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French MPs and Law-making: Deputies' Activities and Citizens' Perceptions

CÉCILE VIGOUR

Legislative studies research often insists on the weakness of the French Parliament compared with the executive. Yet very little qualitative and quantitative empirical research has been done into the work of deputies in the French National Assembly, or into the institution's role in policy and law-making. This article addresses these research gaps by first analysing the characteristics and drivers of French MPs' involvement in law-making rather than in other parliamentary activities, either in the Parliament or in their constituency. Second, it takes an original approach by comparing MPs' perceptions of their activities with those of their electorate through the use of mixed-method analyses (open and closed questionnaires with 230 MPs; 13 focus groups with ordinary citizens). This is indeed a crucial issue in order to better understand the causes fuelling citizens' criticism of their representatives.

Keywords: *parliaments and citizens; law-making; mixed-method analyses; parliamentary work; representation.*

Introduction

Whereas scholars often insist on the weakness of the French Parliament compared with the executive, very little empirical (both qualitative and quantitative) research has been done on the work of deputies in the French National Assembly (NA), or into the institution's role in policy and law-making (Costa & Kerrouche, 2007, 2009; Huber, 1996; Kimmel, 1991). Moreover, while legislative studies constitute a dynamic branch of political science at the international level, they have remained a neglected topic in France (Nay, 2003), where even basic data on the chambers and their members were lacking until the 1990s (with the exception of Cayrol, Parodi, & Ismal, 1971, 1973). As such, relatively little is known about the behaviour of legislators and how they view their work. Further, research has tended to focus more on representation than on the activities of French MPs. Finally, citizens' perceptions have largely been disregarded in qualitative empirical analyses. Yet linking how MPs and citizens feel about representation offers better understanding of the (dis)trust that exists in representative democracies.

This contribution will address these research gaps by first analysing the characteristics and drivers of French MPs' involvement in law-making rather than in other parliamentary activities, either in the Parliament or in their constituencies. Which variables influence legislative work and parliamentary specialisation? How do legislative activity and party discipline affect the ability of MPs to

influence law-making? Second, an original approach will be taken by comparing MPs' perceptions of their activities with those of their electorate. The approach will combine the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data collected between 2009 and 2011 during the 'Parliamentary Legitimation and Democratic Governance in France and in the European Union' (LEGIPAR) research project. The answers given by MPs in face-to-face interviews (using open and closed questionnaires) will be compared with the perceptions of ordinary citizens gathered during focus groups. The concordance and dissonance between these two types of opinion systems and attitudes constitute an original means of investigating legislative activities. How can discrepancies be explained? What are their consequences?

The following section will address three gaps in the academic literature on the French political system that this contribution would like to fill and will present the methods to do so. The subsequent section will focus on the involvement of MPs in law-making. The final section will point up tensions in law-making at the National Assembly caused by the torn allegiance between MPs, their parties, their constituencies and pressure groups.

Contrasted Perceptions: How MPs and Citizens View Parliamentary Work

Three Gaps in the Academic Literature on the French Political System

This contribution would like to address three gaps. The first involves the paucity of parliamentary studies in France until recently (see Costa, the introduction of this issue). While since 1958 the executive has used different means to assert its pre-eminence and overcome opposition from Parliament (Hayward, 2004; Thiébault, 2006), claims about the constitutive weakness of the French Parliament (especially in the legislative process) have probably hindered empirical research. This needs to be assessed with more empirical and detailed evidence, however, and it is necessary to move beyond roll call analysis.

The second challenge is therefore to better understand the activities and perceptions of MPs, and their involvement in law-making more specifically, in order to move beyond the importance placed on the rules of such a rationalised parliament.¹ What part of their work is dedicated to legislation and government oversight? What is the relative importance of the different parliamentary instruments? What drives MPs' involvement in law-making? To answer these questions, I shall examine the influence of political leaning (the degree of difference between left-wing and right-wing MPs) and the differences between backbenchers and leaders, based on their responsibilities within the Chamber as well as their seniority as an MP. The attitude of French MPs is also influenced by their election on a local basis (involvement in their constituency is often a condition for re-election) and on whether or not they hold another elective office at the local level (16 per cent of the MPs in the sample were single-mandate holders versus 10 per cent overall in the National Assembly).² How do the preferred activities of MPs affect their priorities?

Third, given the strong academic interest in the contested legitimacy of elected bodies, it seems particularly appropriate to compare MPs' perceptions of their own activities and what they actually do with the perception held by citizens. How can we explain discrepancies in the perception of MPs and citizens regarding the role of MPs, the influence of political leaning in law-making, and the influence of Parliament compared with the executive? This is all the more interesting given that few research teams have collected data on the views of both MPs and citizens. Such a comparison tackles not only a political issue, but also a methodological one in a context in which poll and election analyses underscore a lack of trust in democratic institutions and formal politics. Finally, from a theoretical perspective, the division of labour between researchers focusing on MPs and those interested in citizens creates a problematic gap that impedes the ability of researchers to understand fully the causes fuelling citizens' criticism of their representatives.

Methods and Data

This contribution will use mixed-method analyses of LEGIPAR data. The views and activities of MPs (collected through questionnaires and interviews) will be contrasted with the perceptions of ordinary citizens gathered during focus groups (Lefébure 2011; for a detailed presentation of the research design and of the groups, see Rozenberg, this issue). The semi-directed discussions dealt with the National Assembly as an institution ('What do the Parliament and its deputies do?') and as a representative chamber ('How is sovereignty delegated in the representative system?').³ The data point up that even citizens who claim not to be interested in politics have complex opinions about Parliament and its representatives.

Law-making at the French National Assembly: A Priority Activity in a Weak Chamber?

How do MPs see law-making compared with other aspects of their work? Do their perceptions converge with those of citizens? The first subsection will highlight the drivers of deputies' national-oriented activity (especially the level of responsibility versus the holding of several mandates and their preferred mandate). The second section will address the place of law-making within MPs' activities in the National Assembly. MPs emphasise their committee work and political group activities whereas most citizens focus only on plenary debates. The third section will look at the reduced role of MPs compared with the executive's influence in policy- and law-making. The distinction between visible and non-visible politics made by Tsebelis (1988) largely explains the differences observed among MPs and between them and ordinary citizens.

Involvement at the National and Local Level

Involvement at the national level is clearly tied to responsibilities within Parliament (for example, the distinction between leaders and backbenchers, and the

holding of several elective offices), whereas the impact of political orientation is more nuanced. When MPs make their work in Parliament a priority despite feeling more satisfaction in their constituencies, citizens express a more balanced point of view.

MPs: The Importance Placed on Parliamentary Work. MPs see their involvement in national politics and policy work as their most important task (see Figure 1).⁴ More than half of MPs rated their participation in the work of the Assembly as most important by far. This priority was higher for MPs with a single elective mandate (69 per cent versus 48 per cent), for left-wing MPs (60 per cent versus 40 per cent for UMP deputies⁵) and for leaders (61 per cent versus 40 per cent for backbenchers, see Table 1). It was also linked to the mandate preferred by MPs:⁶ 46 per cent of MPs who preferred their mayoral mandate did not mention participation in the work of the Assembly as one of their two most important tasks (compared with 30 per cent of those who preferred their mandate as deputy). Conversely, there was almost no difference between women and men. Further, only 17 per cent insisted on their role in influencing government policy. This low score is certainly linked to the difficulty MPs

Figure 1: The Most Important Tasks for French MPs

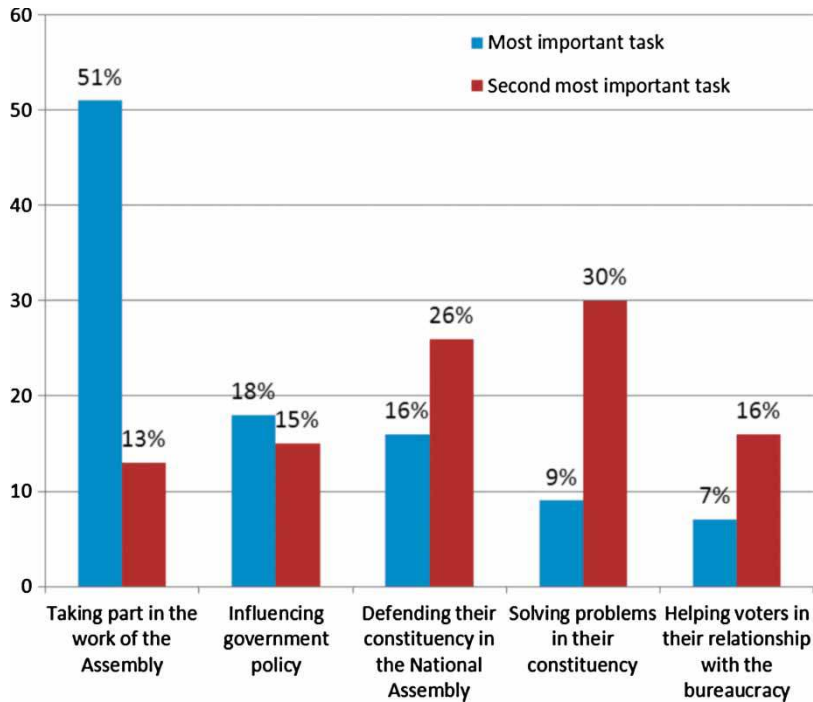


Table 1: MPs' Main Task, Political Leaning, Responsibilities and Gender

Percentage		Percentage for Whom the Work of the Assembly is the Most Important Task
All MPs		51
Political leaning	Left	60
	Right	40
Level of responsibility	Leaders	61
	Backbenchers	40
	Left-wing backbenchers	61
	Right-wing backbenchers	40
Other offices	MP only	69
	Other mandates	48
Gender	Female	53
	Male	50

face in influencing law-making (see the next two subsections). Symmetrically, the second most important activity was tied to MPs' constituencies: the resolution of problems in the constituency (30 per cent) and its defence in the Assembly (26 per cent). The defence of their constituency's interests at the National Assembly was important for 42 per cent of backbenchers, but only for 25 per cent of leaders. When looking at the answers provided by MPs and when recoding each answer according to a binary option (priority given to work at national versus local level⁷), a dominant profile emerged. Fifty-eight per cent of MPs gave priority to their national work and considered work in their constituency to be secondary. Opinion on the three alternative attitudes was split about equally (between 13 and 15 per cent): equal priority was given to the national and local levels, or importance placed first on their constituency and then on national work (see Table 2). Attitudes differed according to political leaning: two-thirds of left-wing MPs (66 per cent), but only half of right-wing MPs (53 per cent) preferred the 'national–local' profile; the 'national–national' profile was two times more likely among left-wingers as opposed to those on the right (even when level of responsibility was taken into account). Of course,

Table 2: The Two Most Important Tasks for French MPs

%	All MPs		MPs who Prefer their Mayoral Mandate	
	National level	Local level	National level	Local level
First task				
Second task				
Local level	58	13	56	21
National level	15	14	5	18

among leaders, 29 per cent gave a double priority to their national responsibilities, while MPs with only one elective mandate neglected the double priority to their local constituency. Similarly, MPs who preferred their mandate as mayor were less likely to choose the ‘national–national’ profile (5 per cent compared with 15 per cent) and more likely to choose the ‘local–local’ profile (21 per cent compared with 13 per cent). Between men and women, the same importance was placed on these profiles, with the exception of the ‘national–national’ option (chosen by only one female respondent).

As Seen by Citizens: A More Nuanced Perception. During the focus groups, citizens identified a dual mission for MPs: they are seen both as representatives of the constituency (with a twofold mission at the local and national levels) and as deputies in Parliament, where their activities are mainly assimilated with policy and law-making. It was felt that, as representatives, MPs should be local interest brokers, ‘transmit’ what ‘the people’ think, ‘defend the interests of the constituency’ and ‘push projects’:

Baya: For me, it is inconceivable that an MP would think up and vote a bill without working hand in hand with the people. (Group 8 (G8))

As they are aware of certain economic and social difficulties in their constituencies (through visits to companies, meetings with labour representatives and trade unions, and the like), MPs holding other elective mandates were considered to be a relevant force for policy proposals. Through ‘their knowledge of the local social fabric and of the implications of a given project ... a mayor is well placed for understanding the problems encountered by craftspeople, business people, retired people, etc. ... Rather than having an MP who is more technocratic by nature and more removed from the constituency’s social realities’ (Denis, G2). With regard to the national level, participants insisted on the National Assembly as a decision-making body.

Law-making in the Work of MPs at the National Assembly

Like MPs, citizens identified law-making as the main activity of MPs at the national level, but their attention was mainly focused on the plenary sessions emphasised in the media rather than on the work done in committees and political groups. MPs felt that the less visible and non-public work was the most important aspect of their work in the NA. This discrepancy was a main source of criticism against MPs.

For Citizens: Law-making as the Main Activity of MPs at the National Level. At the national level, participants in the focus groups identified almost exclusively the voting, preparation and discussion of bills as the main parliamentary task. Only one group also mentioned oversight of the executive. Participation in

law-making was thus only counterbalanced by involvement in the constituency and their role as representatives.

Moreover, it was the voting phase during plenary sessions that attracted attention much more than the preceding debate. Opinions about parliamentary debates were therefore quite controversial. Most participants felt that plenary debates are theatrical due to the ritualised sparring between the left and right wings. These are seen as somewhat fake given that they generally do not have an impact on outcomes:

Aldjia: They put on a good show but the decisions have already been made ... There is something resembling a debate. It is purely theatrical. Since everything has already been decided between them in advance. (G1)

Conversely, others argued that public debate is a cornerstone of democracy.

Relatively few participants mentioned committee work or discussions within and between political groups in order to reach a compromise. Few participants referred to amendment work, when 'sometimes the remarks of the opposition are taken into account':

Interviewer: What is the work of a deputy?

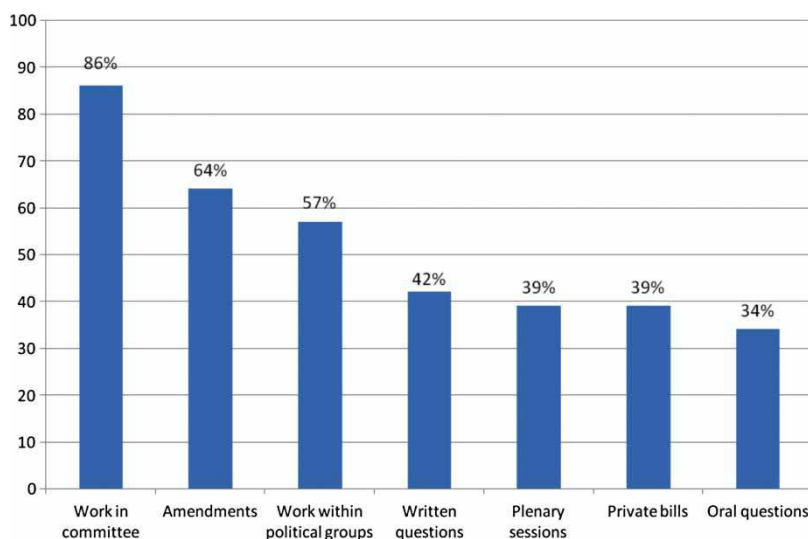
Jacques: Laws first. Bills which have been prepared are voted. They do not just push a button; there are committees and they try to progress on societal issues. [...Their role is to] make the law evolve. (G3)

Finally, citizens emphasised political and party allegiance in legislative work whereas only two focus groups mentioned the legal aspect, the importance of law in the hierarchy of norms and the specific skills required.

Law-making in Practice: The Importance of Non-visible Work for MPs. MPs, on the other hand, saw their non-visible work as central. They felt that the most cardinal tools and procedures within the National Assembly, by order of importance, were: committee work, amendments and work within political groups. Indeed, to the question 'Please tell us about the usefulness of the following parliamentary tools and procedures. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not useful and 5 being very useful', almost 90 per cent of MPs first mentioned committee work as useful or very useful.⁸ This was followed by amendments (64 per cent) and work within their political group (57 per cent). Indeed, MPs felt that involvement in a committee and in their political group increased their ability to influence the content of bills, even before they reached the floor (see the next section). Further, around two-fifths of MPs considered written questions, plenary sessions and private bills to be useful or very useful, while only one-third were convinced of the interest of oral questions (see Figure 2).

There is a substantial difference in how left-wing and right-wing MPs view the usefulness of private bills (see Table 3). Almost half of left-wing MPs deemed them to be useful or very useful compared with 30 per cent in the majority. Moreover, SRC MPs⁹ placed more importance on work within their

Figure 2: The Most Useful Tools in Parliamentary Work



political group (74 per cent versus 44 per cent among UMP members). Opinions differed, however, among left-wing MPs: GdR MPs had an even more negative opinion than their right-wing colleagues on this issue. The main differences were linked to gender. Except for amendments (where gender did not make a difference), women found the parliamentary tools more useful than men. They were two times more likely than men to choose private bills and plenary sessions (63 per cent versus 34 per cent).

When it comes to actual committee work, more than half of committee work is devoted to legislative activities (the examination of government and private bills, hearings, reports, decrees, and so on), almost 25 per cent involves non-legislative work (information and inquiry reports; discussions about the creation of inquiry commissions and missions of evaluation; communication with the media) and almost 15 per cent involves committee work (such as the nomination of *rapporteurs*).¹⁰

Table 3: The Most Useful Tools Depending on Group Affiliation and Gender

Percentage	Work Within Political Groups	Private Bills	Plenary Sessions
All MPs	57	39	39
Left-wing MPs	83	49	36
Right-wing MPs	89	30	41
SRC MPs	74	50	36
UMP deputies	44	32	40
Women	71	63	63
Men	54	34	34

The specialisation that committee work involves is related to seniority, degree of responsibility, as well as to the size of the political group, but not to the left/right divide or to the number of elective offices held. Regardless of their political leaning, more than two-thirds of MPs choose to specialise regardless of whether they are part of the right or left, SRC or UMP groups. The less senior an MP, the more specialised he/she tends to be (80 per cent of first mandate MPs are specialised versus 62 per cent of those with at least two parliamentary mandates). Non-specialisation is more common among leaders (one-third versus one-quarter for backbenchers). Owing to their limited number, GdR MPs are required to work on diverse topics.

Our qualitative interviews with MPs reinforced the distinction between visible and non-visible work in the NA:

My time in the Assembly is useful, except when I am on-call in the hemicycle because a bill is ready. But it's not the end of the world; I work on other things instead. (UMP MP, 1988–2012, 65 years old)

Participating in committee work not only enables MPs to specialise (particularly through hearings and report writing) and become recognised as an expert on a topic, but also means that some of their recommendations are taken into account.¹¹

I believe that with all of our work on the shortcomings of the [professional tax] reform and the potential repercussions for local government, after a lot of work, we managed to make the government much more wary. (SRC MP since 1997, 66 years old)

MPs involved in the law-making process shared the belief that 'room for manoeuvre' still exists for representatives, even in the opposition, especially when they have experience:

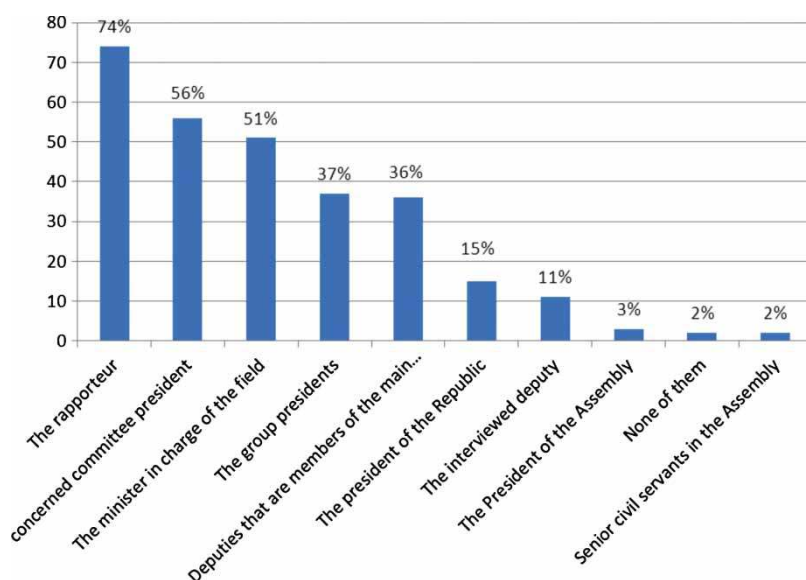
There is limited room for manoeuvre, but it exists and it will one day bear its fruit . . . I try to improve bills, because we are not able to cancel them in any case. (SRC MP since 1997, 66 years old)

An MP's status in the law-making process (as a *rapporteur*, for example) gives them more latitude to act.

The Main Actors in Parliamentary Law-making. Four main variables play a key role in the parliamentary law-making process: an MP's status vis-à-vis a bill's topic, whether or not they belong to the majority, their level of responsibility and their political group's position.

MPs clearly pointed to three main actors in the law-making process when a government bill reaches the floor (see Figure 3):¹² the *rapporteur* (listed by three-quarters of respondents), the relevant committee chair and the Minister in charge of the legislation (for more than half of the MPs questioned); next came the committee's members (one-third). Only 15 per cent of MPs listed the President

Figure 3: The Main Actors in Law-making in the Assembly



of the Republic as a potential recourse. There was widespread consensus on the *rapporteur* and the committee chair (quoted independently of all other variables). There were differences only in the third and fourth positions (between the Minister in charge of the legislation, the group leader and the committee's members).

MPs felt that belonging to the concerned committee gave them more influence.¹³ Over a third felt they had a strong or very strong influence on the work of a committee to which they belonged; one-third felt they had moderate influence, whereas only about 20 per cent judged their influence to be weak or non-existent (see Table 4). Being a member of the government majority had a strong impact on MPs' influence. Regardless of whether they belonged to the UMP or SRC, roughly one-third of MPs believed they had moderate influence, almost half of the majority MPs estimated their influence in committees to be strong or very strong (compared with 20 per cent for the opposition), while more than 40 per cent of opposition MPs felt their influence was non-existent or very limited (versus 13 per cent in the majority). More generally, almost 90 per cent of leaders felt they had moderate,

Table 4: How MPs Perceive their Influence on the Work of the Committees to which they Belong

Percentage	All MPs	Left-wing MPs	Right-wing MPs	Men	Women
No or limited influence	27	44	14	15	27
Moderate influence	37	36	38	39	26
Strong or very strong influence	36	20	48	36	37

strong or very strong influence over the work of their committees. Conversely, even though there was no difference between men and women regarding the ‘strong and very strong influence’ categories, women were under-represented in the moderate category (26 per cent versus 39 per cent). There was no difference between those who were solely MPs and those who held other mandates.

With regard to their influence on the positions of their political group, almost half of MPs felt they had some influence, whereas one-quarter felt that their influence was non-existent or weak and another quarter felt that it was strong (see Table 5). There was only a slight difference between left-wing and right-wing MPs: almost half of them felt they had a moderate level of influence; one-third of left-wing MPs and one-fifth of right-wing MPs felt they had a high degree of influence. Not surprisingly, leaders on both sides and MPs holding other mandates believed they had more influence. Gender was not a contrasting variable.

One right-wing MP gave several examples of such influence on their group’s position, underscoring that disagreement within the majority was not necessarily known outside the group:

The more you act early in the process, the more a bill can be changed. As long as nothing is set in stone, debate within the political group may change the direction of a bill in the desired sense. I believe that group meetings, and internal and informal work meetings are most important. Here is an example: There were a few of us that wanted the duress of work to be taken into account in the pension reform. The minister listened to us. However, had a decision already been taken, it would have been too late had we not already spoken up ... It is important to act in advance as much as possible. (UMP MP, 2002–12, 63 years old)

Thus, non-visible discussions may affect the law-making process.

Law-making in the National Assembly: A Lesser Role Compared with the Executive

MPs’ and citizens’ perceptions converged when it came to opinions on the reduced role that Parliament plays in the law-making process compared with the executive.

Table 5: MPs’ Perception of how they Influence the Positions of their Political Groups

	All MPs	Left-wing MPs	Right-wing MPs	Leaders	Only MP	Holding other Mandates
No or limited influence	27	22	31	26	39	26
Moderate influence	47	46	47	37	42	48
Strong or very strong influence	26	32	22	37	29	26

MPs' Perceptions. More than half of MPs felt their influence on enacted bills (either private or government bills; see Table 6) was limited. Twenty-eight per cent felt that they had no influence; one-third felt they had limited influence; 30 per cent felt they had moderate influence; and only 8 per cent felt they had a strong or very strong influence. There was, however, a marked difference between the majority and the opposition: whereas half of MPs in the majority felt they had no or limited influence (versus three-quarters in the opposition), almost two-fifths of the former felt they had moderate influence (less than 20 per cent in the opposition) and 10 per cent felt they had a strong or very strong influence. Leaders were much more likely to feel they had moderate influence (half versus one-quarter of backbenchers), but this was due to the greater degree of influence felt by majority leaders for whom more than half felt they exerted moderate influence (more than twice as much as majority backbenchers). There was no difference based on gender.

MPs feel that they have even less influence on government bills. Indeed, almost three-quarters of them felt that they had little or no influence on government bills; 16 per cent felt they had moderate influence; and less than 10 per cent felt they had a strong influence. This opinion was more contrasted among the opposition: four-fifths of opposition MPs had the impression they had no influence. Even among the majority, however, two-thirds were of the same opinion; one-fifth found they had moderate influence; and 10 per cent felt they had a strong degree of influence. Leader deputies (from the right and left) did not feel that they influenced government bills any more than backbenchers did; there was also no clear impact related to holding other mandates. Sixty per cent of female MPs (versus 45 per cent of male MPs) felt that they had no influence on government bills.

If we compare results on the influence and satisfaction felt by MPs in Paris with satisfaction in their constituencies, there is a clear correlation (except for government bills): those MPs more satisfied by their work in Paris also felt that they had a strong influence on their committee, political group and enacted laws (see Table 7).

In qualitative interviews, MPs expressed more contrasting views. On the one hand, some MPs insisted on the weakness of Parliament compared with the

Table 6: MPs' Influence on Enacted Bills

	All MPs	Left-wing MPs	Right-wing MPs	Right-wing Backbenchers*
No influence	28	44	17	17
Limited influence	34	33	35	37
Moderate influence	30	19	38	35
Strong influence	7	4	9	9
Very strong influence	1	0	1	2

*Only right-wing backbenchers are mentioned because the level of responsibility does not change the influence of opposition MPs.

Table 7: Satisfaction in Paris and MPs' Influence

Satisfaction	Influence on Committees			Influence on Political Group			Influence on Enacted Laws		
	No or Limited	Moderate	Strong or Very Strong	No or Limited	Moderate	Strong or Very Strong	No or Limited	Moderate	Strong or Very Strong
No or limited	23	13	11	21	18	3	19	9	12
Moderate	30	32	26	26	30	31	29	29	29
Strong or very strong	47	55	63	53	52	66	51	62	59

executive, especially under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (see also Rozenberg, 2012):

The last Constitutional review (2008) drained the MP role of all meaning. MPs are only the shadow of their former selves and the President now controls everything. It is also due to the personality of the President of the Republic . . . We are associated with law-making, but our opinions are seen as irrelevant. Parliamentary work today allows only for expression within commissions and the majority has given itself incredible power to censure, meaning we are useless. We are left to question the government on current topics. But we're strictly gesticulating. It's pathetic. It is no longer a representative democracy at all. (UDI MP since 2002, 54 years old)¹⁴

On the other hand, some MPs reaffirmed the legal status of the Parliament for law-making (and not just for influencing bills):

The parliament has no influence on legislation, since it is the legislator. The government submits a bill to Parliament, Parliament examines the private bill, it is the Parliament that decides, that makes the law. (SRC MP, 1989–2012, 73 years old)

Between these two positions, most representatives emphasised that even opposition MPs can influence law-making if they intervene very early in the process. First, their specialisation and recognised expertise – through their involvement in the spheres of debate – may enable policy entrepreneurs to convince their undecided colleagues and thus help shape public opinion in their favour:

When you work a lot on a case, everyone listens to you. Whether on the left or the right, what matters is the influence you can have in your circle. [. . . For example, with regard to] France's non-participation in George Bush's last Iraq war, I was very vocal on this issue, including in the circles closest to the President of the Republic. [I developed] a strategy for speaking out anywhere there was a debate. And then, slowly, I tried to convince

undecided MPs and influence the opinion of journalists which meant that, in the end, the government refused to go to war. (SRC MP, 1981–2012, 64 years old)

Several MPs from both the majority and the opposition spoke of ‘lobbying’ for the strategies they developed in order to convince a minister of the relevance of their project or of a proposed amendment – lobbying ministers, *rapporteurs* in both chambers, and sometimes via the media, before a bill reaches the floor, because the debate is more or less over before this stage:

I work a lot with the ministries, usually on local issues. When I propose amendments to a bill that are important to me, I lobby. I make appointments, I meet with the Senate rapporteur, I explain the reasons behind my amendment ... I do a lot of work in advance, so that, when we arrive in session, things are more or less finalised and go well ... I take part in the general discussion in such a way that ministers know that I won’t back down ... To me, politics is not activism, it is a magisterium of influence we have to organise well so that when the time comes there is more than just one line in the press. (UMP MP, 1988–2012, 65 years old)

Therefore, although the success rate of private bills is very low, this does not necessarily mean that such proposals do not have some impact. Indeed, some may be included in successful government bills through the amendment procedure.

From the Citizens’ Standpoint. Citizens were almost unanimous regarding the weight of the executive compared with Parliament and the role played by each (some described the President as ‘a monarch’). The executive is seen as calling the shots and defining the main orientation of projects, while Parliament ‘controls and more or less validates’ policies decided upon by the executive:

Karine: There is a balance of power, but it is more or less well-balanced depending on the issue. The President makes a proposal. Then ... the two parliamentary chambers control and more or less approve the government and president’s decisions. (G11)

Given this, some participants questioned the relevance of parliamentary activity if ‘everything is decided in advance’:

Benjamin: The Assembly is not a machine for validating the government’s projects! (G10)

Within the executive, participants systematically mentioned the President of the Republic, but not necessarily the government and ministers. As they belong to the same party, there is a lot of confusion about the roles of the President and Prime Minister.

Citizens gave three explanations for the primacy of the executive. First, they attributed it to the fact that, since 1958, the executive has been able to restrict contestation from Parliament. Indeed, the government can legislate without parliamentary debate using Article 49.3 of the Constitution or it can ask for a final vote on a bill including only amendments accepted by the government (*'vote bloqué'*):

Denis: It is sometimes obvious that the government is trying to force something through with a vote of confidence. You can see that there are moments in parliamentary life when they have difficulty getting bills passed ... At such times, deputies can speak and act more freely. (G2)

Second, citizens noted that the pre-eminence of the executive is legitimised by the majority in presidential and legislative elections, and the necessity to make decisions:

Elisabeth: There are different opinions; but there is nevertheless an outcome! It is the majority that wins. The majority may be wrong, but it is legitimate. (G3)

Finally, most participants referred to the increased 'presidentialisation' of the French regime due to the personality of the (then) President, Nicolas Sarkozy.

As far as legislation is concerned, MPs and citizens agreed that there is an imbalance of power between Parliament and the executive.¹⁵ However, there was a clear discrepancy with regard to the concrete law-making process: citizens emphasised the role of plenary sessions whereas MPs stressed work before this stage. As such, there was a notable distinction made between visible and non-visible politics.

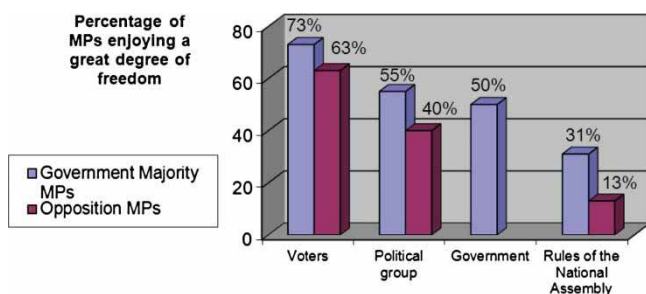
MPs: Between Party, Constituency and Pressure Groups

The relationship between MPs and their parties, political group, electorate and pressure groups raises the question of their autonomy and degree of discretion and, conversely, the relative influence of such groups on MPs' actions. Our survey showed that group discipline tends to be interiorised and pointed up the strong impact of the National Assembly's rules.

The Interiorisation of Group Discipline and its Impact on Law-making

A Variable Degree of Freedom towards their Electorate, Party and own Judgement. We examined the degree of freedom felt by MPs via two series of questions. The first was: 'How would you assess your degree of freedom vis-à-vis: (a) the rules of the Assembly? (b) your political group? (c) your electorate? (d) the government (this last question was addressed only to MPs from the majority). Please give a score between 1, no freedom, and 5, complete freedom'. *Ceteris paribus*, left-wing MPs felt less free than their right-wing counterparts. The

Figure 4: Right-wing and Left-wing MPs who Feel a Great Degree of Freedom



feeling of freedom among MPs was strong vis-à-vis voters (73 per cent for right-wing MPs versus 63 per cent for left-wing MPs), significantly contrasted vis-à-vis political groups depending on political affiliation (55 per cent for right-wing MPs versus 40 per cent for left-wing MPs), and limited with regard to the rules of the National Assembly (see Figure 4).

MPs in their first mandate also felt a greater degree of freedom vis-à-vis their electorate. This attitude is perhaps in contrast to the feeling of being a prisoner to so many other constraints (the still new rules of the Assembly, positions of the group, discipline vis-à-vis the government and President, and so on). While this may seem tied to the fact that they have not yet sought re-election, there was an even higher degree of freedom felt by MPs who had previously lost a legislative election (especially for right-wing MPs: 89 per cent versus 63 per cent, but also on the left 66 per cent versus 53 per cent), perhaps because their defeat was attributable not only to their electorate, but also to their party (choice of candidates, etc.).

Left-wing MPs felt more constrained by their political group. At first glance, this is surprising because party discipline among right-wing MPs is actually very strong. We can wonder whether this answer is sincere and not linked to the desire of majority MPs to reassess their importance, as the media regularly portray them as submissive to the will of the President of the Republic (half of majority MPs felt they had somewhat strong or very strong freedom vis-à-vis the government, and only one-fifth felt they had limited freedom). The contrast among left-wing MPs was strong, however, and only one-third of socialist and radical MPs had an impression of great freedom vis-à-vis their group, compared with almost all GdR MPs (see Table 8). This difference can be explained by the fact that GdR MPs do not feel that they really influence the positions of their group, unlike SRC MPs. More than three-fifths of MPs with at least four mandates felt a great degree of freedom (versus only 40 per cent). Another explanation stems from the fact that majority MPs have other means of influencing the context of bills before their discussion on the floor. In qualitative interviews, while some MPs said it was difficult ‘to both express their own ideas and their solidarity’ (UMP MP

Table 8: MPs' Degree of Freedom vis-à-vis their Political Groups

%	All MPs	SRC MPs	UMP MPs	Men	Women
No or little freedom	48	57	42	15	29
Moderate	28	30	27	35	24
Complete freedom	24	13	31	49	47

since 1993, 61 years old), others noted that, in group meetings, real debate takes place within the majority, in the presence of ministers or the Prime Minister, even though afterwards party discipline is often required:

I like meetings of our political group because the Prime Minister is often there ... There are also members of the cabinet, which means that there is a real debate within the group ... Because current clichés refer to an iron fist ... No, there is debate. But afterwards, the Prime Minister may say: 'I ask that you vote this bill'! (UMP MP, 1988–2012, 65 years old)

Thirty-one per cent of right-wing MPs felt completely free vis-à-vis the rules of the Assembly, while more than half of left-wing MPs thought they had no or little freedom or moderate freedom (see Figure 4). This strong contrast is probably due to the additional power that the rules of the Assembly give to the majority group; but as there were also differences among left-wing MPs, the rules appear to be more constraining for MPs affiliated with a group with strong party discipline. Even right-wing MPs felt rather bound by the Assembly's rules, because they give supremacy to the executive (regarding agenda-setting, the constitutional means to overcome parliamentary opposition, etc.). Finally, seniority gave deputies a stronger feeling of freedom vis-à-vis the Assembly's rules, perhaps because they also have better knowledge of the rules and it allows them to play with and bypass them.

Apart from political orientation, gender was another influential variable on this issue. First, more women felt they had little or no freedom vis-à-vis their political group (29 per cent versus 15 per cent) and they were less numerous in the moderate category (24 per cent versus 35 per cent). Second, women were over-represented among MPs who did not feel free vis-à-vis the Assembly's rules (60 per cent versus 45 per cent) and they were under-represented among MPs who felt free or completely free (13 per cent versus 26 per cent). Even vis-à-vis voters, women felt less free (58 per cent felt complete freedom versus 71 per cent of men).

The second set of questions measuring MPs' degree of freedom looked at discipline when voting and was split into three different questions. First: 'If you intended to take a certain position in the Assembly, but your party wanted you to take an opposite position, what would you do? (1) Follow your party's position. (2) Follow your own judgement'. Then: 'If you felt that a majority of your electorate was opposed to the positions of your political group or party in

the Assembly, what would you do? (1) Follow the position of your electorate. (2) Follow the position of your party'. Third, 'If you intended to take a certain position in the Assembly but thought that a majority of your electorate would prefer you take the opposite position, what would you do? (1) Follow the position of your electorate. (2) Follow your own judgement'.

More than half of MPs felt that a deputy who disagrees with the party line should follow his/her own judgement, whereas 30 per cent found it legitimate nevertheless to toe the party line. There was great disparity between parties, however, as right-wing MPs were overwhelmingly in favour of this (64 per cent versus 17 per cent, with a level of non-response twice that of left-wing MPs) whereas half of left-wing MPs were split equally on the issue (a small majority of SRC MPs would follow their party, whereas GdR MPs felt that it was more legitimate to act in accordance with their own opinion). Voting the party line is certainly easier when MPs believe that they have some influence on it, as proven by the SRC and GdR groups: half of SRC MPs believed they had moderate influence on the group's positions and almost one-third believed they had a strong degree of influence. Conversely, almost half of GdR MPs felt that they had little or no influence, whereas more than one-third felt they had a strong influence. This difference is consistent with the greater heterogeneity of the GdR group, which mainly included MPs from two differing parties (the Green party and Communist party).

With regard to the choice between voters' opinions and the party line, 40 per cent of MPs would follow their party's instructions while a quarter would respect voters' preferences; one-third did not want to answer the question, which shows the embarrassment of some MPs. There was a strong left-right divide. An overwhelming majority of left-wing MPs appeared to be in favour of supporting the party line (56 per cent versus 15 per cent, with almost 30 per cent of non-responses), but right-wing MPs were split into three equivalent groups (voters, party and non-response). The gender divide was also strong: more women would follow the party line (56 per cent versus 41 per cent). This was not due to the over-representation of women among left-wing MPs: indeed, whereas men's attitudes differed according to their political orientation, women had a similar attitude independently of it.

When it came to conflict between their own judgement and voter opinion, however, male and female, left-wing and right-wing MPs, as well as political groups, all converged. Around four-fifths of MPs would follow their own judgement (less than 10 per cent gave the opposite opinion and 10 per cent did not answer). This attitude was coherent with the freedom MPs felt towards voters. Therefore, law-making appears to be more influenced by the Assembly rules and party line than by voters' opinions.

Party Discipline Partly Contested by Citizens. Citizens were aware of the limited freedom that MPs enjoy vis-à-vis their parties and that party discipline is strong in practice, whether it is required by the President of the Republic, the Prime

Minister or the leader of a political group. Participants gave examples of ‘very strict voting instructions’, ‘a guiding line from which MPs within the majority could not depart’. They felt that debate was ‘muzzled’ at the start of the legislature, even though since 2011 this unity has progressively crumbled with the creation of groups inside the UMP in the lead-up to the 2012 elections.

Citizens quoted a few cases where MPs or ministers did not follow the instructions given by their parties. In 2011, some senators refused to vote for a bill on immigration; in 2008, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, a right-wing junior minister of Ecology, accepted an amendment that went against the government’s will but was coherent with her own convictions; in 1998, right-wing MP Roselyne Bachelot gained notoriety when she went against her group and pleaded in favour of the bill on homosexual civil partnerships. Citizens underscored the danger of such attitudes for MPs’ careers: to be publicly disapproved of by political leaders, overlooked for portfolios and responsibilities within the party, and not re-invested in a constituency or re-elected due to the dissident image that comes with such lack of discipline.

The focus groups were divided over the relevance of party discipline (see Table 9). Three main arguments were advanced in favour of it. First, although ‘MPs represent the people’, most are elected as the representative of a party, and legislative elections are based on a ‘government programme’. In addition, it was felt that MPs must be coherent in their votes for voters to rely on them:

Catherine: MPs should logically have more freedom of speech, but they represent a political party and so they follow a political line. (G10)

Denis: It is nevertheless quite paradoxical that a constituency, which votes for a socialist MP for example who in the name of his/her freedom could vote in favour of all the right-wing bills ... MPs are not mandated to defend the interests of the population that elected them. Their mandate is to defend policies at the national level because they are affiliated with a party. And then, at the National Assembly, they obey the voting instructions they are given ... Deputies are primarily there to locally convey a government’s policy. Deputies are not meant to be accountable for their daily action in their constituencies ... We must give the President and his/her Prime Minister the means necessary to implement the policies for which he/she was elected. (G2)

Second, they saw party discipline as a condition for political stability and as a means for efficiency that allows the government to make decisions, even when unpopular. Indeed, since 2001, legislative elections fall after the presidential election:

Denis: Since MPs are elected in a legislative election which gives the majority to a single party, the Chamber becomes dominated by a political party, and then a government’s programme is applied! I think it would be very dangerous if every day a deputy woke up and voted in a different

manner. We are lucky to have fairly stable institutions . . . We changed the order of legislative and presidential elections precisely in order to ensure that when we elect a president, s/he will have loyal MPs during that same period of time. (G2)

Several focus groups gave counter-examples, such as periods of cohabitation (always mentioned as negative) or the defeat of the left in the 2002 and 2007 national elections (attributed in one focus group to a lack of discipline in left-wing parties, which was a source of confusion for voters). Another risk was also raised when, fuelled by changes in their convictions, MPs switch their allegiance (*'retournement de veste'*).¹⁶

Third, according to citizens, MPs should nevertheless be free to follow their own judgement or that of their electorate under certain circumstances. Several participants in each group regretted the strength of the right-left divide upon which the French political system is based. Considering ideas regardless of the political leaning of their promoters would allow a synthesis of the best proposals to emerge:

Michel: Politics should do more to take citizens' opinions into consideration . . . There are very good ideas on the left, and very good ideas from the centre . . . (G5)

Such convergence was deemed justified when 'the future of the country' is at stake (for instance, on issues of unemployment, deindustrialisation). Moreover, 'in an ideal world', adherence to a party (which participants deemed inevitable) would not necessarily mean strict party discipline, because in a democracy MPs should be allowed to express themselves freely: they should 'defend their ideas', try to 'convince' their colleagues, 'rally people to their cause' and make decisions

Table 9: Main Arguments For and Against Party Discipline

General Principles	Arguments in Favour of Party and Group Discipline	Arguments Against
The Principle of representation	MP as a party representative MP as the representative of a 'government programme'	MP as a representative of the constituency
Efficiency	Party as a basis for MPs (in the analysis of parliamentary rules, the examination of bills' content, the choice of strategies) Party discipline as a means for the government to have a stable majority and be able to make decisions, even when they are unpopular	Irrelevance of the left-right divide upon which the French political system is based
Convictions and values	Coherence with the values of their party and its electoral programme	Freedom of speech and vote in a democracy 'Vote in all honesty' and according to their own convictions

‘in all honesty’. Proposing amendments and private bills based on their convictions would allow for the introduction of new ideas.

Finally, it was felt that MPs should take into account the interests of their constituency and the opinions of their electorate (for instance, in terms of town and country planning):

Jean-Jacques: For parties, the Assembly is their lapdog. MPs will vote so that their party passes government and private bills, sometimes against the interests of those who elected them. (G1)

The main arguments for and against party discipline are outlined in Table 9. They show the tensions that exist between differing perceptions of representation in constituencies and parties; these are more complex than the main distinctions in political theory with the figures of trustee, delegate, etc. (Converse & Pierce, 1986; Wahlke, Eulau, Buchanan, Ferguson, & Leroy, 1962).

The Influence of Pressure Groups: Lobbies, Social Movements and Voter Contestation

This section will focus on the following question: under what conditions do interest groups, social movements and voter contestation influence the law-making process during the parliamentary phase?

Different Perceptions of Lobby Groups and Association Pressures. In France, interest groups are not as legitimate as in some other countries. MPs are thought to represent ‘the general interest’, although citizens feel that their representatives should defend the interests of their constituencies. French public opinion is usually very suspicious of ‘private interests’ and of how such interests influence policy and law-making. The weight of such interests in public decisions is regularly contested because there is no transparency owing to the lack of laws regulating such practices:

Denis: Real lobbying goes on that we don’t see, but which exists. And I think it is crucial in influencing a bill’s final content ... These are things which are somewhat obscure ... Some companies have their own lobbyists who can intervene. They sometimes prepare texts in order to influence votes. (G2)

To examine the attitudes of MPs regarding amendments proposed by pressure groups, we asked two different questions to two halves of the parliamentary sample: ‘When examining a bill in the Assembly, (A) a big French firm, (B) a charity organisation, sends you some drafted amendments that it would like defended. How do you react? (1) You defend them. (2) You do not defend them. (3) No answer’¹⁷ (see Table 10). There was a stark contrast in the results: 80 per cent would agree to defend amendments requested by a charity organisation versus 65 per cent from a firm (with 10 per cent of non-responses in the two cases). There was no difference regarding amendments sent by a

Table 10: Acceptance of an Amendment Proposed by a Big French Firm

Percentage (<i>N</i> = 111)	All MPs	Left-wing MPs	Right-wing MPs	MPs with No Other Mandates	MPs with Other Mandates
Accept the amendment	65	48	78	87	61
Refuse it	25	35	17	13	27
Did not answer	10	17	5	0	11

Note: A total of 118 MPs were asked the question referring to a charity organisation; 113 were asked about the firm.

charity organisation that may be identified as a ‘social interest’ (even though the rate of non-response was higher among left-wing MPs: 13 per cent versus 8 per cent); but the attitude of left- and right-wing MPs differed with regard to firms: almost three-quarters of right-wing MPs would accept amendments proposed by a firm, compared with less than half of left-wing and SRC MPs (the rate of non-response was three times higher among left-wing MPs, 16 per cent versus 5 per cent). Moreover, MPs with no other mandates were more willing to do this (87 per cent versus 61 per cent, even if we consider left- and right-wing MPs separately). Conversely, MPs’ level of responsibility in the chamber and gender had no impact. Many left-wing MPs as such viewed the ‘private interests’ represented by big companies as illegitimate.

Some MPs expressed their reticence even with regard to charity amendments (‘I could defend them only if they were coherent with the politics I want to encourage’, SRC MP since 2007, 62 years old); others would accept defending an amendment presented by a firm only if it were in the interest of the whole economy (impact on employment, etc.).

The Impact of Social Movements on Law-making Stressed by Citizens. Rather than underscoring the role of lobbies in law-making, all of the focus groups stressed the means that exist to oppose legislative and government decisions. Almost all referred to the demonstrations and strikes against the 2010 pension reforms, but also to protests directed at MPs regarding the suppression of road signs warning of speed traps in 2011. This last strategy was seen as an efficient means of contesting government decisions, sometimes even more effective than demonstrations:

Karine: We can take a stand on decisions which have already been taken. We just have to go to our MP’s constituency office, knock on the door and say: ‘We are not happy with that bill you voted for. Do something.’ With a bit of luck, that would be more effective than a large demonstration . . .

Julie: French people have always given their opinion . . . They have always protested [in the streets]. They are not revolutionaries, but. . . . In this case they tried to contact high office holders in order to make themselves heard.

Table 11: Summary of the Main Results from the Comparison of MPs' and Citizens' Perceptions

	MPs	Citizens
Deputy, a double activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in Parliament • National level first, then local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of local interests • Role of intermediation
Main variables influencing involvement at the national level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> political leaning (left +); level of responsibility (+); a single elective office (+); preferred mandate (deputy +); gender (women +) 	
Work at the National Assembly	<p>Convergence = law-making perceived as the main activity; but priority given respectively to:</p> <p>Non-visible work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective committee work dedicated to legislation (rather than to executive oversight) • Priority work behind closed doors: committee work; amendments; work within a political group 	<p>Visible work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing, discussing and voting bills • Plenary sessions
Main variables influencing involvement in law-making	A strong consensus: no significant variables	
MPs' influence on law-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to moderate influence • Balanced by several variables: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited influence in the National Assembly • Strong legitimacy of the President in general • But contestation over the 'hyper-presidentialisation'
Main variables influencing law-making	<p>the specific status of some MPs given a bill's topic;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> belonging to the majority (+); level of responsibility (+); position of the political group 	
Style of representation and impact on law-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free from their electorate • Bound to their political group and to the Assembly's rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to take into account voters' interests and opinions • Ambiguous perception of party discipline
Main variables influencing the degree of freedom in law-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political group (UMP -) • Gender (male +) 	
Other actors	Lobbies	<p>Strikes, demonstrations, protest aimed at elected officials</p>

They did not think they would be heard if they protested in the street and they wanted to try something different. (G11)

Directly protesting to elected officials (especially MPs) could present the advantage of being less risky and less time-consuming compared with strikes and demonstrations. According to one participant, such action would be more structured and complementary, like the action of lobbies, which are another legitimate type

of representation in some countries (such as the US). The double pressure of voters and companies would be even more efficient. Nevertheless, participants were aware that the 2012 presidential and legislative elections encouraged MPs to put pressure on the government out of fear of being sanctioned by voters.

Although they recognised the legitimacy of social movements, citizens were divided over the actual impact potential on government and parliament. Some people felt that political actors should listen to citizens in times of mass demonstration or when polls show a strong opposition among citizens; they should also consult people during public meetings or through popular referendums. Others believed that the government and parliament should be able to make unpopular decisions for the good of the country. For this reason, the President of the Republic as well as MPs should keep their freedom vis-à-vis voter opinion:

Roland: [The president] does not govern with opinion poll results. He governs according to what he feels and truly believes is best for the country ...

Denis: when a President is elected by a majority based on a programme, he should respect the agenda. Precisely, it is not 'I govern according to the majority at a given time', but 'I govern according to the majority that elected me and upon which my legitimacy is based'. (G2)

Therefore, although citizens were aware that social movements can influence the policy- and law-making process as well as its outcomes, they were also conscious of the difficulties this can generate.

Table 11 summarises the main findings of our research.

Conclusion

MPs and citizens share a general vision regarding the dual mission of MPs. However, whereas most MPs gave priority to their national work, citizens insisted more on their intermediary role and on representing local interests. The main variables in terms of involvement at the national level were political leaning (left-wing MPs place greater emphasis on their national missions) and level of responsibility, as well as the holding of a single elective office and a deputy's preferred mandate. Regarding their work in the National Assembly, opinions also converged on law-making as a priority activity compared with parliamentary oversight. Yet while citizens emphasised the voting of bills and discussion during plenary sessions, MPs insisted on committee work and work within their political groups for amending legislation.

Both insisted on the rather limited influence of Parliament compared with the executive. MPs nevertheless had a more nuanced point of view, balanced by several variables: the specific status of some MPs when it comes to a bill's subject, belonging to the majority, a person's level of responsibility and the position of one's political group. Moreover, MPs insisted on the importance of

intervening before a government bill reaches the floor (through discussion with the relevant minister, his/her advisers, etc.). The style of representation and its impact on law-making were the most controversial issues. According to citizens who had an ambiguous perception of party discipline, MPs should take into account the interests and opinions of their electorate. On the other hand, MPs felt free from their voters, but bound to their political group and to the Assembly's rules. The main differences expressed among MPs were based on political orientation, one's group, as well as gender (women generally felt less free in their choices, although more satisfied and more convinced of the usefulness of parliamentary tools). Nevertheless, mass demonstrations, strikes, protest and lobbies may strongly influence law-making.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative data on both MPs and citizens helped contribute to analyses of representation and law-making, and such analyses shed new light on concrete parliamentary activities. As our results suggest, political leaning (and belonging to the majority or opposition) does not have an impact on all aspects of law-making to the same extent. As there is disagreement among MPs depending on their involvement at the national level and in law-making, principal component analysis could allow such profiles to be identified and contribute to role theory. Finally, even from a political or societal point of view, better understanding of the discrepancies between MPs and citizens could help reinforce the legitimacy of Parliament and reduce the general distrust of representatives in so far as it would point up some topics that could be questioned – for instance the over-representation of ritualised conflicts between the left and right in the media, which more easily cover controversies and work in plenary sessions as opposed to committee work.

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Notes

1. The database provides information on what MPs say about their activities more than on such activities per se.
2. MPs may also be mayors (or members of a town council) or/and members of a local or regional council (sometimes with responsibilities in their executive). Conversely, a deputy must resign from his/her seat when he/she becomes Minister (but since 2008 gets it back automatically when he/she is no longer a member of the government).

3. For a more detailed analysis of representation, see Rozenberg as well as Brouard et al. and Costa et al., this issue.
4. The question was: 'Of these five statements, which is the most important to you? Which is second most important? (a) Influencing government policy, (b) Helping voters in their relationship with the bureaucracy, (c) Taking part in the work of the Assembly, (d) Defending your constituency in the National Assembly, (e) Solving problems in your constituency'.
5. The UMP group was the right-wing parliamentary group that supported the (then) government majority.
6. Forty-four per cent of MPs preferred their mandate as deputy, whereas 42 per cent preferred their mandate as mayor.
7. The following code was used: 'national level' included 'taking part in the work of the Assembly' and 'influencing government policy'; 'constituency' included the three other answers.
8. The 'useful' and 'very useful' answers have been analysed together.
9. The SRC group, the main left-wing parliamentary group, included mainly MPs from the Socialist party and Radical party. It formed the opposition at the time, along with the GdR group, which included MPs from the Green party and Communist party.
10. This classification was chosen to distinguish between the different types of activity collected in the database on committees.
11. For some MPs, committee work has become more interesting since the 2008 constitutional reform because bills examined in the hemicycle are now amended in committees where most debates take place.
12. The question was as follows: 'Imagine that a very big firm or an association wants to modify a bill being examined by the National Assembly, but anticipates resistance. To whom should they turn to best overcome such resistance? Please select three main actors from the following list: (1) The President of the Assembly? (2) The group presidents? (3) The concerned committee president? (4) The *rapporteur*? (5) You? (6) Deputies that are members of the main parliamentary committee (*saisi au fond*)? (7) Senior civil servants in the Assembly? (8) The President of the Republic? (9) The minister in charge of the field? (10) None of the above?'
13. The question was as follows: 'On a scale of 1 – no influence – to 5 – very strong influence, please estimate your influence on: (a) enacted bills, (b) the positions of your political group, (c) government bills, (d) the work of the committees to which you belong'.
14. The UDI group is comprised of the so-called Independent (centre-right) MPs.
15. Depending on the indicators used, claims about parliamentary weakness may be challenged (see Brouard & Kerrouche, 2011).
16. Citizens referred specifically to left-wing personalities appointed junior minister under Sarkozy.
17. A total of 118 MPs were asked the question referring to a charity organisation; 113 were asked about the firm.

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