2011). There are around 20 permanent and a number of temporary committees. The committees tend to reflect the government departments. The committees prepare formal decision-making in parliament. In committee, MPs can engage in a dialogue with the cabinet and they are able to inform themselves about issues. However, no substantive decision-making

takes place in these committees. Every committee meeting that prepares a decision (for instance when a resolution is proposed) must be followed by a plenary meeting in which the decision is formally recorded. Therefore work of the plenary session mirrors the committee structure: MPs who are active in the same committee will speak in the same plenary sessions. It is important to note that the Dutch committee system is highly relevant in terms of the division of labour it provides, but that the system is by no means 'strong' in the sense that it would challenge the party leadership (cf. Jewel & Patterson 1986, p. 141). MPs act in committees on behalf of their party and therefore usually maintain party unity (Van Schendelen 1976). Party leaders can and do interfere with their MPs' committee work if they seem to stray too far from the party line.

Dutch MPs can sponsor different proposals: private member bills, amendments to government bills and bills from other members and resolutions. In practice, private member bills are very rare and cabinet, which also has the right of initiative, proposes the vast majority of bills (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling 2010, p. 214). MPs lack the time and the specialist legal knowledge necessary to draft legislation (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling 2010, p. 216; Visscher 1994, p. 83). Cosponsorship of private member bills is therefore relatively uninformative in the Dutch case. The second type of proposal is an amendment to proposed legislation (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling 2010, pp. 218-219). About one-third of all votes in parliament concern amendments. Finally, MPs can propose parliamentary resolutions,<sup>4</sup> the expressions of a judgment or wish of parliament, mainly concerning cabinet policy (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling 2010, p. 342; Visscher 1994, p. 98). Resolutions are mainly relevant as a tool to signal attention for particular issues to voters as well as an attempt to influence the political agenda: when adopted, the

cabinet is usually asked to explore certain policy options, which is usually followed up by further parliamentary debate. MPs make frequent use of resolutions (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling 2010, p. 343): more than half of all votes in parliament concern resolutions. Formally resolutions need the 'support' of at least four MPs. This support is indicated by a show of hands at the time the proposal is introduced. Normally, all MPs present will 'support' the introduction of a resolution, which is different from actually cosponsoring it, which is done by signing the resolution (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling 2010, p. 343).<sup>5</sup>

We look at the extent to which pairs of MPs cosponsor resolutions and amendments. As these are different types of proposals, we analyse cosponsorship of resolutions and amendments separately. We understand cosponsorship as a dyadic relationship. A pair of legislators forms one case in the analysis. As the total size of the *Tweede Kamer* is 150, each MP can potentially cooperate with 149 colleagues. Therefore, we have around 22,350 cases for each parliamentary period that we investigate (slightly more, because new MPs enter during a parliamentary period). We focus on the parliamentary periods for which we have complete data (1998-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2006 and 2006-2010). We limit the analysis to MPs who have been a member of parliament for at least 100 days.<sup>6</sup>

We employ the measurement approach of Alemán et al. (2009). The dependent variable, *cosponsorship* between legislators *a* and *b* is measured as the proportion of proposals of legislator *a* that has been co-signed by legislator *b* (Alemán et al. 2009, p. 95). For example, if *a* signs 50 resolutions (or amendments) in total, 10 of which together with legislator *b*, the value on the cosponsorship variable is 0.2. Therefore, this measurement is not symmetric: cosponsorship between *a* and *b* is not necessarily equal to cosponsorship between *b* and *a*. In the previous example, *b* might have

signed only 40 resolutions, which results in a cosponsorship level of 0.25 for  $b$  and  $a$ . Data for the cosponsorship of resolutions and amendments is drawn from the minutes and parliamentary documents as available from the official website using automated scripts (Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations 2012). Table 1 provides descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables. The average proportion of cosponsorship of resolutions is low at just 0.02; for amendments it is even lower at just 0.01. As the number of amendments and the level of cosponsorship on them are both lower, the measurement for amendments is less fine-grained. Therefore we expect that the relationships in the study of amendments will be somewhat weaker than those found in the study of resolutions.

[Table 1 about here]

The independent variables have been measured as follows. Intuitively it would make sense to measure our main independent variable, *cospecialisation*, as shared committee membership of two MPs. This data is, however, not available for the period we are studying. Therefore, we operationalised *cospecialisation* as the degree to which two MPs spoke together in parliamentary debates. As we discussed above, every committee meeting in which substantive decisions are discussed, are followed by a plenary meeting: in this way an analysis of plenary activity effectively incorporates committee activity. Similarly to the cosponsorship variable, *cospecialisation* measures the proportion of parliamentary debates that legislator  $a$  spoke in, in which legislator  $b$  also spoke. Thus, if legislator  $a$  took the floor in 60 debates, 20 of which were also addressed by legislator  $b$ , their *cospecialisation* is 0.33. This way of measuring *cospecialisation* has certain advantages over using committee membership. Our measure is able to capture the *degree* to which two MPs specialise

in the same field rather than just whether they are member of the same committee. Some MPs are a member of only one committee and are thus highly specialised, while other MPs have multiple committee memberships and can thus be thought of as less specialised. Large parties usually have multiple members in every committee, each of which focuses on a specific subtopic. Measuring cospecialisation in terms of cospeech is a way to take these factors into account. The limitation of our measure is the fact that resolutions need to be introduced during a parliamentary debate, which might bias our measures upwards: if you wish to introduce a resolution, you also have to speak in parliament. Only one of the signatories of a resolution introduces a resolution during a debate, however, which should limit this source of bias. We have obtained the data on cospeech in plenary sessions from the official minutes (Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations 2012). The average level of cospecialisation is 0.04.

The *policy distance* between two legislators is based on the distance between their respective parties on the left-right scale, as measured in the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (Hooghe et al. 2010). We use the 2002 CHES survey to estimate policy distances in the 1998-2002 and 2002-2003 parliaments, 2006 for the 2003-2006 parliament and 2010 for the 2006-2010 parliament.<sup>7</sup> The average distance between two MPs is 0.22 measured on a scale that ranges between 0 and 1. We have replicated our analysis with expert estimates from the Benoit and Laver (2006) survey, which did not affect our findings.

We operationalise the *government-opposition divide* using two dummy variables: whether both MPs belonged to government parties (mean = 0.34) and whether both MPs belonged to opposition parties (mean = 0.18). We would expect to find effects in the same direction for opposition and government party MPs, but the effect size might differ between the two. Another dummy variable has been included



for the variable *same party*, which indicates whether both MPs in a pair belonged to the same party (value 1) or not (0). The average value is 0.19.<sup>8</sup>

We analyse the relationships between our independent and dependent variables in a multilevel fractional logit model (Papke & Wooldridge 1996).<sup>9</sup> We use a fractional logit, because our dependent variable is a percentage. Each MP is included multiple times in the dataset: for each MP *a*, we take the percentage of proposals of *a* that was cosponsored with legislator *b*. Therefore, we include (cross-level) random intercepts for both *a* and *b*. In addition, we include a random intercept for the parliamentary period, as the extent of cosponsorship might vary between parliamentary periods.

[Table 2 about here]

## Results

Table 2 presents the results of our fractional logit regression. We present models for resolutions and amendments separately, both with and without interaction effects. Our explanations will focus on the full models with interaction effects. Model 2 explains the level of cosponsorship of resolutions. While it is difficult to interpret the size of the coefficient directly, the range of our explanatory variables is similar for most variables, so larger coefficients imply a larger effect. As expected, we observe a strong and statistically significant effect for cospecialisation. The predicted value for cosponsorship of resolutions between two typical government MPs with average policy distance is 0.4% when cospecialisation is equal to 0%, while it reaches levels of 14.5% when cospecialisation is 36%.<sup>10</sup> The effect of cospecialisation on cosponsorship of amendments is of similar size (see Model 4). This corroborates our

cospecialisation hypothesis: those pairs of MPs that are more specialised in similar issues will also introduce more resolutions together.

We also find a positive relationship between *policy distance* and cosponsorship of resolutions. The effect is, however, much smaller: keeping other variables at their mean or mode, when the policy distance is near its maximum, cosponsorship is 0.4%, while we estimate cosponsorship to be at 0.8% when policy distance is at its minimum. More importantly, we argued that the effect of policy distance would be dependent on cospecialisation: for those that do not specialise in the same issues, policy distance will not really matter, because they will not work together anyhow, but for those that do work on the same issues, policy distance will be a relevant factor. Figures 1a and 1b displays this interaction graphically. It displays the relationship between policy distance and cosponsorship for three different levels of cospecialisation (0%, 10% and 20% cospecialisation). A large share (70%) of our pairs of MPs never speaks in the same debate. For them, policy distance has only a small effect: those with a small policy distance are expected to cosponsor in 0.54% of the cases, those with a large policy distance in 0.27%. For those with high levels of cospecialisation (20%), the difference between a small policy distance (expected cosponsorship 4.1%) and a large policy distance (expected cosponsorship 1.9%) is significantly larger. This provides support for our policy distance-specialisation interaction hypothesis: the higher the level of cospecialisation, the larger the effect of policy distance on cosponsorship. Still, even if cospecialisation is very low, policy distance does have a small effect on its own. Therefore, cospecialisation is not truly a *conditio sine qua non*.

[Figures 1a and 1b about here]

The interaction between policy distance and cospecialisation fails to achieve significance in the model on amendments. That means that the effect of policy distance on cosponsorship is similar for all levels of cospecialisation. This might be explained by the more technical nature of many amendments, especially those that are proposed by two members who are specialised in similar issues. These types of proposals are usually not motivated by ideological concerns, but rather seek to improve the quality of the bill. Therefore, we might expect MPs from ideologically opposed parties to introduce such amendments. As a result, the impact of policy distance on cosponsorship would not be larger for those with a higher level of cospecialisation.

The relationship between the *government-opposition divide* and *cosponsorship* is positive and statistically significant: overall, MPs tend to cosponsor more proposals together when both belong to a government party or when both belong to an opposition party. Figure 2 presents this effect graphically for different levels of cospecialisation. When cospecialisation is low, cosponsorship is highest for pairs of opposition MPs (0.6%), followed by government MPs (0.4%) and ‘mixed’ pairs (one government MP, one opposition MP) (0.3%). Note that the difference between government MPs and mixed pairs is very small when cospecialisation is low. As the level of cospecialisation increases, the differences between the three groups become much larger. Highly cospecialised government MPs tend to display higher rates (13.9%) of resolution cosponsorship than highly cospecialised opposition MPs (8.7%), and mixed pairs (5.4%). We find similar coefficients in the model for amendments. The effects for government and opposition MPs are quite different: we find a large positive interaction effect for government MPs, meaning that specialisation has a particularly large effect on their cosponsorship behaviour. As

specialisation increases, the difference in the level of cosponsorship between pairs of government MPs and mixed pairs of MPs increased strongly. This can be explained by reference to two factors. First of all, government parties have the greatest incentives to use specialisation as a tool to increase party unity as the survival of the government depends on the support of these MPs. Therefore, these parties usually have strict rules about the type of resolutions and amendments that their MPs are allowed to propose. Second, government parties are usually somewhat larger in size: this usually means that their MPs are more specialised. This makes a stronger effect of specialisation on their behaviour more plausible. Compared to the other two groups, opposition MPs seem to be least affected by cospecialisation. This can be explained by the fact that in many smaller political parties opposition MPs have little room to specialise, as they need to cover many different topics. All in all, our data lends support to the government-opposition specialisation interaction hypothesis, especially for government MPs. The difference between those on opposite sides of the government-opposition divide mainly comes into play when there is at least some degree of cospecialisation.

[Figure 2 about here]

The analysis of cosponsorship of resolutions and amendments lends support to the idea that cospecialisation is the driving force behind patterns of cosponsorship in the Dutch lower house. It is almost like a *conditio sine qua non*: without cospecialisation, there is almost no cosponsorship. As cospecialisation increases, policy distance and government-opposition divide play an increasingly important role.

## Discussion and conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that cospecialisation has a large impact on patterns of parliamentary cosponsorship in the Netherlands. If two MPs are not specialised in the same issue area, they are not very likely to cosponsor resolutions or amendments together. The finding that cospecialisation is important does not imply that only sectorial interests dominate decision-making procedures in the Dutch parliament (cf. Andeweg 1997). Policy distance between prospective cosponsors and government-opposition divide are also important determinants of cosponsorship. Given some degree of cospecialisation between two MPs, they are more likely to sponsor proposals together if the policy distance between them is small and if they belong to the same side of the government-opposition divide.

Parliamentary policy-making takes place between MPs who are specialised in the same policy area. Dutch MPs behave as representatives of their party within their assigned portfolios. For example, agriculture spokespersons from the left and the right have very different plans for the future of agriculture. Therefore, within the committee on agriculture MPs from the left will cooperate with other MPs from the left and MPs of the right will cooperate with other MPs for the right. Moreover, spokespersons from government parties are more likely to cooperate with each other than with spokespersons from the opposition. MPs from the government have a shared interest in the stability of government.

These findings imply that the modes of parliamentary behaviour are not only consecutive or coexistent (cf. Andeweg 1992), but that they are *conditional* on each other: membership of the same policy committee is practically a *conditio sine qua non* for cosponsorship. MPs only cosponsor resolutions with MPs who share the same policy portfolio. It is highly unlikely that an agriculture spokesperson would sign a

resolution proposed by a foreign affairs spokesperson. However, within their own policy remit spokespersons tend to cooperate with MPs who favour similar policies and are on the same side of the government-opposition divide. Dutch parliamentarians play their partisan roles within specialised policy fields.

Those who study MPs modes of executive-legislative relations in the Dutch Tweede Kamer have found that MPs themselves say that they take on several roles in parliament: they act sometimes as parliamentarians (hold the government accountable), sometimes as a party delegate pursuing the party's interest and at other times of advocates of specific policy interests. MPs regard their roles as advocates for specific issue areas usually as the least important of these three and the party delegate role as the most important (Andeweg 1997; Van Vonno 2012). This is consistent with our findings: while specialisation is important for structuring individual MPs' behaviour, within their specialised field MPs often play a *partisan* role. Elite surveys show that MPs feel that the division of labour is crucially important in the internal decision making procedures of their parties: 27% of respondents in the 2006 Dutch Parliamentary Survey indicated that the party specialist was the most influential actor in decision-making within the parliamentary party (Andeweg & Thomassen 2011, p. 668). In addition, their influence in party meetings is regarded as very or quite important by 96% of respondents. Given this, it is not surprising to find that cosponsorship is influenced so much by specialisation. Within their parliamentary party group parliamentary politics is like a 'marketplace' in which each MP defends the interests of the issue in which (s)he is specialized, while within their parliamentary committees parliament is best characterised as an arena (Andeweg 1997).

While we found a strong impact of cospecialisation on cosponsorship, this does not imply that other factors beyond the ones we analysed here do not affect

cosponsorship. Further research should explore the impact of the party leadership on cosponsorship, such as the role that external agents such as lobbyists play, media-related variables (such as preserving a party's issue ownership or the individual drive to achieve a stronger public profile) or personal factors. We would expect a conditioning effect of specialisation to be present there as well.

The significance of these results is not limited to the Netherlands or similar countries with a parliamentary system of government and high levels of party unity. Talbert and Potoski's (2002) study of cosponsorship in the United States Congress showed that MPs tend to cosponsor bills with MPs with who they shared an ideological position *on a specific issue dimension*, whether that is on environmental issues or fiscal issues. These patterns may indeed imply that MPs tend to cosponsor bills with MPs they are ideologically close *and* share a specific policy orientation: so MPs who are oriented at fiscal issues tend to cosponsor resolutions with other MPs who are active on fiscal issues as well and with whom they agree on the issue. Further research should examine whether the patterns found here hold in other parliamentary systems. We expect that as party unity declines, the effect of specialisation on cosponsorship will decline. Still, specialisation will likely be an important factor in the analysis of cosponsorship patterns in many parliaments.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in the Dutch parliament there is a distinction to be made between *sponsoring* a proposal (by signing it) and *supporting the introduction* of a proposal at the time it is introduced on the floor of the house (by raising hands). While the latter officially requires five supporters, this has been merely a formality in the last decades with all members present usually supporting (or rather: allowing) the introduction.

<sup>2</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.

<sup>3</sup> As one anonymous reviewer pointed out: there might be several other factors that explain cosponsorship between to MPs, such as prior personal history between MPs (you might rather work together with someone you know), the ideological cohesion between government parties on specific issues (government MPs might cosponsor more often on issues that they are more cohesive on), issue ownership (an MP might be less willing to share credit for a specific issue that his party owns), media attention (MPs may try to cosponsor more to counterbalance a lack of media attention) or the party leadership. Some of these potential explanations are more specific versions of the variables that we include in our analysis. As (a) we want to focus on specialisation as an explanation, and (b) we lack data to test these additional hypotheses, we focus on left-right and government-opposition divide as two alternative explanations.

<sup>4</sup> In the Dutch context these are called ‘moties’, which one might translate as motions. Contrary to other legislatures, however, almost all of these are substantive rather than procedural in nature. Therefore, these are better compared to what in other legislatures are called ‘resolutions’.

<sup>5</sup> The rule that a resolution needs support of at least four MPs is effectively no longer used in parliament: after 1994 there are no known examples of resolutions that did not come to a vote because of a lack of support for tabling it.

<sup>6</sup> MPs who have not introduced any resolution or amendment are excluded from the relevant analysis, because they might bias our results by introducing many ‘zero-cases’ (because one obviously cannot cosponsor if one does not introduce any proposal).

<sup>7</sup> We use the 2002 estimates for SGP and LPF in the 2003-2006 period, because these parties were not included in the 2006 survey.

<sup>8</sup> Note that because MPs from the same party have a policy distance of zero, there is a strong and significant relationship between distance and the same party variable (0.76, significant at the 0.01-level).

<sup>9</sup> Using the glmer function in the R package lme4 (Bates, Maechler, Bolker & Walker 2013).

<sup>10</sup> All expected values have been calculated using Zelig (Imai, King & Lau 2008).



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## Tables

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics**

| <b>Variable</b>              | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Std. Dev.</b> | <b>Min.</b> | <b>Max.</b> | <b>N</b> |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| Cosponsorship of resolutions | 0.02        | 0.07             | 0.00        | 1.00        | 99500    |
| Cosponsorship of amendments  | 0.01        | 0.06             | 0.00        | 1.00        | 70184    |
| Cospecialisation             | 0.04        | 0.11             | 0.00        | 1.00        | 106430   |
| Policy distance              | 0.22        | 0.17             | 0.00        | 0.70        | 105864   |
| Both in government           | 0.34        | 0.47             | 0.00        | 1.00        | 106430   |
| Both in opposition           | 0.18        | 0.38             | 0.00        | 1.00        | 106430   |
| Same party                   | 0.19        | 0.39             | 0.00        | 1.00        | 106430   |

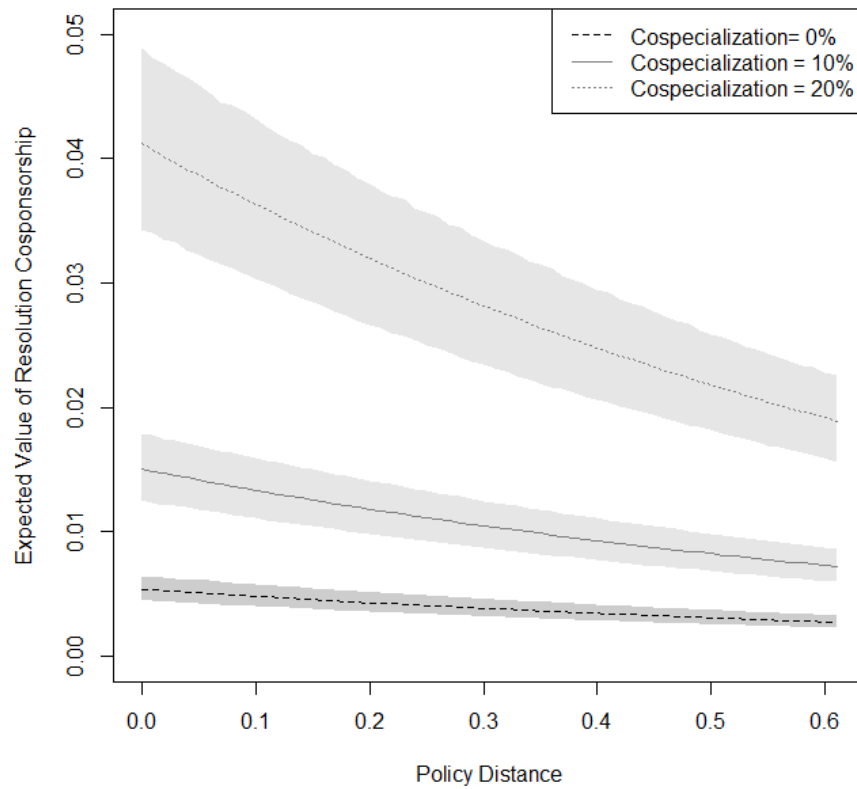
**Table 2: Explaining Cosponsorship**

|                                          | (1)<br>Resolutions                   | (2)<br>Resolutions                   | (3)<br>Amendments                    | (4)<br>Amendments                    |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Intercept                                | -5.42 <sup>*</sup><br>[-5.60; -5.24] | -5.41 <sup>*</sup><br>[-5.60; -5.23] | -6.04 <sup>*</sup><br>[-6.25; -5.83] | -5.93 <sup>*</sup><br>[-6.14; -5.71] |
| Cospecialisation                         | 7.98 <sup>*</sup><br>[7.93; 8.03]    | 7.88 <sup>*</sup><br>[7.79; 7.98]    | 7.97 <sup>*</sup><br>[7.84; 8.10]    | 7.43 <sup>*</sup><br>[7.19; 7.67]    |
| Policy distance                          | -1.34 <sup>*</sup><br>[-1.39; -1.29] | -1.12 <sup>*</sup><br>[-1.19; -1.04] | -1.36 <sup>*</sup><br>[-1.51; -1.21] | -1.36 <sup>*</sup><br>[-1.57; -1.16] |
| Both in government                       | 0.57 <sup>*</sup><br>[0.54; 0.60]    | 0.20 <sup>*</sup><br>[0.16; 0.23]    | 1.07 <sup>*</sup><br>[1.00; 1.13]    | 0.60 <sup>*</sup><br>[0.52; 0.68]    |
| Both in opposition                       | 0.58 <sup>*</sup><br>[0.55; 0.60]    | 0.59 <sup>*</sup><br>[0.56; 0.62]    | 0.54 <sup>*</sup><br>[0.47; 0.61]    | 0.64 <sup>*</sup><br>[0.56; 0.72]    |
| Same party                               | -1.50 <sup>*</sup><br>[-1.55; -1.45] | -1.36 <sup>*</sup><br>[-1.42; -1.31] | -1.46 <sup>*</sup><br>[-1.57; -1.35] | -1.35 <sup>*</sup><br>[-1.46; -1.23] |
| Cospecialisation *<br>Policy distance    |                                      | -0.98 <sup>*</sup><br>[-1.23; -0.73] |                                      | -0.01<br>[-0.71; 0.69]               |
| Cospecialisation *<br>Both in government |                                      | 2.45 <sup>*</sup><br>[2.32; 2.57]    |                                      | 2.94 <sup>*</sup><br>[2.67; 3.22]    |
| Cospecialisation *<br>Both in opposition |                                      | -0.11 <sup>*</sup><br>[-0.20; -0.02] |                                      | -0.68 <sup>*</sup><br>[-0.91; -0.44] |
| AIC                                      | 168749.63                            | 166915.11                            | 47433.60                             | 46815.29                             |
| BIC                                      | 168835.16                            | 167029.14                            | 47515.99                             | 46925.15                             |
| Log Likelihood                           | -84365.82                            | -83445.55                            | -23707.80                            | -23395.65                            |
| Deviance                                 | 168731.63                            | 166891.11                            | 47415.60                             | 46791.29                             |
| N                                        | 98978                                | 98978                                | 69886                                | 69886                                |
| N groups: MP2                            | 373                                  | 373                                  | 324                                  | 324                                  |
| N groups: MP1                            | 373                                  | 373                                  | 324                                  | 324                                  |
| N groups: Period                         | 4                                    | 4                                    | 4                                    | 4                                    |
| Variance: MP2<br>(Intercept)             | 0.75                                 | 0.75                                 | 0.90                                 | 0.89                                 |
| Variance: MP1<br>(Intercept)             | 0.32                                 | 0.34                                 | 0.31                                 | 0.32                                 |
| Variance: Period<br>(Intercept)          | 0.02                                 | 0.02                                 | 0.03                                 | 0.02                                 |
| Variance: Residual                       | 1.00                                 | 1.00                                 | 1.00                                 | 1.00                                 |

Multilevel fractional logit models. Dependent variable: cosponsorship of resolutions or amendments. 95% (Wald) confidence intervals of coefficients in brackets.

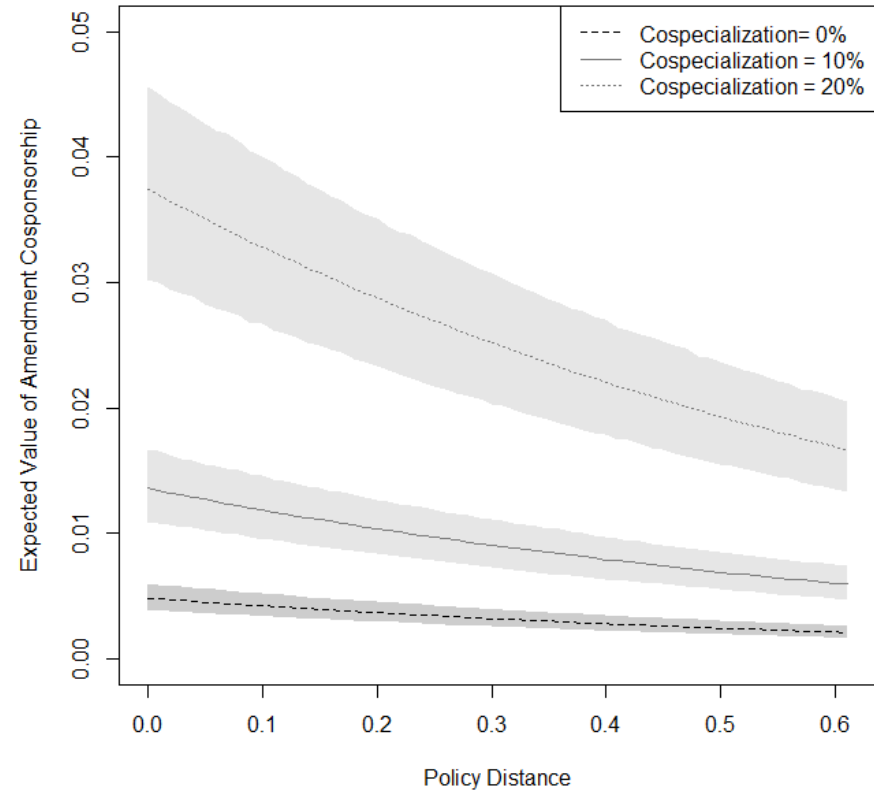
\* 0 outside the confidence interval

## Figures



**Figure 1a: Interaction effect of Cospecialisation and Policy Distance (Resolutions)**

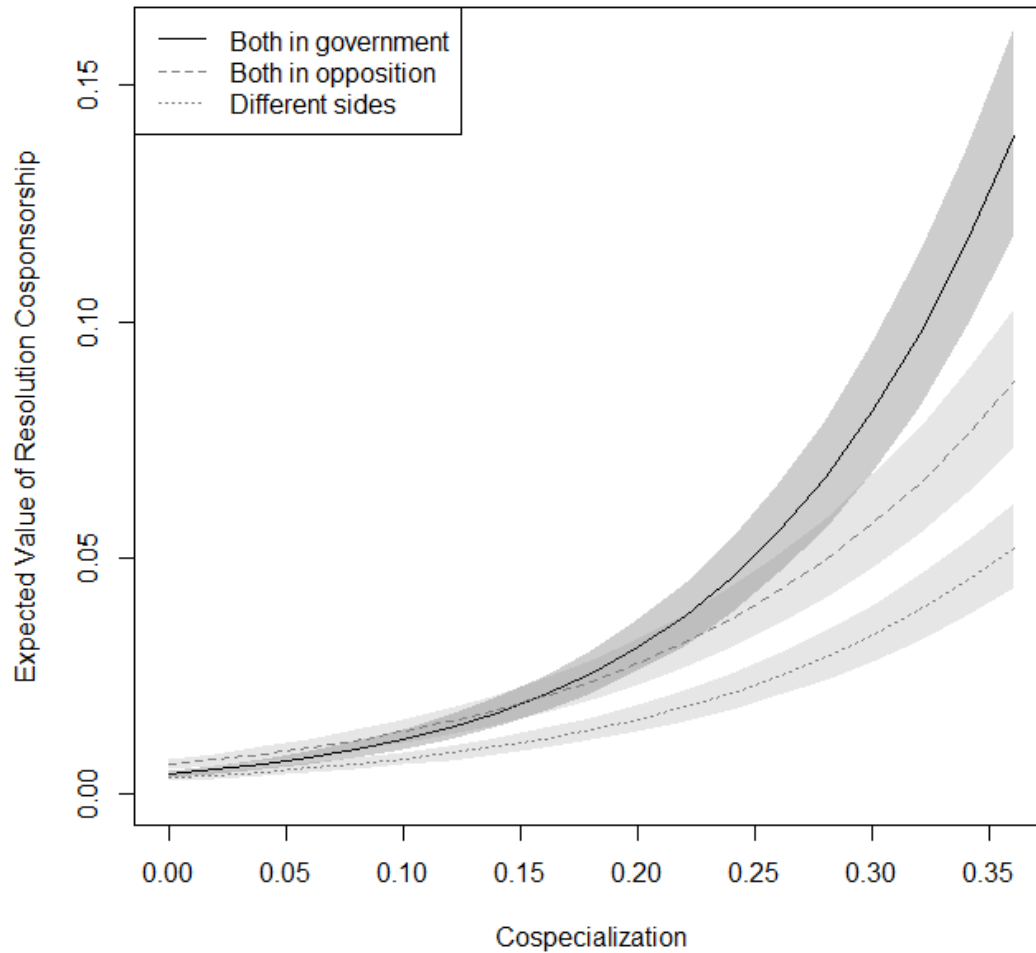
Note: Shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals. Values displayed are for two typical government MPs of different parties. The figure displays values of Policy Distance between the 2.5 and 97.5 percentile.



**Figure 1b: Interaction effect of Cospecialisation and Policy Distance (Amendments)**

Note: Shaded indicate 95% confidence intervals. Values displayed are for two typical government MPs of different parties. The figure displays values of Policy Distance between the 2.5 and 97.5 percentile.

**Figure 2: The effect of cospecialisation on cosponsorship for government MP pairs, opposition MP pairs and ‘mixed’ pairs**



Note: Dotted lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Values displayed are for two typical MPs of different parties with Policy distance kept at its mean value (0.22). The figure displays values of Cospecialisation between the 2.5 and 97.5 percentile.