Regional and National Variation in Parliamentary Questions at the European Parliament

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Abstract
The European Parliament has seen its responsibilities, visibility, and political salience increase as the EU has sought to address allegations of the democratic deficit. The political decisions of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), therefore, are similarly of increasing importance when looking at political oversight and decision-making at the European level, yet regional differences in a multinational legislative context remain understudied. This paper takes a mixed-methods approach to assessing differences in uses of the parliamentary question process between MEPs representing older member states and post-Socialist states that have joined since 2004. Elite interviews conducted with MEPs and senior Commission officials, conducted in Fall 2018, are combined with an original, large N dataset containing 130,921 submitted parliamentary questions between 2004 and 2019. These questions, submitted by MEPs to the Commission or Council, are combined with relevant biographical data. Structural topic modeling is used to examine how regional and national differences affect the way MEPs use the parliamentary question process, with significant differences in topics between Western and post-Socialist MEPs. Questions are also aggregated into a country-year panel, assigned to their most associated topic, to conduct regression analysis on the role of national difference.

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Introduction

As the EU has been forced to respond to a series of crises in the past fifteen years, we have seen positional differences between member states take center stage. There have debates between member states about responding to the rule of law crisis, the migration crisis, and, most recently, the appropriate types of aid to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. National leaders from across the political spectrum have frequently articulated the ways that their national interests sometimes depart from European interests. These public, contentious discussions have underscored the ways that the national backgrounds of politicians seeking to solve problems at the European level continue to play a crucial role.

At the same time, the European Parliament has continued to increase in institutional importance at the European level, as the EU continues to respond to critiques regarding its democratic deficit. Many studies on the behavior of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) indicate that MEPs align more with members of their party group than with members of their national delegation (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007, among others). Yet at the same time, fundamentally MEPs remain responsible to national voters. Moreover, they have been socialized in national political traditions, with most staying involved in national political debates, campaigns, and dynamics. As such, we might expect that these differences still might affect the way they approach their parliamentary duties, even with the great deal of party cohesion seen in voting and the significant socialization effects of the European Parliament itself. Given potential socialization effects, shared policy interests, and common geographies, we may expect to see evidence of this at both a regional bloc level and an individual member state level, depending on the particular topics that MEPs are pursuing.

Most studies examining differences in MEP behavior focus on voting. However, fewer studies examine the European Parliament through the lens of one of the most important functions of any legislature: oversight. Oversight in the European Union is instead commonly seen through the lens of national policy implementation. However, the European Parliament has institutional pathways to regularized oversight through the parliamentary questions mechanism, which allow MEPs the opportunity to receive on-the-record responses from the Council and Commission. While MEPs certainly use parliamentary questions for a variety of purposes, ranging from information gathering to campaigning for re-election, parliamentary questions are still at their core an oversight mechanism. While we do have considerable evidence of the primary role that party politics plays in the way MEPs vote, the ways that other cleavages (like national background) could impact additional aspects of MEP behavior remain understudied.

Indeed, it is important to consider the potential systematic differences in the ways that officials from national backgrounds – including major regional differences that could affect larger areas like the EU members of the former Eastern bloc – may utilize EU institutions. The primary research question is then: Do MEPs from different countries use parliamentary questions in different ways and/or for different purposes? To examine this question, this paper takes a mixed method approach to the question of regional differences in oversight in the European Parliament. First, a series of elite interviews with MEPs and senior Commission officials were conducted in Brussels in Fall 2018, to augment existing literature and facilitate hypothesis generation. These interviews also inform the discussion of the findings. Second, an original dataset of the text of parliamentary question, which are submitted by MEPs to the Council or Commission, is analyzed as a corpus for computational text analysis and structural topic modeling. This is the first large-scale computational text analysis of parliamentary questions at the European Parliament. The data consist of 130,921 questions from 2004–2019, with extensive

metadata available to augment the analysis. To examine national, rather than regional, differences, these questions are then re-aggregated into a nation-year panel dataset that assigns questions to the topic they are most associated with. These data are then analyzed with linear regression models to examine how national characteristics examine the specific topics of questions asked by MEPs.

This paper proceeds in four parts. First, I review the literature on both party cohesion in the European Parliament and parliamentary questions and oversight in the European Union. Second, I propose hypotheses regarding differences in the oversight activities of MEPs based off national background, based on existing literature and elite interviews, emphasizing the parliamentary question procedure. Third, I discuss the data and method. Finally, I discuss the findings from the topic models and conclude.

Party Politics in the European Parliament
A considerable – and persuasive – body of literature examines the politics of the European Parliament and argues that party politics are the dominant axis of conflict. Historically, this meant that politics in the European Parliament were contested not based off national interests but on a left-right political spectrum (Hix and Noury 2009; McElroy and Benoit 2012). Increasingly party politics remain the primary axis of conflict, but the relevant cleavage is not left-right but instead competition between Euroskeptic and Europhilic parties – what Hooghe and Marks (2018) call the transnational cleavage (see also Hix, Noury, and Roland 2019). While the primary cleavage between parties may have shifted, parties themselves remain central actors.

The centrality of party is clear from the consistently strong party cohesion demonstrated by party groups within the European Parliament (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2005; McElroy and Benoit 2012; Yordanova and Mühlböck 2015). This is even true in the context of enlargement, which adds considerable new member states after 2004, and adds member states with very different political histories (Bressanelli 2014; Bíró-Nagy 2016). Cohesion increased over time as the powers delegated to the Parliament increased, thereby raising the stakes for MEP activity (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007). Even in an area where we might expect national interests to be stronger, we still see strong evidence for party cohesion (Raunio and Wagner 2020). Moreover, existing research (discussed below) does go beyond MEP voting behavior and finds that party politics can also be predictive of other behavior at the European Parliament: for example, the number of questions asked by an MEP.

While the literature clearly demonstrates party cohesion in voting and illustrates the importance of party politics in other aspects of the legislative role of MEPs, research also suggests that nationality plays a role in MEP behavior. Hix's work, while convincingly arguing for notable cohesion of party groups in European parliamentary activities, still acknowledges some of the importance of national politics and parties (2002). He and his coauthors argue, for example, that party discipline is enforced by national party rather than European party group (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007, Chapter 7). Other authors have gone further. Costello and Thomson (2016) find that MEPs do break with party cohesion when national issues are at stake. And recent research by Buzogány and Ćetković (2021) examines votes on environmental and climate policy and finds some evidence of national background impacting MEP votes, as well as correlations between national opposition to policies in the Council (where national interests clearly predominate) and national MEPs opposing legislation in the European Parliament. If national background can still matter in some votes, even when party is the primary axis, then it

stands to reason that it could also matter in the parliamentary question procedure, where politicians can pursue individual agendas on issues of their choice.

Oversight, Parliamentary Questions, and the European Parliament
Oversight in the European Union is commonly interpreted in the context of the relationship between member states and central institutions. First, there are the questions of how European-level institutions oversee implementation of European laws, policies, and directives at the national level (Jensen 2007; Falkner and Treib 2008; Fjelstul and Carrubba 2018) or ensure that member states maintain democratic norms and values (Closa and Kochenov 2016; Kelemen 2017; Pech and Scheppele 2017). Second, there is the question of how national governments oversee the European level – either through national parliaments (Holzhacker 2002; Auel 2007; Winzen 2013; Senninger 2017) or through European institutions (Ballmann, Epstein, and O'Halloran 2002; Pollack 2003; Blom-Hansen 2011). Intra-European oversight mechanisms, however, are also important, and the European Parliament plays a crucial role in these processes (for example, Dehousse 2003; van de Steeg 2009), with a range of institutional responsibilities and mechanisms at its disposal (Poptcheva 2019).

Oversight is among the primary responsibilities of most democratically elected legislatures. Pelizzo and Stapenhurst note that a legislature's "performance of the oversight function is essential to improving the quality of democracy and…reducing corruption" (2013, 17). Oversight can not only be used to ensure the appropriate implementation of policies and use of resources but also can be an important means of ensuring that legislative prerogatives are protected in the face of actions taken by the executive branches (Kriner and Schickler 2016). A range of tools are available to legislatures and parliaments to carry out legislative oversight. In parliamentary systems, parliamentary questions are among the most widely available mechanism of legislative oversight,[1] and they are the most regularized oversight mechanism in the European Parliament. Governments are then required to respond to inquiries from members of parliament – in the case of the European Parliament, they primarily ask questions of the Commission. These questions could be motivated by either regularized or motivated by crisis (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984) and could be used for political or apolitical ends—none of which are mutually exclusive (Wiberg 1995).

Wiberg and Koura (1994) argue that parliamentary questions have three broad functions: control, responsiveness, and political profile. Of these, the first two have concrete implications for legislative oversight, while the other serves an obvious political function. Within control seeking questions, oversight consists of criticism and scrutiny, while responsiveness-seeking questions seek to hold institutions accountable to legislative actions. Again, however, these rationales should not be seen as mutually exclusive. For example, Martin (2011) finds that parliamentary questions are often used to address, or at least demonstrate involvement in, constituent concerns in addition to serving as an oversight mechanism. Even the most nakedly political question may ultimately serve a functional role in service of oversight.

Parliamentary questions offer a regularized, institutionalized path for MEPs to obtain information from the other major institutions. While parliamentary questions can be used for a

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[1] Wiberg (1995) finds that oral or written questions are used in every Western European country. A 2009 IPU-WBI survey of legislative bodies found that 96.4% of lower house respondents had oral/written questions as a legislative tool (n=97) and 100% of upper house respondents (n=19) (Pelizzo and Stapenhurst 2012).

variety of functions,[2] oversight is among the most important. MEPs can submit questions in writing to either the Council or Commission – though in practice, most questions are directed to the Commission. There is also a less utilized possibility for oral questions to subsequently be asked of Commissioners at Parliament sessions, often if a written response is not receive in a timely manner or the response is somehow considered unsatisfactory. At present, MEPs are limited to asking 12 questions per month, including one priority question; however, prior to a reform in early 2016, MEPs were able to ask questions without set limits.

The existing research on parliamentary questions at the European Parliament has largely found two different factors can explain differences in the use of parliamentary questions: 1) the domestic status of one's political party (in domestic opposition or coalition government) or 2) membership in a European party group that is either inside or outside the mainstream.[3] Interviews with Commission officials and MEPs indicate that there is widespread belief among insiders in the validity of both arguments.

Proksch and Slapin (2010) find that MEP questions are one of the primary ways that politicians in opposition at the domestic level attempt to exercise oversight of European policy, lacking clear representation on the Council or, perhaps, the Commission as well. This finding is corroborated by Font and Pérez Durán's (2016) examination of the ways that the European Parliament oversees European level agencies. Much as in domestic parliaments (Döring 1995; Saalfeld 2000), formal questions allow parties in domestic opposition to hold governments account when other more informal avenues are not available. Questions may also be designed to attract attention to national-level violations made by ruling parties. MEP questions can stimulate Commission involvement on issues where violations of European laws and regulations have been found (Jensen, Proksch, and Slapin 2013). The use of EP questions while in domestic opposition gives politicians an avenue to try to exert some influence over their national governments. One MEP in domestic opposition shared this view and said that parliamentary questions served as a means of trying to hold a national government to account [Interview 1].

Findings for the other primary argument about variation in parliamentary question use have been more mixed. Raunio (1996) tests the hypothesis that parties with greater distance from the center in the European Parliament should ask more questions. Asking greater numbers of questions would account for the fact that smaller parties are more marginalized in much of the policymaking process in the EU. Raunio, however, generally finds limited evidence for the theory outside of the Green Party, though he does find that the Liberal and Conservative mainstream groups do ask proportionally fewer questions than might be expected. Sozzi (2016) finds limited support for this theory as well, showing that the far left group (GUE/NGL) and non-attached members use questions more frequently, but otherwise having inconclusive results. Others, however, have found more evidence for this, with Brack and Costa (2019) finding that Euroskeptic party groups ask proportionally more questions than others. Interviews with Members of the European Parliament corroborate this argument as well. One Western MEP from a major party suggested that parliamentary questions offered far left and far right parties an opportunity to "blame" the Commission for political issues [Interview 9]. An interview with an MEP from outside the governing coalition offered examples of ways that MEPs from more peripheral party groups use parliamentary questions to emphasize their issues of concern

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[2] For an elaboration of the various purposes questions can serve for MEPs, see (Raunio 1996, 357–58). Questions of how different purposes might impact the content of questions are important but outside the scope of this paper.

[3] Other work, however, has found that there is no characteristic that explains variation in the use of questions well (Sorace 2018).

[Interview 2]. Another MEP suggested that differences in questions among party groups would reflect different political priorities for election campaigning [Interview 6].

While the existing literature offers clear evidence that party politics play a role in the use of questions at the European Parliament, it is far from clear that they are the only factor, and interviews indicate a strong perception of national background impacting the use of parliamentary questions. The following section will propose hypotheses for potential ways that national background could impact parliamentary question use.

Hypotheses
Although we have considerable evidence of the primary role of party politics in how MEPs vote, we still have less evidence for party politics playing the primary role in how MEPs ask parliamentary questions and conduct legislative oversight. My interviews with MEPs and especially Commission officials suggest that national backgrounds may play an important role in questions. One Commission official suggested that various member state characteristics impact the questions received by their office, including the size of the country (smaller countries wanting to maintain more visibility) and degree of decentralization (resulting in regionally, rather than nationally, focused questions) [Interview 4]. Another Commission official indicated that their DG received more questions from Eastern and Southern European MEPs than from other regions [Interview 5], while others offered anecdotes about their own portfolios, explicitly arguing that MEPs from particular countries were more likely to ask questions about particular topics [Interviews 7, 10]. One official said that in their issue area, when given an question portraying a situation in a negative light that it was "80 percent predictable from which Group and which nationality the question comes from" [Interview 7]. Some MEPs shared this view as well. One Western MEP said that most parliamentary questions were designed to have national relevance more than European relevance [Interview 6]. Another Western MEP said that issues, often with a territorial component, may be of particular interest for particular national delegations [Interview 13]. An MEP from a post-Socialist member state echoed this view, stating that some topics might be more frequent from members from a particular country or region [Interview 1].

Some academic work to date corroborates these observations. Kirchner's work examining the behavior of MEPs in the early stages of the European Parliament finds evidence of national differences in both the amount of and issue focus of questions submitted by MEPs with different national backgrounds (1984, 95, 115–35). Brack and Costa's (2019) recent chapter finds that, in a coded sample of written questions, national concerns seem to make up a significant portion of MEP questions. They find that 27.48% of written questions in their sample were coded as pertaining to national or subnational concerns. They also preliminarily find that "peripheral" countries in Southern and Eastern Europe tend to skew more towards national level concerns. This builds on Fabio Sozzi's (2015) findings, that the background of MEPs affects how they pursue representative functions using parliamentary questions.

Both MEPs and academic work point to the potential relevance of being from a "peripheral" region for the types of questions asked by MEPs. To get a sense of the potential importance of national background in European oversight, we will start by aggregating to one of the most salient core-periphery divides in the contemporary EU: the East-West divide (Epstein and Jacoby 2014; Grzymała-Busse 2016; Rupnik 2016). This divide reflects not only contemporary policy differences but also the legacies of socialism for party politics and parliamentary systems. Political parties in Western Europe are more doctrinaire than in Eastern

Europe, where parties are weaker and less consolidated (Kitschelt 1995; Bielasiak 1997; Thames 2005; Nikolenyi 2014). Instead, parties often focus more on patronage issues than programmatic issues associated with Western European political cleavages (Meyer-Sahling 2006; Kopecký and Spirova 2011). Ohlén (2013) outlines the difficulties of integrating political parties in post-Socialist Europe into European party groups. Given these findings, we might expect MEPs representing post-Socialist countries to be less motivated by party politics concerns and instead approach European oversight through a more nationally-motivated mindset, resulting in different use of the parliamentary question procedure.

H1: MEPs from Post-Socialist and Western member states will address different substantive topics in parliamentary questions.

While establishing a baseline difference between MEPs from Western and post-Socialist MEPs provides an indication of some trends on a macrolevel, we can also begin to examine such differences nationally. We will come up with some broad hypotheses that will be difficult to empirically test; however, we will also devise more specific corollaries that can provide evidence for the hypotheses and can be directly tested. Both are straightforward ways of thinking about the importance of national background in parliamentary activities.

We can imagine two potential reasons for expecting commonalities among these subregional groups. One possible national-level factor that might impact which questions are asked by MEPs is a country's innate national geographic and demographic characteristics. We should expect countries to ask questions that are relevant based simply off geographic location. As one narrow example, the EU has several macroregional strategies. We would expect the Baltics to ask fewer questions about the Danube or Adriatic and Ionian regional strategies because of their geographic proximity. While this distinction is too narrow to be tested using data at this level of aggregation, it is illustrative of the types of differences we might see in larger policy domains that are also impacted by geography. At face value, this makes sense: the innate characteristics of a nation's territory, geography, or population are likely to impact an MEP's oversight concerns at the European level.

Hypothesis 2: National differences in proportions of questions can be explained by geographic or demographic characteristics.

To operationalize Hypothesis 2 in a testable way, we will test three straightforward corollaries as easy tests, to examine the plausibility of a baseline of national differences. Two will examine the relationship of member states to Russia and the Eastern Neighborhood, a topic domain where we might significant differences between post-Socialist and Western MEPs; the third will examine fisheries and maritime policy, where the differences between post-Socialist and Western MEPs would be less clear.

Given the fraught historical relationships with Russia, we might expect post-Socialist member states to ask proportionally more questions about the Eastern Neighborhood and foreign policy towards Russia and other CIS countries. In an analysis of voting behavior, Krekó et al. (2020) do find that post-Socialist countries systematically support tougher treatment of Russia, in comparison to MEPs from Western or Southern countries. We also might expect there to be more questions about Russia specifically from those countries nearest to Russia, where threats of

Russian intervention are most acute. Proximity to Russia will be proxied by the great circle distance between the primary airport in the national capital and Moscow's Domodedovo Airport.

> *Corollary 2A: MEPs from post-Socialist countries will ask proportionally more questions about Russia and the Eastern Neighborhood.*

> *Corollary 2B: MEPs from countries with capitals nearer to Moscow will ask proportionally more questions about Russia and the Eastern Neighborhood.*

We might also expect geography to play a role in domestic policy concerns. So we expect countries with more coastline to ask more questions about some policy domains that would seem at face value to be more relevant: fisheries and maritime policy.

> *Corollary 2C: MEPs from countries with longer coastlines will ask more questions about fisheries.*

> *Corollary 2D: MEPs from countries with longer coastlines will ask more questions about maritime policy.*

The second possible explanations for differences between countries are policies and economic conditions. We can logically expect countries with similar policy perspectives or environments to share common concerns. Countries that are struggling economically across the EU are likely to seek to address similar problems through European oversight, which might not be shared by countries in boom times.

Another important factor may be differentiated within countries. We may see shared opposition positions, with MEPs using similar types of oversight when their parties are out of power domestically. As noted before, existing research finds that parliamentary questions are especially utilized by MEPs whose parties are in the national opposition (Proksch and Slapin 2010; Font and Pérez Durán 2016). They use this as a means of holding their national governments to account. There are several domestic concerns among opposition parties that are not evenly distributed. Corruption is one such major issue: if national governments are behaving corruptly, and especially if that corruption might involve the abuse of EU resources (Huliaras and Petropoulos 2016; Kelemen 2020), we could anticipate that we would see more oversight questions from these countries about corruption as MEPs seek to draw attention to this issue. Here, this will be operationalized using the corruption perception index from Transparency International by looking at questions pertaining to public procurement and investigations.

Hypothesis 3: National differences in proportions of questions can be explained by shared policy differences.

> *Corollary 3A: MEPs from countries with lower GDP growth rates will ask proportionally more questions about current economic conditions.*

> *Corollary 3B: MEPs from countries with lower GDP growth rates will ask proportionally more questions about economic topics more broadly.*

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> *Corollary 3C: MEPs from countries with greater perceptions of corruption will ask proportionally more questions about procurement.*

> *Corollary 3D: MEPs from countries with greater perceptions of corruption will ask proportionally more questions about investigations.*

Data and Method

This project takes a mixed-method approach to examine how questions submitted by Members of the European Parliament, which are then answered by EU officials, are used by different blocs of actors. The primary data used for this project are large N text analysis of questions submitted by MEPs to the Commission and the Council. Parliamentary questions are an important facet of legislative behavior (Rozenberg and Martin 2011); additionally they offer a clear, albeit partial, publicly available record of legislative activity and priorities for an individual MEP. In-depth elite interviews are used to help develop the hypotheses examined with the qualitative data.

Interviews were conducted with MEPs (in most cases together with staff) and senior Commission officials in Brussels in Fall 2018. Interview subjects were contacted via e-mail at their official points of contact. Response rates differed significantly by subject type. 77 MEPs were contacted, with efforts made to ensure diversity of both of national and party group backgrounds. Of these, 48 (62.3%) did not reply to either initial or follow-up communications. Seven (9.1%) agreed to be interviewed, while the remaining 22 (28.6%) declined. A smaller number of Commission officials were contacted, to keep the sample balanced. Seven offices associated with the Commission were contacted, and six interviews were conducted (85.7%). While this interview sample is not used to test hypotheses, it aided in hypothesis generation and findings are incorporated into discussion of the quantitative results and implications.

The quantitative analysis is based on an original dataset of questions to examine the oversight role of MEPs in the European Parliament. Both oral and written questions are included, as are questions directed at the Commission, Council, and High Representative. Question text and metadata, has been collected from publicly available sources.[4] The text data consist of 130,921 questions from 2004–2019, accounting for the period that post-Socialist MEPs were involved in the European Parliament.[5] Biographical metadata about the question submitter (MEPs) has also been collected. The biographical data on MEPs has been originally collected, though previous versions of this project used data from Hix and Høyland (2013). Questions asked jointly by multiple MEPs are dropped from the data to ensure that biographical data is accurately matched and that there are not issues with question weighting in the data structure.

This data is examined first using structural topic modeling (STM), allowing for inference in large-scale text analysis (Roberts et al. 2013). Structural topic modeling uses a Bag of Words approach, divorcing word meaning from sentence structure. STM is based off of latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), which means that it considers topics as two tiered: each topic has an associated set of words, and each document has an associated set of topics. Importantly, however, STM allows for the incorporation of metadata into the analysis by subsequently running regressions on covariates of interest and estimating the covariance between topics (Roberts et al. 2014). This

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[4] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/parliamentary-questions.html

[5] Post-Socialist MEPs are defined as members representing states once governed by Communist regimes: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria. As Germany is a unified European Parliament constituency with national party lists, representatives from the former East Germany are excluded, though could be incorporated by determining German MEP birthplace if future analysis warrants.

allows for the data about the question, as well as the MEP asking the question, to be brought into the analysis. In this case, an upstream approach to metadata will be used (Wesslen 2018), which will allow for separate modeling of topics within questions asked by both Western and post-Socialist to see how similar the results are. This data should be well suited to STM, as they avoid the most common pitfalls present in LDA data: namely, the sample being too small or the document text being too short (Tang et al. 2014). The models here focus on the text of the questions submitted by MEPs to the Commission and the Council for written or oral response. These questions have undergone various stages of preprocessing to remove stop words, incorporate stemming, and standardize documents and metadata between years to account for variability that might otherwise skew the results (Lucas et al. 2015). These decisions will be discussed below, to heed Denny and Spirling's (2018) call to take the implications of pre-processing choices seriously.

A significant amount of custom stop words and phrases were incorporated to account for the particular data. Parliamentary questions are both short and formulaic; moreover, the majority of them have been translated from their original language into English for this analysis. As such, we removed a significant number of words that did not appear to indicate the topic of discussion but instead amounted to words setting up the discussion (for example, "clarify"). Some words were removed only in unstemmed form, as opposed to stem form: for example, "currently." By only removing the unstemmed form, this allows a question about water or air currents to still identified in the dataset. Words removed in unstemmed form were typically either adverbs or had common stems. Finally, we also incorporated entire phrases into the stop words list. This was done to account for words with multiple meanings, especially those that are often found in clichés. For example, we did not want to lose substantive questions about bears, the animal. However, "bear" is also used in several phrases commonly found in these types of questions ("bear the burden", "bearing in mind"). Topic modeling struggles to account for words with multiple meanings, so the frequent use of such idioms was noticeably and unconstructively affecting the models. This is a somewhat more expansive use of stop words than is often used in topic models; however, given the nature of our largely translated texts that often follow set patterns, this has improved our model quality while without interfering with the ability to get at the substantive topics present in individual questions.

Additionally, member state references in both noun ("Italy") and adjective ("Italian") forms have been replaced with "nation" and "national," respectively, which will allow cleaner differentiation on if thematic topics by eliminating the aggregation of questions about a single member state into particular topics that focus on different policies.[6] This data was then processed, tokenizing question text into individual words, organizing them into a sparse data frame to be used as the basis for the topic models. As a secondary illustration of differences in topics, log-odds ratios are used to illustrate differences in the proportion of terms used by post-Socialist and Western MEPs.

After words have been grouped using unsupervised STM, the researcher must infer and assign meaningful conceptual labels based on the groupings. This is a necessarily interpretative exercise. In this case, three different tools are used to determine the most likely conceptual significance of a group: 1) the words most frequently found in a topic (Chang et al. 2009); 2) FREX, a measure that balances frequency of a word with exclusivity to a topic (Bischof and Airoldi 2012; Roberts, Stewart, and Airoldi 2016); and, 3) the most representative passages –

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[6] Third country names were retained; this pre-processing step only applies to EU members. National clustering about foreign policy topics is still possible.

here, individual parliamentary questions – associated with a topic (Roberts et al. 2014). Here, they are generated by the findthoughts command within the STM package in R (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014). The top results for the three tools for each topic were used in conjunction, to determine the most likely conceptual reason for the grouping.

Variance between the regional groupings is then tested for statistical significance. Specifically, we test the gamma scores associated with each regional grouping. The gamma score of each is the weight associated with a particular document-topic classification, here measured as the average per topic of all questions submitted by a group. To compare the post-Socialist and Western MEPs in a binary comparison, we determine statistical significance using a T-test. Significance levels are adjusted with the Bonferroni correction.[7]

Finally, hypotheses 2 and 3, and their respective corollaries, are tested using regression analysis. To do this analysis, we aggregated the findings from the topic model into a numerical dataset. Each question has a topic that it is most associated with. We aggregated the number of questions most associated with each topic by country-year, giving us an N of 433. Data are organized into national panels. Where possible, both national and annual fixed effects are used, to capture national characteristics that might affect the count of questions being asked (ie, number of MEPs) as well as chronological characteristics that might skew the data (ie, the 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull leading to more questions about volcanoes). When time invariant national measures are included, random effects models are used, necessary to account to the lack of variation within fixed characteristics on some variables of interest within the panel. In these models, national fixed effects cannot be used for this same reason. In these cases, the number of MEPs in a country at the start of a year is included as a control variable to account for the base question counts. When national fixed effects are included, this variation will be accounted for.

Data for dependent variables to test the corollaries are derived directly from the topic model. Data on the number of MEPs per year comes from the European Parliament. Data on the distance from national capital airports to Moscow are calculated according to aerial great circle flying distance. Data on coastlines, measured in km, comes from the CIA World Factbook (n.d.). Data on GDP growth rates comes from Eurostat (n.d.). Data on the corruption perception index come from Transparency International (2021).

Models

Hypothesis 1 focuses on the substantive differences between MEPs representing post-Socialist and Western member states. The dependent variable is the differences in issue area between the two sets of MEPs. Descriptive statistics can show us some of the differences between the two. A preliminary method of comparison, the log-odds ratio, illustrates differences in the ratio of word frequencies between a dichotomous set of actors: here, MEPs from post-Socialist countries vs. MEPs from Western European backgrounds. Fundamentally, it shows us the words that appear most disproportionately in one grouping (ie, said fairly often by post-Socialist MEPs but rarely by Western ones). Log-odds ratios do not consider semantic coherence of documents, but merely the frequency of terms; nevertheless, this comparison illustrates some preliminary differences. Table 1 below shows the results from a log-odds ratio comparing these two groupings. To ensure that these statistics are not driven by rare words, Table 1 only includes words that appear at least

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[7] In this case, dividing our thresholds by the number of tests (69) leads to .000725 being equivalent to the .05 level; .000145 being equivalent to the .01 level; and 1.45e-05 being equivalent the .001 level.

90 times in the dataset,[8] and it shows the ten terms that were most disproportionately used by both MEPs from post-Socialist countries and MEPs from Western countries.

Table 1. Top Terms in Log-Odds Ratios

Rank	Disproportionately Likely Post-Socialist MEP Term	Disproportionately Likely Western MEP Term
1	Magyar Nemzeti Bank (Hungarian National Bank)	Valencia
2	Belarus	Galicia
3	Paks	Tuscany
4	Orbán	Azores
5	Slovak	Civil Society Forum on Drugs
6	Polish	Catalonia
7	Kremlin	National Strategic Reference Framework
8	Lukashenko	Lazio
9	Sergei	Crete
10	Moldova	Bissau

Table 1 provides evidence for Brack and Costa's (2019) arguments about territorial concerns being the basis for many parliamentary questions – terms referring to the geography of member states appear very frequently on both sides. However, we can see some key differences. MEPs from Western States – especially, it appears, Spain – are more often referring to subnational units, which are likely indicative of greater traditions for subnational autonomy in some western member states. Sozzi (2015) finds that states with greater decentralization lead to a more subnational focus on MEP representation. In eastern member states, where true subnational autonomy has a more limited history, these terms appear less frequently, and MEPs focus more on national-level issues. Aside from the evidence for the territorial representation argument, we see some trends in differences on European issues as well. We see differences in foreign policy concerns. Post-Socialist member states strongly focus on relationships with the East, being more likely to ask questions about Belarus, Russia, and Moldova. Western MEPs are more likely to ask about former colonies.

More developed structural topic models, however, give us a far more in-depth picture of the types of questions that MEPs ask. To determine the appropriate number of topics (K), an iterative approach was taken, first running models with 20, 40, 50, 60, 80, and 100 topics, and then running diagnostic tests as advised by Silge (2018); this showed decreasing returns after the 60-70 model range. One random seed was generated and used for all iterations of the model. Graphs of the diagnostic iterations are available in Appendix A. These diagnostics offered some guidance as to the appropriate number of topics, or K. The true value of K, however, must be determined inductively by the researcher through in-depth qualitative analysis to determine when topics are substantively meaningful (Quinn et al. 2010; Catalinac 2016). A K of 69 fits within our broad diagnostic tests, and within this range offers the most substantively meaningful representation of the most frequent topics in the parliamentary questions data; therefore, this model was used for further analysis. Topics were also clustered into eight larger groups

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[8] Log-odds ratios here are calculated prior to several of the pre-processing steps for the topic models described in the data and method section. However, clear duplicates were consolidated.

(macrotopics), to aid in interpretability and analysis. Table 2 below shows the 69 individual topics generated by the topic model created from the questions submitted by MEPs, organized into these eight larger categories.[9]

Table 2. Clustered Summary of Topic Labels

Cluster 1: European Oversight (18)	Cluster 2: Social and Cultural Policy (11)	Cluster 3: Energy, Infrastructure, and Environment (11)	Cluster 4: Foreign Policy (10)
1) Procurement	1) Education	1) Air transportation	1) Foreign relations
2) EU Law violations	2) Cultural heritage	2) Energy emissions	2) Israel/Palestine
3) Outermost regions	3) Civil society	3) Maritime	3) Armed conflict
4) Standardization	4) Fundamental rights	4) Waste management	4) Political events
5) Follow up questions	5) Health care	5) Energy market	5) FTAs
6) Member state comparisons	6) NGOs	6) Animal welfare	6) Turkey
7) Civil service	7) Social policy	7) Environment	7) International cooperation
8) EU – Municipal	8) Discrimination	8) Nuclear	8) Political prisoners
9) Implementation	9) Children	9) Conservation	9) Sanctions
10) EU meetings	10) Media	10) Land transportation	10) Eastern neighborhood
11) EU strategies	11) Language policy	11) Infrastructure	
12) Mutual recognition			
13) EU budget			
14) Free movement			
15) EU Treaties			
16) Parliamentary initiatives			
17) Crime			
18) Investigations			
Cluster 5: Economy (9)	Cluster 6: Regulation (5)	Cluster 7: Agriculture and Fisheries (3)	Cluster 8: Migration (2)
1) Industry	1) Food labels	1) Natural disasters	1) Migration
2) Banking	2) Risk mitigation	2) Fisheries	2) Borders
3) Competition	3) Consumer protection	3) Agriculture	
4) Taxation	4) Regulation		
5) Tourism	5) Chemical safety		
6) Economic conditions			
7) Employment			
8) Digital economy			
9) Imports/Exports			

Topic labels were applied by the investigator based on the word probabilities assigned to the topic, the frequency-exclusivity scores associated with a topic (measured by a weighted mean

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[9] A separate, automated view of the relationships between topics, as defined by most overlapping words, can be found in a network graph, in which each node is one of the 69 topics, in Appendix C.

between overall word frequency and exclusivity of words within a topic), and the documents most associated with a topic. The twelve most frequent word stems per topic (measured by β, the probability that a word stem is in a given topic) were automatically generated by the STM algorithm; a chart showing the frequent word stems for all 69 individual topics is in Appendix B.

While Table 2 shows the topics prevalent in parliamentary questions irrespective of nationality, Table 3 compares questions from Western MEPs and questions from post-Socialist MEPs, using gamma values (the assignment of a particular document to a particular topic) from the topic models to measure the percentage of documents in a given topic. This is a concrete measure of issue salience, taken from the proportion of total MEP questions assigned to a particular topic. This illustrates the corpus-level distribution of proportions of each topic with in the separate post-Socialist and Western groups. Each row indicates the percentage of the parliamentary questions assigned to a given topic. Western and Post-Socialist MEPs are calculated separately and compared. Each column represents the entire universe of submitted parliamentary questions for that group of MEPs, however it may not add up to precisely 100% due to rounding. P values are measured in scientific notation, so as to account for the much smaller significance thresholds under the Bonferroni correction.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Table 3 shows that the differences between quite a few topics are statistically significant, and some highly so. For example, Post-Socialist MEPs are significantly more likely to ask questions about Russia and Eastern neighbors, about energy, and about agriculture. Western MEPs are significantly more likely to ask questions about air transportation, Turkey, and banking. Some of the differences are unsurprising – post-Socialist MEPs, were much more likely to ask questions about borders, which we might expect given the vehemence of anti-migrant position of some Eastern member states. Western MEPs are more likely to ask questions about environmental conservation, which we would expect given general policy differences and the higher proportion of Green Party MEPs coming from older members.

While the differences in percentages in Table 3are small, given the size of the dataset, the effect is still in many cases a substantial difference of several hundred questions. We can see that questions comparing member states to one another make up the largest share of questions for both post-Socialist and Western MEPs. The differences become starker in more substantive policy domains, however. While questions about agriculture make up 1.81% of total questions submitted by post-Socialist MEPs, they make up only 1.29% of Western MEP questions. And there are clear and statistically significant distinctions in foreign policy priorities between the regions: post-Socialist MEPs ask considerably more questions about Russia than the Middle East, while we can see that Western MEPs ask a greater share of questions about Turkey than about Russia, and ask more questions about the Middle East than do post-Socialist MEPs.

Not all topics are different – we can see that for a large number of topics, MEPs from post-Socialist and Western countries ask questions at roughly the same rate. Nevertheless, these significance tests and topic proportions here strongly suggest that there are some systematic differences with how MEPs from post-Socialist and Western backgrounds use submitted questions for oversight purposes. While they share some key areas of focus, each group of MEPs also shows different broad policy concerns, both in terms of content and proportionality. And while the percentage differences are not orders of magnitude different, the size of the corpus means that the substantive differences in numbers of question could still have some tangible

impact on oversight capacity. These show considerable evidence for Hypothesis 1, that there are substantive differences regional differences between MEPs in their oversight activities at the European Parliament.

      Hypotheses 2 and 3 discuss how variability in national characteristics and national policies might influence oversight questions. These are tested by illustrative corollaries, which provide examples of ways we might expect national characteristics and policies to affect MEP behavior. As these are time invariant characteristics, national fixed effects are not possible, and random effects are used so that we can assess the impact of time invariant characteristics on our models of interest. In these models number of MEPs is included as a control for the volume of questions while also proxying the effect of national population.

      Tables 4 and 5 show the findings for the corollaries about fixed national characteristics. Corollaries 2A and 2B examine how fixed national characteristics might impact the amount of questions that MEPs asked about Russia and the Eastern neighborhood of the EU. 2A posited that the post-Socialist countries generally would ask more questions, while 2B hypothesized that the specific geographic distance from Moscow might more accurately predict.

Table 4. Predictors of Questions about the Eastern Neighborhood

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Distance from Moscow	0.00178^{*} (0.000838)		0.00225^{*} (0.000997)	0.00219^{*} (0.00101)
Number of MEPs	0.136^{***} (0.0250)	0.144^{***} (0.0275)	0.140^{***} (0.0255)	0.142^{***} (0.0259)
Post-Socialist		-0.537 (1.423)	1.361 (1.564)	1.186 (1.589)
Year=2004				0 (.)
Year=2005				1.520 (2.444)
Year=2006				1.480 (2.444)
Year=2007				2.617 (2.401)
Year=2008				3.950 (2.401)
Year=2009				0.543 (2.401)
Year=2010				3.616 (2.401)
Year=2011				3.246 (2.401)
Year=2012				2.410 (2.401)
Year=2013				8.963^{***} (2.382)
Year=2014				5.928^{*} (2.382)
Year=2015				10.86^{***} (2.382)
Year=2016				1.897 (2.382)
Year=2017				2.040 (2.382)
Year=2018				1.504 (2.382)
Year=2019				-0.639 (2.382)
Constant	-2.047 (1.742)	1.406 (1.242)	-3.592 (2.489)	-6.653^{*} (3.029)
Observations	433	433	433	433

Standard errors in parentheses
$^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

We can see that distance the national capital to Moscow is predictive of the number of questions about the Eastern Neighborhood, albeit significant only at a .05 level. A dummy variable measuring post-Socialist status in a given year is not significant in any configuration. When yearly fixed effects are included, we see a major boost in questions between 2013-2015 at the height of the Ukraine crisis; however, the significance of proximity to Russia remains. This suggests that, even with the differences we see between Western and Post-Socialist countries in Table 3, specific national characteristics might give clearer pictures of oversight, and that there are important differences within the post-Socialist bloc.

Corollaries 2C and 2D examine how length of coastline, another fixed geographic characteristic, might impact the amount of questions that MEPs asked about fisheries and maritime policy. We would predict that increased coastline length would be a reasonable proxy for the importance of these topics for MEPs representing different nations. Table 4 below shows the findings.

Table 5. Predictors of Questions about Fisheries and Maritime Policy

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Coastline length	0.00118^{**} (0.000412)	0.00117^{**} (0.000428)	0.000350^{***} (0.0000697)	0.000348^{***} (0.0000699)
Number of MEPs	0.0852 (0.0595)	0.0908 (0.0622)	0.0119 (0.0102)	0.0139 (0.0103)
Year=2004		0 (.)		0 (.)
Year=2005		0.840 (1.702)		0.320 (0.650)
Year=2006		1.720 (1.702)		0.600 (0.650)
Year=2007		2.284 (1.672)		0.727 (0.639)
Year=2008		3.396^{*} (1.672)		1.541^{*} (0.639)
Year=2009		1.470 (1.672)		0.430 (0.639)
Year=2010		5.005^{**} (1.676)		4.307^{***} (0.639)
Year=2011		5.597^{***} (1.676)		2.789^{***} (0.639)
Year=2012		4.944^{**} (1.674)		1.631^{*} (0.639)
Year=2013		4.053^{*} (1.662)		2.055^{**} (0.634)
Year=2014		3.232 (1.662)		1.984^{**} (0.634)
Year=2015		5.531^{***} (1.663)		1.884^{**} (0.634)
Year=2016		1.281 (1.663)		0.741 (0.634)
Year=2017		0.816 (1.663)		0.705 (0.634)
Year=2018		1.102 (1.663)		0.955 (0.634)
Year=2019		-3.327^{*} (1.663)		-0.0446 (0.634)
Constant	1.508 (2.100)	-1.008 (2.512)	0.607 (0.356)	-0.743 (0.577)
Observations	433	433	433	433

Standard errors in parentheses
$^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

Models 5 and 6 examine the 'Fisheries' topic, while models 7 and 8 examine the 'Maritime' topic. We can see that in both cases the length of a country's coastline is predictive of the number of questions about these topics, at the .01 and .001 levels respectively. The inclusion of yearly fixed effects in Models 6 and 8 does not impact the significance of coastline length. Tables 4 and 5 provide some illustrative evidence of the potential impact of fixed national characteristics on the number of oversight questions at the European level.

  Hypothesis 3 looks the importance of policy differences to explain national variation. This was operationalized under two sets of corollaries, which are each texted in panel regressions including country fixed effects. Corollaries 3A and 3B examine the impact of national GDP growth rates on the number of questions asked by MEPs. Data for these questions includes the years 2009-2019, as annual GDP growth rates were unavailable for earlier years. Table 6 shows the results; Models 9 and 10 specifically examine the impact on the number of questions about the 'Economic conditions' topic. Models 11 and 12 examine the impact on the number of questions in the entire Economic cluster, as described in Table 2.

Table 6. Predictors of questions about economic topics

	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
GDP Growth Rate	-0.537** (0.196)	-0.973*** (0.270)	-1.409 (0.774)	-3.063** (0.991)
Year=2009		0 (.)		0 (.)
Year=2010		14.27*** (3.487)		50.85*** (12.80)
Year=2011		11.24** (3.489)		54.89*** (12.81)
Year=2012		12.73*** (3.227)		51.04*** (11.84)
Year=2013		15.31*** (3.297)		72.22*** (12.10)
Year=2014		9.767** (3.542)		41.90** (13.00)
Year=2015		15.22*** (3.777)		69.40*** (13.86)
Year=2016		9.254* (3.604)		39.81** (13.23)
Year=2017		8.559* (3.792)		33.60* (13.92)
Year=2018		6.805 (3.703)		26.48 (13.59)
Year=2019		4.740 (3.619)		1.245 (13.28)
Constant	7.798*** (0.725)	-1.325 (2.511)	55.21*** (2.859)	17.69 (9.215)
Observations	304	304	304	304

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

As expected, GDP growth rate is a significant predictor of questions about economic conditions. The negative sign here means that the number of questions declines for countries with higher growth rates; thereby, conversely, countries with lower growth rates ask more questions. This is significant at the .01 level without the additional inclusion of yearly fixed effects, and at the .001 level when yearly controls are included.

The relationship between the GDP growth rate and the number of questions about the entire economic cluster of topics is more ambiguous. Without the inclusion of yearly fixed effects (Model 11), there is no statistically significant effect. However, with the inclusion of yearly fixed effects (Model 12), it is significant at the .01 level. Given the strong temporal correlations evident in the finding – unsurprising given the nature of the economic cycle – we have a strong prior for the inclusion of yearly fixed effects on top of national fixed effects, so there is at least some reasonable evidence for an association between GDP growth rate and the number of questions about all economic topics.

Table 7 below shows the associations between the Corruption Perception Index (a score of 100 being the least corrupt, a score of 1 being the most corrupt) and questions asked about public procurement (Models 13 and 14) and investigations (Models 15 and 16).

Table 7. Predictors of questions about Procurement and Investigations

	Model 13	Model 14	Model 15	Model 16
Corruption Perception Index	-0.231* (0.0948)	-0.267** (0.0918)	-0.147* (0.0690)	-0.158* (0.0651)
Year=2012		0 (.)		0 (.)
Year=2013		0.949 (0.823)		1.223* (0.583)
Year=2014		0.947 (0.830)		0.441 (0.588)
Year=2015		2.416** (0.854)		1.726** (0.605)
Year=2016		0.0518 (0.835)		0.681 (0.591)
Year=2017		-0.582 (0.836)		-0.742 (0.592)
Year=2018		-0.608 (0.836)		-0.915 (0.592)
Year=2019		-2.453** (0.831)		-1.685** (0.589)
Constant	18.02** (6.106)	20.22*** (5.830)	11.77** (4.445)	12.39** (4.130)
Observations	223	223	223	223

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The negative coefficient here shows that countries with higher CPI scores – which indicate fewer perceptions of corruption – ask fewer questions about both public procurement and investigations. Therefore, we should expect more corrupt countries (with lower CPI scores) to ask more questions about both. For each model, this measure is significant at the .01 level, with or without the inclusion of yearly fixed effects. Data include the years 2012-2019, as CPI measures prior to 2012 used a different formula and are not directly comparable. These findings are in line with previous research emphasizing the ways that opposition parties use parliamentary oversight in the European Parliament; it stands to reason that the concentrated questions about public procurement in countries associated with more corruption are unlikely to come from government-affiliated MEPs.

These corollary tests provide some quick illustrations of potential operationalizations of the ways that national background might impact the ways that MEPs conduct oversight. These tests aggregate all single-author MEP questions from a given year, classifying them by most associated topic. The findings suggest that there are some clear, relevant associations between

national policies and characteristics and the types of oversight questions that MEPs ask. These findings are in line with the elite interviews conducted at the outset of this project. These corollary tests are only loose proxies for Hypotheses 2 and 3, but they provide some preliminary evidence of the importance of taking national background of MEPs seriously, even in light of the considerable literature on the importance of party politics at the European Parliament.

Conclusion

Quantitative text analysis can give us further insight into the ways that Members of the European Parliament behave as legislators. The existing literature on parliamentary behavior is primarily based on voting and broadly argues that party politics supersede nationality when explaining MEP voting outcomes. This emphasis on party politics is shared by the existing literature on parliamentary questions, which finds that domestic political opposition status and being on the outside of the Europhilic/Euroskeptic cleavage explains variation in the use of parliamentary questions.

      While not intending to suggest that party politics are insignificant, this paper, however, argues that nationality plays an important understudied role in oversight in the world's most institutionalized transnational parliament. By focusing on one institutional pathway – parliamentary questions – this project assesses both regional variation (between MEPs from post-Socialist states and MEPs from West European backgrounds) and national variation (through panel analysis of questions asked at the country-year level) in European oversight. Elite interviews conducted with both Members of the European Parliament and senior Commission officials also suggests that national background plays a clear role in the use of parliamentary questions by some MEPs. Structural topic models of the question texts submitted by MEPs preliminarily show some key differences and similarities in areas of focus between MEPs of different backgrounds, suggesting that regional backgrounds can indeed influence the types of concerns addressed through the use of European-level oversight. The preliminary findings suggest that, zeroing in further, there is important national variation in topics as well. For example, a post-socialist dummy variable does not predict a higher number of total questions about the Eastern neighborhood; however, distance between one's national capital and Moscow does. These findings suggest that further study is needed to consider the important ways that national background can influence European oversight.

      This paper should only be considered the starting point for research on regional and national variation in oversight at the European Parliament. Future research could verify these results using natural language processing (NLP) to incorporate sentence structure and other semantic factors, not just word meaning. Future research can also explore the intersection of regional variation with party variation, to analyze how the interaction between party politics and regional influence affects MEP oversight behavior and outcomes.

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Table 3. Gamma Value Means by Region.
For ease of interpretation, when a difference is significant, the side with the larger share of questions is bolded. Columns may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Topic	Western	Post-Socialist	Pr(>|t|)
Natural Disasters	1.33%	1.30%	2.75E-01
Education	1.09%	**1.30%**	2.55E-08***
Migration	1.38%	1.37%	8.18E-01
Procurement	1.79%	1.73%	2.08E-03
Foreign Relations	**0.96%**	0.87%	6.36E-09***
Cultural Heritage	**1.50%**	1.33%	2.55E-09***
Industry	**1.53%**	1.30%	6.92E-22***
Food Labels	1.19%	**1.30%**	1.43E-04**
Banking	**1.63%**	1.38%	1.92E-09***
Violations of EU Law	**1.77%**	1.69%	3.81E-08***
Civil Society	1.68%	**1.92%**	3.96E-43***
Air transport	**1.17%**	0.93%	1.03E-11***
Fundamental Rights	1.84%	1.79%	1.57E-01
Health Care	2.05%	1.93%	3.98E-02
NGOs	**1.06%**	1.02%	1.11E-11***
Israel / Palestine	**0.81%**	0.52%	4.29E-35***
Competition	1.68%	**1.91%**	6.55E-15***
Taxation	1.19%	1.14%	1.07E-01
Tourism	1.10%	**1.23%**	3.33E-33***
Economic Conditions	1.95%	1.97%	6.30E-01
Social Policy	1.44%	**1.79%**	2.36E-18***
Outermost Regions	1.40%	1.34%	7.07E-03
Employment	**1.41%**	1.27%	8.21E-10***
Fisheries	**1.23%**	1.07%	2.15E-04*
Standardization	0.97%	**1.07%**	1.55E-27***
Armed Conflict	**1.93%**	1.68%	2.02E-07***
Follow Up Questions	**2.30%**	2.01%	1.77E-40***
Energy Emissions	1.39%	**1.77%**	4.89E-15***
Discrimination	1.51%	1.43%	6.06E-02
Risk Mitigation	1.00%	**1.03%**	2.35E-07***
Consumer Protection	1.37%	1.42%	4.38E-02
Maritime	0.73%	0.81%	1.12E-03
Member State Comparison	3.25%	**3.61%**	4.96E-33***
Politics	1.58%	1.60%	4.24E-01
FTAs	1.78%	**1.97%**	5.94E-06***
Agriculture	1.29%	**1.81%**	2.32E-27***
Civil Service	1.02%	0.98%	6.07E-03
Waste Management	**1.03%**	0.80%	4.60E-12***
Turkey	**1.37%**	0.90%	6.37E-70***
EU - Municipal	**1.91%**	1.23%	6.42E-99***

Energy Market	0.82%	**1.02%**	2.36E-13***
Implementation	**1.83%**	1.74%	7.17E-07***
International Cooperation	1.17%	1.13%	9.35E-04
Children	1.47%	1.56%	8.81E-03
Political Prisoners	1.53%	1.49%	4.50E-01
Animal Welfare	1.48%	1.60%	1.22E-02
Environment	0.98%	0.88%	1.06E-03
Sanctions	0.83%	0.82%	7.30E-01
Nuclear	0.79%	0.78%	7.00E-01
EU Meetings	1.42%	1.38%	7.76E-02
EU Strategies	1.91%	**2.19%**	2.36E-37***
Conservation	**1.62%**	1.11%	2.84E-29***
Mutual Recognition	0.81%	0.84%	7.66E-02
Media	**1.27%**	1.16%	7.87E-23***
Regulation	1.58%	**1.72%**	1.38E-18***
Borders	0.91%	**1.14%**	2.53E-18***
Digital	1.73%	1.85%	4.64E-03
Land Transport	1.43%	1.45%	7.30E-01
Chemical Safety	1.79%	1.71%	9.87E-02
Language	1.03%	1.00%	2.42E-01
Budget	2.58%	2.50%	4.83E-02
Infrastructure	1.52%	1.53%	6.88E-01
Free Movement	1.37%	**1.49%**	4.46E-09***
EU Treaties	2.09%	2.13%	1.40E-01
Parliamentary Initiatives	1.68%	**1.80%**	3.08E-11***
Eastern Neighborhood	1.04%	**1.78%**	2.12E-68***
Imports / Exports	1.60%	**1.88%**	3.54E-14***
Crime	**1.47%**	1.29%	1.05E-07***
Investigations	**1.67%**	1.54%	3.15E-11***

* $p < 7.25$e-4, ** $p < 1.45$e-4, *** $p < 1.45$e-5

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Appendix A. Model Diagnostics
The following tests were suggested by Julia Silge (2018) for use with data formatted using the quanteda package, to help diagnose the ideal number of topics (*K*) in topic modeling. As a short-hand, for held-out likelihood and semantic coherence, higher values are better; for residuals, lower bounds are better. There is no definitive way of determining which *K* value will be optimal, but these diagnostic tests can provide a guideline.

Figure A1. Model Distribution
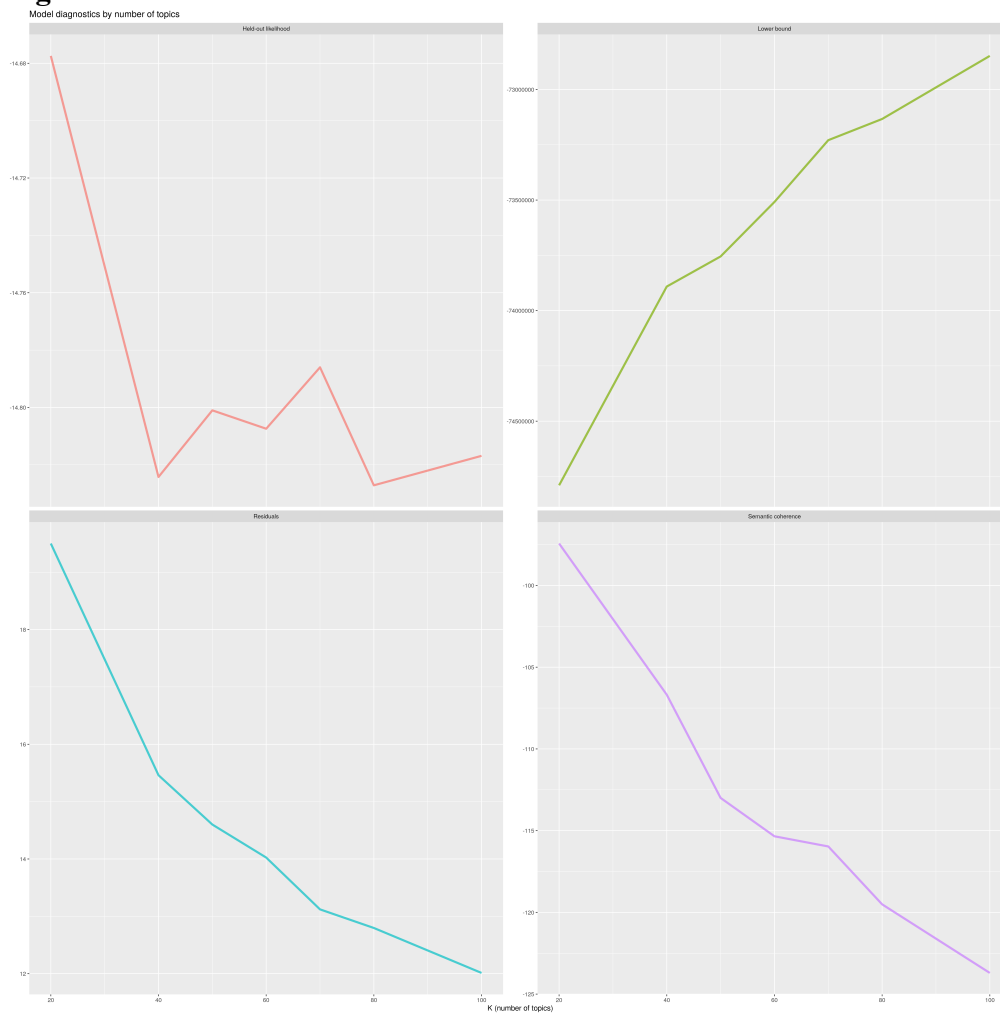
These diagnostic tests are not definitive. However, there seem to be some indications given the slope changes in held-out likelihood and residuals between 60-80 topics that this would be an appropriate range to consider values. This is an appropriate and necessary step of determining the correct number of topics (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). Increases above 70 topics appeared to result in overly-specific topics that created artificial divisions between aspects of the same concept.

Appendix B. Beta Chart for All Topics

Highest Word Probabilities for each Topic
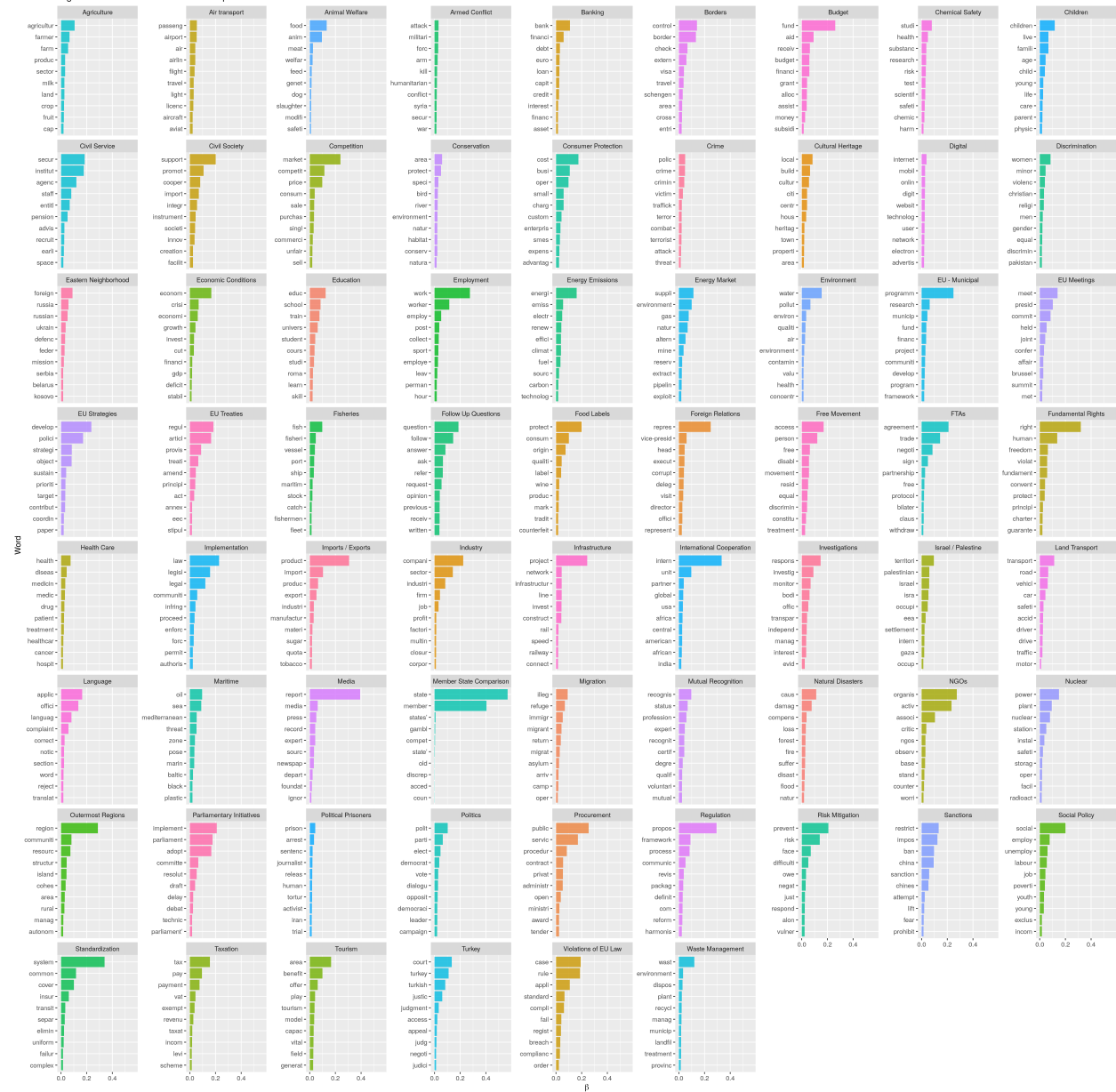
Appendix C. Networked Topics.
The font size of the topic label indicates the percentage of the total corpus a topic comprises. The thickness of the line indicates the level of correlation between two given topics. Colors do not have an intrinsic meaning, and are present to better track connections between dense nodes.