

The Hidden Electoral Connection: Analyzing Parliamentary Questions in the Chilean Congress

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Abstract

Legislators in presidential countries use a variety of mechanisms to advance their electoral careers and connect with relevant constituents. The most frequently studied activities are bill initiation, co-sponsoring, and legislative speeches. In this paper, we examine legislators' information requests (i.e., parliamentary questions) to the government, which have been studied in some parliamentary countries but remain largely unscrutinized in presidential countries. We focus on the case of Chile – where strong and cohesive national parties coexist with electoral incentives that emphasize the personal vote – to examine the links between party responsiveness and legislators' efforts to connect with their electoral constituencies. Making use of a new database of parliamentary questions and a comprehensive sample of geographical references, we examine how legislators use this mechanism to forge connections with voters, and find that targeted activities tend to increase as a function of electoral insecurity and progressive ambition.

Keywords: Parliamentary Questions – Progressive Ambition – Personal Vote – Legislators – Chile

Mechanisms for members of parliament to demand information from the government are institutionalized in several European countries. The most well-known procedure involves parliamentary questions (PQ). These can be oral questions posed directly to ministers on the floor of parliament, such as those asked during the renowned “Question Time” in the British Parliament, or written questions to which the government must respond within a stipulated period of time, such as the various types of queries that members of parliament can introduce in the German Bundestag. Most European parliamentary countries include both types in their standing rules of procedure (Russo and Wiberg 2010). This institutional mechanism has been characterized as a tool utilised to enforce government accountability to parliament and to reduce moral hazard (Norton 1993, Wiberg 1994, Sánchez de Dios and Wiberg 2011). In addition, it structures information-seeking behavior on the part of MPs in a manner relatively unconstrained by the disciplining behavior of party leaders. However, PQs provide more than an opportunity to obtain information and demand government action; they offer a chance to signal members’ positions on particular issues, to represent electoral constituencies, and to build a personal reputation (Russo and Wiberg 2010, Saalfeld 2011). As a result, they illuminate the preferences and interests of legislators (Martin 2011a).

The analyses of PQs remain comparatively scant within the legislative studies literature and are confined to parliamentary countries. Their absence from the rules of procedure in the United States and in most presidential countries has contributed to the lack of studies outside the domain of parliamentary countries. But PQs are not absent in all presidential countries. In this paper, we focus on the case of Chile, a presidential democracy that has an institutionalized procedure, the *hora de incidentes*, whereby legislators can give non-lawmaking speeches and request information from the executive branch. Ordinary sessions have specific times set for these activities, which are often reported by the media, shown on TV, and publicized by the legislators themselves. We argue that, as in parliamentary countries, these written information requests, called *oficios*, provide legislators with the means to advance

constituent interests and claim credit. In addition, they are useful to furthering their political careers, given that legislators benefit from cultivating a personal vote.

In this study, we focus on the connection between electoral incentives and the targeting of *oficios*. We expect more marginal legislators (electorally vulnerable and from distant regions) to be more likely to advance *oficios* focused on their electoral districts. In addition, we expect legislators seeking to make a move to the Senate in the subsequent election to be more likely to target their *oficios* to those regions beyond the lower chamber district but within the respective upper chamber district. To conduct this analysis, we collected information on 4,475 *oficios* introduced in the Chilean Chamber of Deputies during the *hora de incidentes* and coded them accordingly.

The contribution of this study is two-fold. First, we extend the existing literature on political representation in presidential countries by showing that PQs play an important role in constituent representation, and that a substantial proportion of PQs are regionally targeted to build a reputation among local constituents. Second, we demonstrate how the progressive ambition of legislators is reflected in the targeting of these information requests. The evidence we present reveals how Chilean legislators cultivate the personal vote, despite prior evidence that characterized their legislative behavior as highly structured by nationally-oriented parties.

The rest of this paper is divided into four parts. We begin with a short review of the empirical findings stemming from the literature on PQs, which, as mentioned above, has focused primarily on parliamentary countries. Next, we describe the institutional context surrounding the *hora de incidentes* and *oficios* in the Chilean Chamber of Deputies, the electoral incentives influencing legislative behavior, and some specific testable implications regarding the targeting of PQs. The empirical section presents the data we collected, the model employed to test our hypotheses, and the statistical results. The last section offers some concluding remarks.

The Study of Parliamentary Questions

Legislators use a variety of mechanisms to connect with constituents and advance their interests. The most studied activities involve bill initiation, bill cosponsoring, and legislative speeches. In addition, extensive literature has examined the relative importance that legislators give to constituency service (e.g., district casework). Empirical studies suggest that the propensity of legislators to engage in these activities is influenced by the strength of the electoral connection. When legislators are motivated by furthering their political careers and electoral rules make cultivating a personal vote an optimal strategy to advance such goal, they will engage in activities designed to enhance their connection with electoral constituents (Cox and McCubbins 2001). For instance, in countries using mixed member proportional rules, evidence shows that members elected in single-member districts are more willing to engage in constituency service than those elected from lists (McLeay and Vowels 2007, Battle 2010, Cain et al. 1987:220, Stratmann and Baur 2002, Lancaster and Patterson 1990). Evidence from the UK shows that electorally vulnerable members make greater use of private member bills and Early Day Motions than do members from safe constituencies (Bowler 2010, Kellermann 2013). Evidence from Latin American presidential democracies shows that, under proportional representation rules that encourage intra-party competition (e.g., open lists), increases in district magnitude enhance the probability that legislators will initiate bills targeted at their personal reelection constituencies (Crisp et al. 2004).

One activity that has received comparatively less attention is the use of questions asked by members of parliaments to demand answers from the government (and, sometimes, related agencies). Most parliamentary countries include opportunities for members of parliament to ask oral and written questions of the government in their rules of procedure (Norton 1993, Russo and Wiberg 2010). The main purpose of PQs, according to most sources, is to exert control and make governments accountable to parliament (Sánchez and Wiber 2011, Saalfeld 2000, Bailer 2011, Akirav 2011). Martin's (2011a:262 & 265)

review of the academic literature on PQs notes that many studies assume “that questions have little application to cultivating relationships with constituents,” however, he argues that content analysis of PQs shows that they “are a standard tool for constituency representation and gathering personal votes.”

Recent empirical analyses of parliamentary countries show mixed results with regards to the linkage between PQs and constituency-focused behavior. For instance, Rasch (2011) focuses on the Norwegian parliament and distinguishes between Question Time and Question Hour. The former is a more open forum where the party leadership exerts no obvious control over the written questions advanced by members of parliament, while the latter is a much more constrained forum for spontaneous questions that is controlled by the frontbenches. The empirical analysis finds that, during Question Hour, leaders are more likely than others to participate while electorally vulnerable members are less likely to do so. However, there is no evidence that electorally vulnerable or opposition members behave differently from others during Question Time. While members who are the only ones from their party in a constituency ask more questions than others, there is not much evidence of an electoral connection.

Analyses from the British House of Commons have examined the connection between written parliamentary questions and electoral constituents with mixed results. On one hand, Saalfeld (2011) finds that members with a visible-minority status and members from constituencies with a high share of non-White residents tend to ask significantly more questions about immigration and minority concerns. On the other hand, Kellerman (2016) shows that, as the margin of victory in prior elections decreases, members ask more questions; however, the margin of victory does not affect the proportion of questions that focus on constituency issues. His conclusion was that electorally vulnerable members use questions to signal effort rather than to bring attention to constituency issues.

Blidook and Kerby (2011) examine members’ questions in the Canadian House of Commons when exploring the relationship between characteristics of the electoral district (e.g., agricultural employment,

immigrant population, fishery employment, etc.) and the propensity to ask questions focused on the related topic. They find that in five of the eight topics studied, constituency interests increase the propensity to ask a question in such subjects. In addition, they find that members' electoral vulnerability increases the number of questions in three of the eight topics. In contrast, Lazardoux's (2005) study of the French National Assembly finds no effect of electoral vulnerability or reelection on the number of written questions asked by members of parliament. He also finds that members from rural districts, where constituents have greater difficulties dealing with the state, tend to ask more questions.

In his analysis of the Irish parliament, Martin (2011b) examines the content of written questions and finds that about 44% have a local focus. He uses district magnitude and having a co-partisan elected from the same district as proxies for incentives to cultivate a personal vote, but results show that neither variable has a statistically significant effect. The results also show that members from more peripheral regions (i.e., further away from Dublin) ask more local questions, which Martin (2011) associates with a greater demand for constituency-centered behavior. In Russo's (2011) analysis of written questions in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, constituency-oriented questions represent around 39% of all questions asked. He finds that members who were born and live in their electoral constituency asked more of those questions, while those in leadership positions asked fewer. Bailer (2011) finds that in the Swiss Lower House, only 11% of parliamentary questions were directly constituency-related. He uses the rule employed to elect members of parliament (majoritarian versus proportional) as a proxy for responsiveness to constituent interests, and finds that it does not have a statistically significant effect on the propensity to ask questions.

To summarize, the literature on parliamentary countries has underlined the importance of PQs as a mechanism of control and accountability, but empirical analyses fall short of showing a strong electoral connection behind their usage. Studies of the UK, France, Norway, and Canada examined whether

members' electoral vulnerability affect their propensity to ask question. In France and Norway, electoral vulnerability does not increase the number of questions asked. Results from Canada show some connection to constituent-related questions in less than half of the topics examined while, in the UK, there is a positive association with the overall number of questions but none with those that focus on a constituency. Studies of Ireland and Switzerland investigated whether incentives to cultivate a personal vote increased the propensity to ask questions, but neither study found support for such a proposition. Other evidence shows that the type of questions asked reflects constituent interests. In Ireland and Italy, a substantial portion of the questions asked had a local focus (although not in Switzerland). There is also evidence of a significant relationship between the topic of PQs and constituency characteristics in the UK and Canada, and the topic of PQs and district characteristics in Ireland and France.

In the next sections of this paper, we describe the usage of PQs in presidential Chile, and explain why we expect to find a significant association between electoral incentives and constituency-focused questions.

The Use of *Oficios* and the Electoral Connection in Chile's Chamber of Deputies

Chile, unlike the United States, has established formal mechanisms to allow legislators to direct questions to members of the government. One such procedure, called *interpelaciones*, requires the support of one-third of deputies to call a special session of Congress with the goal of asking a minister questions related to the matters under his or her purview. This procedure, with variations, is in place in most Latin American countries, such as in Argentina (only for the cabinet chief), Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Unlike most other presidential countries, Chile has another institutional mechanism called the *oficio*, which allows members of congress to put forward written questions that government institutions must answer within a stipulated period of time.

Congressional sessions in Chile are normally divided into three parts: the first two are dedicated to bills and resolutions, while the third, called *hora de incidentes*, lasts 60 minutes and is dedicated to individual speeches on any matter except bills. Legislators use this time to address a variety of issues and frequently request that transcripts of their speeches be sent to relevant members of their constituency. These speeches can also include written questions, *oficios*, and the vast majority do. These *oficios* are the focus of our empirical analysis. The *hora de incidentes* and the use of *oficios* provide a forum to exercise congressional oversight of governmental activities, but they also offer opportunities for constituent service and credit claiming.

The extent to which electoral incentives to cater to constituents is reflected in the written questions advanced by Chilean legislators remains unstudied. There are reasons to expect that legislators' electoral connections should be reflected in the type of questions asked. While several scholars who examined parliamentary countries expected this connection to be reflected in PQs, so far, the evidence has been weak at best. We argue that, in Chile, this linkage should be significant.

Political institutions shape legislators' incentives to cultivate voter support based on their individual characteristics. Since its return to democracy in 1990, Chile's electoral rules have fostered personal vote seeking (Carey 2009:173, Morgenstern et al. 2012). Until the 2015 reform, members were elected under an open-list proportional representation system with districts of magnitude equal to two. Parties or electoral alliances could present two candidates per list in each district, but they could only win both seats if their total vote doubled the vote of the list coming second in the district; otherwise, the second seat went to the list coming second in the district. Given that most districts tended to elect one member from each coalition, the focus of the electoral contest was between the two individual candidates inside the major lists, who competed for preference votes. In addition, prior works have underlined that

the personal vote is stronger in presidential than in parliamentary countries (Carey and Shugart 1995, Morgenstern and Swindle 2005).

Electoral incentives for the personal vote should hold for those legislators with some prospect of reelection (Crisp et al. 2004). Chile has one of the highest rates of reelection in presidential countries, and most legislators build a career in Congress (Carey 2002, Alemán 2013). In addition, elite surveys reflect legislators' concern for local constituents. They tend to state that they primarily represent district voters rather than all voters or the party and express their concern with bringing resources into the district (Nolte 2002, Marengi and Garcia Montero 2006, Marengi 2009, Valverde 2009).

Despite their declared concern with constituent service and the personal vote incentives derived from electoral and constitutional rules, there is not much evidence supporting the notion that legislators' district-oriented attitudes actually promote locally-oriented legislation. Marengi (2009:187-192) examined bill initiation in Chile and found that proposals with a regional and local focus represented a very small percentage of all bills introduced (less than 7% during the period 2002-2006). It could be argued that institutional rules and party discipline make locally-oriented behavior difficult. Legislators are constrained in their ability to initiate pork barrel legislation; omnibus legislation is prohibited; the amendment process is heavily regulated; and executive gatekeeping over several policy areas limits the type of legislation individual members are allowed to introduce. In addition, parties are considered to be rather disciplined, with roll call indices that show a higher level of unity than in many other presidential countries (Carey 2009:174-175, Alemán and Saiegh 2007).

In their seminal book on the personal vote, Cain et al. (1987:215) noted that legislators may be faced with conflicting incentives derived from electoral rules that emphasize the personal vote and legislative institutions that promote party discipline. But in those instances, when legislators are limited in their opportunities to dissent on parliamentary votes to favor constituents and have little control over

the party's reputation, they should have stronger incentives to focus on other district oriented activities (Cain et al. 1987:90, 182, 215; Heitshusen et al. 2005). Thus far, however, in Chile, the legislative consequences of the electoral connection have remained mostly hidden.

We argue that the *Hora de Incidentes*, with its speeches and written questions, is the main forum for showcasing constituent service in Chile. Our analysis concentrates on the written questions (i.e., *oficios*). Examples from our dataset reflect the various types of *oficios* advanced by members of Congress, and their intent. Consider the following examples:

- On August 22nd, 2006, Deputy Rosauro Martínez introduced an *oficio* addressed to the Secretary of Education and the Governor of the Region Bio Bio, calling attention to the lack of resources in a school with a special needs program in the commune of Chillán.
- On March 22nd, 2007, Deputy René Alinco introduced an *oficio* addressed to the Secretary of Health requesting information regarding patients' lengthy waits for biopsies at a regional hospital and requesting an audit of the hospital's administrative proceedings.
- On July 5th, 2007, Deputy Alfonso de Urresti introduced an *oficio* addressed to the Secretary of Housing, the Governor of the district, and the Mayor of Valdivia, calling attention to the poor state of a main road in his district's capital, Valdivia, and requesting information regarding the timeline and budgetary allocation for road repairs.
- On November 18th, 2008, Deputy Jorge Sabag introduced an *oficio* addressed to the Secretary of Housing inquiring about the program of subsidies for rural housing and seeking improvements in the allocation of such resources.
- On July 13th, 2007, Deputy Sergio Bobadilla introduced an *oficio* addressed to the executive requesting information on the assignment of presidential scholarships, including the profile of former scholarship holders, selection procedures, and the composition of the selection committee.

As the examples show, *oficios* offer legislators an opportunity to address substantive policy matters. The first three examples focus on issues that are specific to the member's district. The other two focus on more general issues that are not explicitly circumscribed to the member's electoral district.

We expect our empirical analysis of *oficios* presented by individual members to reflect not only the recognized purpose of oversight and control of governmental institutions, but also the electoral and career incentives associated with the personal vote. We advance three specific hypotheses. First, we expect legislators who are more electorally vulnerable to introduce a larger number of written questions having a constituency focus than more electorally secure members. Since Chilean legislators depend on the support of their local constituents to win office, those with small electoral margins are under greater pressure to cultivate personal votes than are more secure legislators. When members consider their seat safe, they have the flexibility to engage in other types of activities. In their interviews with members of parliament in six chambers, Heitshusen et al. (2005) find that marginal members in parliaments where electoral rules create personalizing incentives are significantly more likely to express a constituency focus. We expect this motivation to manifest itself in the number of *oficios* introduced.

Second, we argue that members elected from more peripheral regions should have greater incentives to ask more constituency-focused questions. Constituents from districts further away from the center of governmental and economic power should have greater difficulties accessing the central government bureaucracy, which is located in the capital, Santiago. Concerns of remote districts are less likely to be highlighted by the national media or championed by influential interest groups. Constituent-focused *oficios* offer a way for legislators to address the particular needs of these voters. Prior research has found that constituent-focused behavior on the part of legislators is more common among members who come from districts further away from the seat of government (Heitshusen et al. 2005). Consistent with this view, Martin's analysis of the Irish case (2011b) shows that members from Dublin are less likely

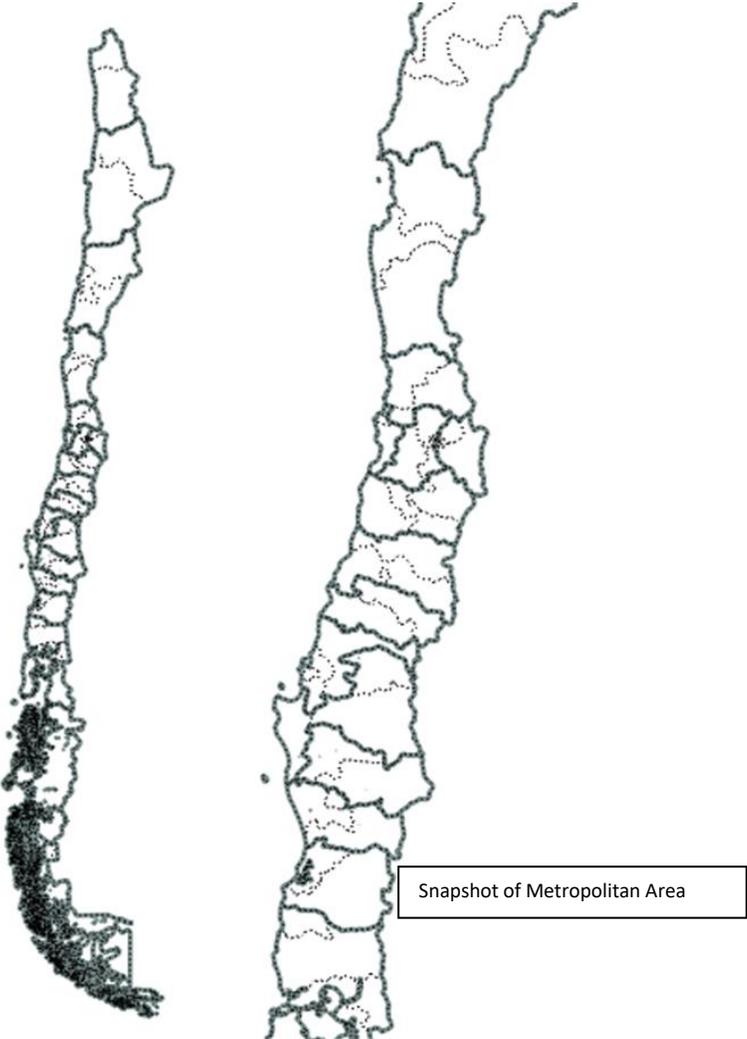
to ask constituency-focused questions than those from districts further away. As a result, we expect to find legislators from peripheral regions more actively targeting their question to district concerns.

Lastly, we expect written questions to reflect the progressive ambition of legislators. Prior works have not examined whether the progressive ambition of legislators is reflected in written PQs, but have underlined how such ambition is often reflected in legislative behavior. For instance, Van der Slik and Pernacciaro (1979) and Schiller (1995) show that members of the U.S. House of Representatives tend to increase bill submission when they expect to jump to a higher career position. Along the same lines, Hibbing (1986) and Miler (2015) find that representatives change their voting behavior when they expect to become Senators. Treul (2009) shows that U.S. senators who expect to run for the presidency are more likely to deviate from party mandates. Finally, Victor (2011) highlights that progressively ambitious legislators tend to increase signals of policy expertise to voters.

Other studies have shown that behavioral patterns reflecting progressive ambition are rather common in federal countries. In the case of Brazil, Ames (2001) links gubernatorial and mayoral ambition with increases in amendments to federal budgets. Micozzi (2009, 2014a, 2014b) shows that Argentine legislators seeking a mayoral position are more likely than others to draft bills centered on their home districts, while those with municipal-level goals tend to cosponsor legislation more frequently. Micozzi and Rogers (2014) reveal that Argentine legislators seeking to become governors are more likely than others to initiate bills targeting their district's economically relevant activities (i.e., beef, soy, or tourism). However, multilevel careerism is not necessarily restricted to federal or highly decentralized systems. For instance, Chasqueti and Micozzi (2014) show that in Uruguay, which is a unitary country with nationally-oriented parties, deputies who seek to become state intendents tend to draft twice as many bills with a local focus as their colleagues, especially if they belong to rural and peripheral districts.

In Chile, a non-trivial number of members of the Chamber of Deputies choose to run for the Senate at the end of the term in office, and, as a consequence, have incentives to build a reputation with constituents beyond the regional boundaries of their lower chamber district. Such career jumps from the Chamber of Deputies to the Senate, which have been ignored by the legislative literature, imply that members switch from a small predictable constituency to a wider territory, which includes, by definition, a broader electorate. Figure 1 shows the differences in district boundaries for the lower (solid line) and upper chamber (dotted lines).

Figure 1. Districts for the Chamber of Deputies (dotted) and the Senate



Deputies seeking to move to the Senate need to reach otherwise inconsequential voters to improve their reelection prospects. Legislative signals can help deputies seeking to become senators reach these new constituencies. Our theoretical expectation is that subjects seeking a seat in the Senate should use *oficios* centered on their new prospective constituency to further their career goals.

In summary, we expect *oficios* with a local target to capture the electoral and career incentives of Chilean legislators. We specify three hypotheses relating *oficios* to the constituency-oriented behavior of deputies:

- **H1.** Electoral vulnerability: The lower the margin of victory of a legislator, the greater the number of constituency-focused questions.
- **H2.** Peripheral districts: The further away a district is from the capital (Santiago), the greater the number of constituency-focused questions asked by its respective legislators.
- **H3.** Progressive ambition: Deputies that run for a Senate seat should be more likely than others to target the regions beyond the lower chamber district but within the respective Senate district.

In the next section, we describe the data and models used to test these hypotheses, and present the statistical results.

Empirical Analysis

The dependent variable in our analysis is the number of constituency-focused questions asked by each legislator. As have others before us, we utilize counts as the dependent variable and legislators as the unit of analysis (e.g., Saalfeld 2011, Kellerman 2016). Our data-gathering process followed several steps. First, we downloaded transcripts from the sessions of Chamber of Deputies (*Diario de Sesiones*) for the period 2006-2010, which we used to collect information on *oficios* offered during the *Hora de Incidentes*, including the name of the member asking the written question and a description of its content.

From this, we developed a sample of 4,475 *oficios*. Next, we downloaded geographic information, more specifically, the GIS shapefiles with the corresponding information of every single geographical point in Chile. These data come from the *Sistema Integrado de Informacion Territorial* made available by the Library of Congress in Chile. It covers electoral districts, towns, neighborhoods, rivers, mountains and even glaciers. We linked the geographic information to the territorial boundaries of each district, and then reviewed the content of the *oficios* data to evaluate their association with the district specific geographic information. An *oficio* was coded as 1 if it mentioned any of the geographical references of the electoral district of the deputy, or 0 otherwise. For example, if an *oficio* is drafted by a legislator from a district that includes the city of Viña del Mar and the name of this city is included in the headline of the *oficio*, then it is coded as 1. This strategy is similar to the one employed by Gamm and Kousser (2010, 2013) to classify district-targeted legislation in the U.S., and by Crisp et al. (forthcoming) to classify parliamentary questions in New Zealand. Overall, the average number of *oficios* targeted to the legislator's lower chamber district was 15, and the average number of *oficios* was 36.

Our key independent variables are operationalized in the following manner. To capture electoral vulnerability, we use two variables. The first one captures the margin between the legislator and his or her partner on the list. Since, in most districts, each coalition wins one seat, the focus of the competition is most often within each list. The second one captures the margin between the legislator's list and the other top-two list. In addition, to capture how peripheral the district where the legislator was elected is, we use the logged distance between the main city in the district and Santiago (i.e., log of 1+distance in km). To capture progressive ambition, we include a dummy variable indicating whether the legislator ran for the Senate in the Senate district that encompasses his or her lower chamber district.

We also include a series of control variables. Prior studies have argued that legislators with prominent roles in the chamber have lower incentives to use credit-claiming and position-taking

mechanisms than do more marginal legislators. In addition, prior studies have argued that first-time members and members of the opposition are likely to have greater incentives to utilize this institutional mechanism, although the evidence from earlier studies is mixed. To control for these effects, we include dummy variables that capture whether a legislator was a member of the chamber's directorate, a member of key committees (*Hacienda* and *Constitución*), a first-time member, and a member of the government coalition. When testing the third hypothesis, we also control for legislators that run for the Senate but in districts other than the one associated with their current lower chamber district, our reasoning being that our key independent variable measures each member's targeting of their related district (not every possible district). Lastly, we include a control for the total number of *oficios* presented by each deputy.

We run two count models. The first is a negative binomial model with the number of *oficios* targeted to the lower-chamber district as the dependent variable. The second is a zero-inflated negative binomial regression with the dependent variable being the number of *oficios* targeted to the area within the legislators' corresponding Senate district but beyond the lower-house district. Given the excessive number of zeros in the second model (deputies present an average of 1.5 *oficios* targeted to this specific region), the zero-inflated model is typically considered to be more appropriate. The sign and significance of the key independent variable in this model is not changed if we run a negative binomial model instead of a zero-inflated model. Results appear in Table 1. The coefficients are shown in bold and standard errors are placed below them.

Overall, the results lend support to our hypotheses. In model #1, both variables capturing electoral vulnerability have the expected sign and are statistically significant. An increase of 1 in the intra-list margin decreases the incident rate of *oficios* by 1%, while holding other variables constant. In terms of the list margin, an increase of 1 decreases the incident rate of *oficios* by 1.3%, again holding constant the other variables in the model. For example, the predicted number of *oficios* for an "electorally safe"

deputy with an intra-list margin of 39 points and a margin list of 43 (e.g., Patricio Walker) is around 4, while the predicted number of *oficios* for an “electorally vulnerable” legislator with an intra-list margin of 1 and a margin list of -20 (e.g., Enrique Estay) is close to 14.

Table 1. Number of *Oficios* Presented, Count Models

Variables	Model #1	Model #2
Intra-list margin	-0.010 *	-0.036 ***
	0.005	0.011
List margin	-0.013 **	-0.025 **
	0.005	0.011
District distance	0.167 ***	0.092
	0.043	0.100
Run for Senate in related district		1.093 **
		0.427
Run for Senate in other district		1.096
		1.307
Leadership	-0.140	0.594 *
	0.168	0.320
Member of key committees	-0.189	-0.119
	0.181	0.430
First-time member	0.019	-0.352
	0.152	0.342
Opposition	-0.246	0.087
	0.188	0.406
Total <i>oficios</i>	0.023 ***	0.017 ***
	0.002	0.003
Constant	0.843 ***	-0.577
	0.267	0.668
Inflate:		
Intra-list margin		-0.194
		0.156
List margin		-0.156
		0.115
First-time member		1.317
		1.637
Total <i>oficios</i>		-0.204 **
		0.103
Constant		3.136 *
		1.845
Number of Observations	120	120
Log likelihood	-376.712	-152.753

Note: Statistical significance * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

The variable capturing the district's distance from Santiago is also statistically significant and in the expected direction. This variable goes from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 7.78. An increase in the logged distance from Santiago by 1 increases the number of *oficios* targeted to the lower chamber district by 18%. The predicted number of *oficios* for a deputy who comes from Santiago is close to 4, while the number for a deputy from a district located at an average distance from the capital is close to 9.

The goal of model #2 is to evaluate the consequences of progressive ambition, more specifically, whether candidates for the Senate are more likely to target *oficios* beyond their lower chamber district but within the associated Senate district. Results confirm this hypothesis. Running for the Senate in an associated district increases the predicted number of such *oficios* from close to 1 to close to 3.

The control variables are not statistically significant, except for the variable capturing the total number of *oficios* and the dummy variable capturing leadership positions, both of which have a positive sign. The inflate portion of the model captures the likelihood of being in the "always zero" group (i.e., not introducing *oficios* targeted to this region). We included variables capturing the number of *oficios* introduced, electoral vulnerability, and being a first-time deputy. The results show that those introducing more *oficios* are actually less likely to be in the "always zero" group, while the coefficients for the other variables are indistinguishable from zero.

Conclusions

To conclude, we argued that PQs are an important tool in the hands of electorally-motivated legislators, and have shown the way in which they offer an opportunity to connect with key constituencies. The work we present here makes four distinct contributions. First, the literature that examines questions posed by legislators to the government remains scant and has almost exclusively focused on parliamentary countries. This article expands the range of cases examined and offers a window into the use of PQs in presidential countries. Many studies centered on parliamentary countries hypothesized that

written questions would capture constituency-focused activities but did not find strong and consistent effects. In Chile, however, the analysis revealed that electoral vulnerability and belonging to peripheral districts increase the number of constituency-focused PQs.

Second, the article contributes to the literature on legislative behavior by analyzing PQs in a presidential democracy characterized by both electoral rules that promote a personal vote and a party system with strong national parties. In their seminal work on the personal vote, Cain et al. (1987:215) considered this dilemma and expected that legislators limited in their opportunities to dissent on parliamentary votes to favor constituents would focus instead on other district-oriented activities. In this article, we show that Chilean legislators, who belong to nationally-oriented parties and exhibit high levels of party discipline, use PQs to cultivate the personal vote.

In addition, the results presented here contribute to the literature on Chilean politics. They show that district-focused behavior is an important determinant of the type of questions put forward by deputies. While elite surveys have noted that legislators express their intent to prioritize the representation of district voters, the legislative literature has not provided much evidence showing district-oriented behavior. This study shows legislative effects that are consistent with electoral rules that promote personalization and that are compatible with the findings of elite surveys.

Lastly, this study adds to the existing literature by showing that progressive ambition is reflected in the pattern of written questions. Prior works highlighting the constituency focus of PQs have not evaluated this effect, nor have studies on progressive ambition evaluated whether its implications extend to PQs. We show that Chilean legislators seeking a Senate seat are significantly more likely to target their respective Senate district. Further research should illuminate the extent to which this finding is reflected in the behavior of legislators elsewhere.

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