

*National MPs and their parliamentary behaviour: still a case for structural explanations?*

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The more structured the environment in which political parties function, the more are they expected to act and interact taking into account the institutional structure at work in different settings. This paper deals with institutional determinants of party unity, their impact, if any, and also with the strength of relationships identified. The analysis tests some hypotheses derived from the literature and also provides new hypotheses which consider additional factors and their interactions.

The need for party unity is at the heart of representative democracy and guarantees the articulation of voters' interests and the translation of political opinions and into public policies. Some of the big questions are indeed if parties can stay united despite a federal system at work or an electoral system which discourages loyalty and favours individualism or are they able to adapt and make use of internal mechanisms which counteract environmental influences perceived as obstacles in achieving their objectives, those being either votes, seats or policy goals. The paper offers answers to these questions making use of the data from the 1996 elite surveys and the 2007 expert survey from twenty-three European countries.