



# Media coverage and vote in the European parliamentary elections in France

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# “Cumul des Mandats” in Contemporary French Politics. An Empirical Study of the *XII<sup>e</sup> législature* of the *Assemblée Nationale*

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## Abstract:

It has often been noted that French politicians frequently hold local and national offices concurrently. Traditionally, this phenomenon is explained by the political culture (a patriarchal conception of authority), the territorial centralization and the weakness of party organizations that characterize France. In order to test the latter two hypotheses, we propose analysing the practise of the *cumul des mandats* at the level of individual parliamentarians. In this way we circumvent the classic  $n=1$  problem without engaging in a comparison with other countries. Based on a logit analysis with the dependent variable equal to the number of local offices held by the members of the National Assembly under the present term (*XII<sup>e</sup> législature*), the study partially confirms our hypotheses. Other variables, such as age and gender, are also considered.

**Keywords:** Cumul des mandats; Elective mandates; France; Parliament.

## Introduction

An oft noted specificity of French politics is the accumulation of mandates and offices held concurrently by most politicians (Knapp, 2004)<sup>1</sup>. This practice, known in French as “*cumul des mandats*”, is an enduring phenomenon – it has indeed even gained momentum – though laws were passed with a view to limiting it. The general public also tends to reject it, as

illustrated by opinion polls which suggest that more than 60% of the electorate would approve of laws prohibiting any form of *cumul*<sup>2</sup>.

*Cumul des mandats* has thus become a much debated issue in political and academic milieus. Most observers point out that this phenomenon is quite specific to France. In other countries, holding several mandates simultaneously is either restricted by law as in Germany, Greece or Italy, or alien to the political culture of the country, as in the US and the UK (Mabileau, 1991: 17). A comparative approach to *cumul des mandats* across Europe based on the number of local offices held by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) shows that French MEPs are by far the most numerous group to hold both a local office and a European mandate. As opposed to France (43.7%) and Luxembourg (33.3%), a mere 16.8% of all the MEPs hold local offices, and the gap between France and Luxembourg is significantly more than 10 points (see appendix I).

There are in fact several types of *cumul* in which French politicians engage when they combine mandates and offices. Since there is no limitation to the number of mandates that a politician may hold in his or her lifetime, political careers are frequently very long as incumbents are often re-elected several times until they retire at an advanced age. However, the concept of *cumul des mandats* usually refers to the multiple mandates held simultaneously by political actors who have responsibilities outside the world of politics proper – in trade unions or professional organizations, for instance –, work in the public or private sector, or hold national or local non-elected executive positions (CREAM, 1998). But the most controversial dimension of *cumul* is the simultaneous accumulation of local elected offices held by national representatives, i.e. members of the National Assembly (MPs). Indeed it is not uncommon, that the mayors of the principle municipalities of a *circonscription* (constituency) successively occupy the same seat in parliament. This is especially the case in the 16<sup>th</sup> *circonscription* of Bouches-du-Rhône where three mayors were elected in the last three legislatures: the mayor of Tarascon (the gaullist Thérèse Aillaud 1993-1997), of Arles (the socialist Michel Vauzelle 1997-2002) and of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer (the UMP Roland Chassain since 2002). In the present study, we will focus on why MPs from the *XII<sup>e</sup> législature* (starting in 2002) engage in a *cumul des mandats* at the local and regional levels (municipalities, *départements* and regions), a political practice that has become widespread in the Fifth Republic.

In the last two decades, several attempts were made to limit the scope of *cumul des mandats*. Two laws were voted in 1985 with a view to preventing representatives from holding concurrently more than one of the following mandates – Member of the European Parliament,

regional councillor (*conseiller régional*), county councillor (*conseiller général*), mayor of a town of more than 20,000 inhabitants, *député-maire* (MP and mayor) of a town of more than 100,000 inhabitants<sup>3</sup>. The unexpected consequence of such regulations was an increase in single *cumul* – i.e. a national office plus a single local function. As Y. Mény puts it, “while the cumul was limited in terms of the number of mandates, it nevertheless became more widespread” (Mény, 1992: 82; see also Mabileau, 1991). The relative failure of the first set of regulations led to the adoption of more constraining rules. Indeed new laws were passed in 2000 and amended in 2003<sup>4</sup>.

In concrete terms, it is impossible today in France for an elected representative to be both a member of the *Assemblée Nationale* and of the *Sénat*. MPs and Senators may not be MEPs either. They may not hold more than one of the following mandates – regional councillor, county councillor, councillor in the Corsican Assembly, councillor of a town of more than 3,500 inhabitants, or councillor in Paris. But an MP can still have local executive functions and be a regional or county assembly president, the president of the Corsican Assembly, or a mayor. In theory he or she may also combine mandates as MP, county council president and mayor of a town of less than 3,500 inhabitants, although, in reality, this configuration does not exist today. Nevertheless certain individuals such as Augustin Bonrepaux are presidents of a *conseil général* (Ariège as it happens) and *adjoint au maire* (deputy mayor) (Ax-les-Thermes), others, like Françoise de Panafieu or Jean Tiberi are mayors (17<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> *arrondissements* of Paris respectively) and members of the *conseil général*.

In the literature, three opposite but non-exclusive interpretations of *cumul des mandats* prevail. According to Y. Mény, this phenomenon is the expression of a patriarchal conception of power in a country still dominated by the traditional image of the monarch: despite the French Revolution, “the traditional conception of authority tends to concentrate power in the hands of one alone” (Mény, 1992: 62; see also Mény, 1997). But this explanation seems to be partly contradicted by opinion polls (Olivier, 1998). Other specialists contend that the accumulation of mandates and offices is linked to the territorial organization of France, characterized by a strong central state (Knapp, 1991), and reflecting the dominant *cursus honorum* of politicians (Sadran, 2000). According to this theory, local mandates are often less an end in themselves than the point of departure necessary to a political career. Because of centralization, they offer only a limited perimeter of action and prestige. On the other hand, as they do not demand a particularly large investment for politicians elected to parliament, the latter have an interest in preserving the economic advantages, the insurance in the case that they are not re-elected at the national level and the proximity to their electorate. This,

however, does not suffice to explain this French specificity: other centralized states exist in Europe where there is not this widespread *cumul*. According to the third explanation, it is the weakness of parties that is at the origin of the widespread existence of *cumul des mandats*: this is due to the fact that in France it is those who are elected several times who make the party and not the inverse (Knapp, 2004; Mény, 1992).

In this article, we propose to analyze *cumul des mandats* with respect to the last two explanations. It must be noted that these hypotheses – a highly centralized state and weak party organization – have never really been tested. This is due to the difficulty of comparing the French situation to those of other countries while addressing all the other contextual variables. In order to get around this difficulty (the classic  $n=1$  problem), we have changed the unit of analysis to individual parliamentarians, thus gaining some variance while controlling for the cultural context.

To sum up, the aim of this paper is twofold. We will first describe the scope and nature of *cumul des mandats* as practiced by the members of the National Assembly following the 2000 and 2003 laws. We will then try and explain what factors may be instrumental in the persistence of such a practice.

### **An empirical study**

The present study focuses on *cumul des mandats* as practiced by the 577 members of *XII<sup>e</sup> législature* of the National Assembly in office at the time of writing (March 2006), that is MPs elected during the 2002 general election plus a few MPs elected more recently during by-elections. Our sample does not include the members of the higher chamber of Parliament, the *Sénat*. Indeed the *raison d'être* of the *Sénat* is partially to represent subnational territorial entities: senators are elected by *grands électeurs* (local elected representatives) and almost all senators hold another local mandate.

The Right won the 2002 general legislative elections. The Assembly is thus composed of a majority of representatives who belong to the conservative *UMP* (a newly formed alliance between *RPR* and some *UDF* members) with 368 MPs (63.78% of the Assembly) and the centre-right *UDF* (30 MPs, 5.2%). The left wing representatives from the Socialist (*PS*) and Communist (*PC*) groups are respectively 149 (25.82%) and 21 (3.64%). The other 11 MPs, who do not belong to any parliamentary group (*NI: non-inscrits*), are members of the environmentalist party (*Les Verts*) (3 MPs), the centre-left *PRG* (2 MPs), the nationalist *MPF* (1 MP) and the right-wing liberal party (*Démocratie Libérale*) (1 MP). Out of the remaining 4

*non-inscrits* MPs, two co-operate with the majority *UMP* – they are thus considered as *UMP* members in our study - and the other two MPs who come from the overseas territory of *La Martinique* are truly *non-inscrits* representatives.

It is interesting to notice that, as is the case in most parliaments in Europe, the Assembly remains rather gerontocratic. In 2006, MPs are 57 years old on average (the youngest MP is 30 and the oldest one, 84). There are no significant differences between the various parties, except for the Communist MPs who are 11 years older (63) than the younger *UDF* representatives (52). Women MPs are slightly younger (56) than their male counterparts.

To go deeper into gender considerations, the legislature remains strongly male-dominated: there are only 75 women who sit in Parliament. The Left is somewhat more feminized: 25 Socialist MPs out of 149 (16%), 4 Communists out of 21 (19%) and 1 Green representative out 3 (33%) are women. As for the Right, 43 MPs are women: 42 *UMP* (11.4%) and 1 *UDF* (3.33%).

These disparities have no significant impact upon *cumul* statistics. 89.25% of all MPs hold one or more additional elective offices<sup>5</sup>. Only 62 members of the National Assembly (10.75%) do not have any other mandate. There are strong similarities between women and men in matters of *cumul* (87% and 90% respectively), or between the *UMP* and the Socialist Party (90% against 89%). Overall, the local position most favoured by MPs is that of mayor (49%), followed by county councillor (13.7%) and regional councillor (9%). Finally, 14.9% of the MPs hold two local elective mandates simultaneously. Figure 1 shows the percentage of MPs who hold local offices according to the type of office held and to the left-right divide (absolute figures are in brackets).

### [Figure 1]

As illustrated in Figure 1, there is no significant difference between left-wing and right-wing parties in matters of *cumul*. We should nevertheless point out the fact that left-wing MPs tend to hold fewer local elective offices than their right-wing counterparts – on average, 1.01 against 1.05.

It is also noteworthy that, out of a total of 577 MPs, 531 are directly elected representatives and 46 (7.97%) are *suppléants* (deputy MPs). According to the French Constitution, deputy MPs (not to be confused with MPs elected on the occasion of by-elections) are elected on the same ticket as the main candidates, whom they replace if the latter are called to other, higher

positions (to become Cabinet members, in most cases). Deputy MPs are slightly younger (55 years of age on average). Among the 46 deputy MPs in the National Assembly, 34 (73.9%) are men. 42 deputy MPs (92.8%) hold one or more additional elective offices and 11 (24%) accumulate more than one supplementary mandate. These indicators show that the profile of deputy MPs is rather similar to that of “ordinary” MPs. Although these figures are only relevant to those deputy MPs who have successfully replaced incumbents and although *UMP* is over-represented in the sample (42 deputy MPs, 92.8% of the sample), it should be noted that deputy MPs cannot be regarded as mere “artefacts” used by parties to improve their brand image or promote minor or junior members.

### **Theory and Hypotheses**

As noted before, some specialists contend that weak political parties and a highly centralized state are the two main factors that may explain why elective offices are so often combined in France (Knapp, 1991). From an institutional point of view, France is indeed one of the most centralized countries in the EU (Colomer, 2002). Political parties, with their lack of resources and organizational autonomy, tend to be weak in the sense that they have a limited influence on the choices of individual politicians (Knapp, 2004). The combination of the two factors thus offers politicians opportunities to multiply electoral mandates at a sustainable political cost.

Before developing the two hypotheses – a highly centralized state and weak party organizations – it is necessary to briefly present the reasons that may explain why MPs engage in a *cumul des mandats*. According to A. François, *cumul* may reduce risks stemming from the precariousness of political careers (François, 2002); it can increase politicians’ income and power, and provide the necessary financial resources for future electoral campaigns (François, 2006). It may also help incumbents be re-elected (Nevers, 1991; Foucault, 2006). But there are at least two major constraints. First, responsibilities are higher and the work load significantly heavier. *Cumul des mandats* is time consuming. It is certainly not an easy task to hold several elective offices at the same time. Secondly, political parties are theoretically opposed to *cumul des mandats*, for two reasons. Multiple office-holders have less time to devote to parliamentary activities (questions to the government, amendments) and they ask more from Parliament (state subsidies for the towns or regions they represent, special attention to local issues) (Mény, 1992). Moreover the general public does not approve of *cumul des mandats* (Olivier 1998). In all logic, there is a definite risk that parties could thus

lose votes if they endorsed “*cumul* candidates”. We therefore make the assumption that, *ceteris paribus*, even if a politician decides to run for several elections concurrently, he will meet strong resistance and opposition from his or her own party.

However, the constraints and political cost attached to holding several elective offices simultaneously are weaker in France than in any other country. Highly centralized institutions imply less work and responsibilities at the local level. As local authorities largely depend on decisions made by central institutions, a representative will have more room for manoeuvre in his daily political activities in a *département* or municipality if he or she seats in Parliament and thus has access to the higher decision-making body. Besides, the generally weak internal organization of parties means that individual parliamentarians can more easily influence the choice of their party’s candidate in a given constituency. French parties can be qualified as weak insofar as they do not possess true organisational autonomy, which is however, one of the fundamental characteristics of any political party (Seiler, 2000). To be precise, the internal division of power between the elected officials and the rest of the party apparatus (party members and administration) is particularly favourable to the former. The material and financial resources belonging to the party are limited: there are very few party members, there is a cap on donations from individuals and those from private enterprises are prohibited by the law and party organizations are not backed by powerful structures on the periphery (unions or foundations) as is often the case elsewhere in Europe<sup>6</sup>. Faced with this lack of resources in party organizations, elected officials enjoy a margin of manoeuvre to the extent that the public financing of parties is linked to the results of legislative elections and locally elected representatives have resources associated with the exercise of a local mandate (i.e. financial compensation, and in the case of a mayor his staff, municipal offices and communication services). Neither the local party authorities (consisting of a few members or clients), nor the national authorities (lacking resources and the ability to sanction) are then able to dissuade a local elected official from running for office in a legislative election: there are so little inclined to do so that they themselves belong to the club of elected representatives.

For lack of a comparison with other European countries, our demonstration concentrates on the variability of the individual situations of French parliamentarians. Indeed the overall picture drawn up does not prevent the distribution of power and modes of organization unique to each party. To a certain extent, one can argue that not all territorial collectivities have the same degree of dependence on the center. In other words, our hypotheses can be tested if we relate the political cost of holding multiple mandates to three factors which vary at the individual level – party strength, various types of local offices and the different

responsibilities attached to the positions held. We can formulate four hypotheses relating to the relationship between party and individual politicians and two hypotheses relative to the material cost of *cumul*.

First, *the likelihood that an MP may hold several mandates depends on his or her party organization*. Though French political parties are weak as a rule, some are weaker than others. We will hypothesize that the politicians of the weakest parties (that is to say those that have a minimal organizational autonomy) enjoy a larger margin of individual manoeuvre and thus tend to have more mandates.

Secondly, *a politician is more likely to hold several offices if he or she is firmly established in a region*. This relates to the issue of local power. In his or her dealings with the party, a well-established politician, who is known to the militants and has a good grasp of the local environment, can more easily be a multiple office candidate. Strictly speaking, we should distinguish here between different types of political trajectory or *cursus honorum* (Sellier, 1984). According to this idea, the practice of *cumul* does not have the same logic depending on whether it is practised in an ascending or a descending manner: an MP who previously held a local mandate has neither the same difficulties to be elected nor the same political goals as an MP who obtained a local mandate after his national one. The most striking difference is the influence of the party on the career of the politicians. The party will a priori have a greater influence in the first case. Nevertheless, the large majority of MPs have an ascending *cumul*: 83% of them have one or more local mandates before being elected as an MP. Following the careers of actual MPs, we establish that 86% of cumulating MPs (“*cumulards*”) have an ascending *cursus honorum* and that individuals who were mayors before becoming MPs, like the highly visible mayor-MP of Bègles, Noël Mamère, are three times more numerous than those who were first parliamentarians.

Thirdly, *members of party executive committees tend to hold more offices*. As for any party member, there is a conflict of interest between the official positions defended by the party and the defense of their personal interests. But contrary to the rank and file members, party leaders are in a stronger position to defend their own positions: they possess the resources, information and the notoriety associated with their position in the party. They are therefore less likely to meet internal opposition when they choose to be candidates more than one time.

Fourthly, *a single member type of election favours cumul more than a list system*. The choice of a candidate is, by definition, very important in matters of *cumul*, because it is the moment when the party decides whether or not it will support a candidate who already holds an elected mandate. Once again, the issue hinges on the balance between the party as an institution and

the politician as an individual, which partly depends on the electoral system. Arguably, in a list system, voting is much more about ideological or partisan considerations than about the candidates' supposed personal qualities: individual candidates are diluted in a list system. The role of the party is much more significant in the case of a list system than in a single member election. If the party proves to be too authoritarian, there is a definite risk that a well-established incumbent might run as an independent candidate and win against the party's official nominee. Conversely, the bargaining power of an individual candidate is much weaker in the case of a list system, because he or she may find it difficult to put up a competing list.

These four hypotheses illustrate the relationship between parties and individual politicians, which obviously influences the choice of the candidates.

We should also address the problem of the costs attached to the responsibilities and tasks assumed. We therefore propose two other hypotheses.

First, *parliamentarians from more independent regions tend not to hold local offices*. As explained before, it is generally easier to hold several elected offices in France than anywhere else because institutional centralization decreases the responsibilities of local office-holders. But some MPs come from more independent and distant constituencies and regions. We contend that, in these regions, local mandates demand more direct involvement from the persons in charge. In such regions politicians tend to relinquish their local mandates when they are elected to Parliament.

Secondly, *politicians tend to hold more mandates in less populated constituencies*. The work load and responsibilities implied in the political management of a densely populated urban area are more significant than in low density rural areas. Parliamentarians are thus more likely to keep their local mandates in rural areas.

We have thus tentatively shown that party weakness and territorial centralization may account for the prevalence of *cumul des mandats* in France. In the next part, we propose to test these explanations according to the six specific hypotheses mentioned above. We also take into account two demographic variables: age and sex.

## **Data and variables**

To test our hypotheses, we have used two sets of indicators – indicators related to our dependent variable (the different possibilities of *cumul* offered to MPs) and indicators that

make up our independent variables (socio-political indicators about parliamentarians, party organization and the characteristic features of the constituencies).

*Dependent Variable: types of cumul*

There are many elective functions that French parliamentarians can hold. We shall analyse here the three most important ones not only in quantitative terms but also their significance: municipal mandates (*maires* and *conseillers municipaux*), county council members (*conseiller général*) and regional council members (*conseiller regional*).

Using official information available on the National Assembly website, our database consists of information regarding whether or not the MPs have a local mandate, and the number of mandates held simultaneously (two or three). There are in fact two dependent variables. The first (*cumul*) is a dummy variable that equals 1 if an MP holds a local elective office and 0 if he or she does not. The second (*cumul type*) is a nominal variable scored 0 if an MP has no local office, 1 in the case of a municipal office, 2 if he or she is a general councillor, 3 if he or she is a regional councillor and 4 if he or she holds at least two local elective offices.

*Independent variables and associated indicators*

- Party organization

The first independent variable (*Party organization*) establishes a classification of parties in terms of their degree of organizational autonomy: it aims to test the hypothesis according to which the weaker a party is in terms of its organizational resources the more its MPs have a tendency to cumulate. The extent to which central committee membership is controlled by the members of the “party in office” as opposed to the party rank and file members is particularly relevant to the question of party organization. The dichotomy originally established by Duverger (1951) between “mass party” and “cadre party” has lost some of its accuracy following the deep changes that have affected political life in Western Europe. Katz and Mair (1995) suggest that the cartel party has become the dominant model in contemporary politics, which is a relevant description of most French political parties, especially the *UMP* and *PS*, (Seiler, 2003). However, there are some differences in terms of party strength, membership and numbers of elected politicians.

Using several indicators relative to party organization (see appendix II) as well as data from specialized studies, we propose a typology of party organization based on the degree of

control exerted by the “party in office” over party leadership. In the case of the centre-right parties, Haegel (2002) points out that the respective role of in-office politicians and militants was a very sensitive issue when a new political alliance was concluded between right-wing parties in 2002: the centre-right *UDF* members who joined the alliance strongly opposed giving militants a dominant position whereas the conservative *RPR* leaders adopted a more open attitude towards the rank and file members. This resulted in a compromise in the drafting of the new *UMP* alliance party statutes. Conversely, two other parties, namely the part of the *UDF* party which remained an independent parliamentary group, and the centre-left *PRG* party – traditionally considered as “cadre parties” – have kept a structure which is much more favourably oriented towards in-office leaders. The parliamentary group leaders are given an *ex-officio* status (in the National Assembly, Senate and European Parliament) in their respective central committees and there are very few non-elected members in their executive committees<sup>7</sup>.

The French Communist Party (*PCF*), considered as an ideal-type mass party during the 1950s, has typically retained some of its original characteristics: there are very few elected politicians among the party leaders and the party machinery has kept a significant role. The Green party sticks to its internal rule of not allowing any member to hold several mandates simultaneously: the leading committee of the party is only made up of non-office-holding politicians.

The typology of party organization appears as an ordinal indicator, which differentiates between three types of political parties, according to the institutional constraints imposed on their elected members. The weakest parties in terms of internal organization are in the first group (*UDF*, *PRG*, *MPF*, *DL* and the *non-inscrits* representatives), then comes the group comprising *UMP* and *PS*, and finally the third group is made up of parties in which grass-root members and militants are the most influential (French Communist Party, Greens)<sup>8</sup>. We propose to assess the influence of these data on the propensity of politicians to accumulate elective mandates.

- Local strongholds

The second independent variable pertains to the local ties that may exist between a well-established MP and his or her constituency. The hypothesis is the following one: a long-standing parliamentarian is bound to be well-known to the electorate and thus highly likely to be re-elected, independently of his or her party’s support. Likewise, the more local mandates he or she may have held, the more legitimate he or she is to run for new elections. Political

experience and reputation, acquired through consecutive terms of office, lessen risks of local political competition. *Cumul* across time facilitates vertical *cumul*. In order to assess how well-established MPs may be, we have computed the number of elective mandates (data from the National Assembly website), held in the same local areas as their constituencies before they were elected for the first time in Parliament.

- Party leadership

To assess the impact of party leadership positions upon *cumul*, a dichotomous variable differentiates between MPs who are party leaders (as stated on the official website of each party) from those who have no specific position in their party. In the *UMP* party, the central committee is made up of the president, deputy-presidents, the treasurer, the president's own political advisers, spokespersons, executive councillors, national secretaries for political affairs and administrative national secretaries. The leading body of the Socialist Party is composed of the National Secretariat and of the Project Committee. Leadership in the *UDF* party is entrusted to the president and vice-presidents, the spokesperson, the treasurer and the executive committee. The Greens have an executive committee of 13 members who were elected on the occasion of the 2005 Congress. The *PRG* central committee gathers together the president, the general delegate, the secretary general, the treasurer, the spokesperson and deputy-presidents. The *PCF* president collaborates with the National Council and the Executive College.

As this stage, it should already be noted that 97 members of the National Assembly (17%) have a leading position in their party. There are significant differences between the parties: the proportion is 63% for the *UDF*, 14% for the *UMP*, and 18% for the *PS*. Of all the MPs who hold directional responsibilities in their parties, 94% (91 out of 97) also hold a local elected office and 9% (9 out of 97) hold two elected offices.

- Devolution, Decentralization

To test our hypothesis relative to the degree of autonomy of the various constituencies, we have constructed a dummy variable, which differentiates between metropolitan regions and the few "territories" that are endowed with a specific status. Despite the high degree of centralization of the French state, special rights have been granted to some regional entities – overseas regions in their vast majority – (Corsica, French Polynesia, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guyana, New Caledonia and La Réunion island). Corsica was a "region" but became an autonomous "territorial community" in 1991 (the law on 13 May 1991). The autonomous

status was extended after a new law was voted on 22 January 2002. Following the revision of the Constitution on 28 March 2003, each over-seas community was granted a specific status. While being more autonomous than the standard metropolitan regions, they can adapt legislative provisions and merge regional and county councils into a single assembly. The overseas territories thus offer an interesting opportunity to test whether local MPs tend to practice *cumul des mandats* on the model of metropolitan MPs. It should be noted, however, that the devolution indicator is strongly correlated to the geographical distance of the constituencies from the capital, which could be another intervening variable<sup>9</sup>.

- Density

We have also constructed a variable indicating the characteristics of the local environment, namely the population density in each *département* as measured by the French National Institute of Statistics (INSEE). The totality of the French territory has been taken into account, i.e. 100 *départements*, plus several overseas local authorities. Our objective is to assess the political cost attached to multiple office-holding according to the density of the local population concerned<sup>10</sup>.

- Gender and age

We have introduced the two most important control variables: gender and age. This is a dummy variable labelled 1 for men and 0 for women. The age variable corresponds to the age of each parliamentarian in early 2006.

## **Empirical Results**

In this section, we propose to analyse empirically to what extent the degree of centralization and the organisational weakness of the parties in France may be the main factors that account for *cumul des mandats*. Our hypotheses are tested through a Logit analysis with robust standard errors.

In Table 1, the dependent variable is a dummy indicator of the accumulation of local elective offices (*cumul*). Only 62 members of the National Assembly (11%) do not hold additional local offices. The impact of the seven independent variables on the choice to engage in *cumul* is evaluated independently of the type of local office held. The first three independent variables relate to the negotiation between politicians and parties (party organization, local

strongholds, and party leadership). The next two variables refer to the political cost of *cumul* (devolution and density), and the two last ones are gender and age.

### [Table 1]

Starting with the indicators relative to the assumption about the conflict of interest between parties and individual politicians, the first result is that the stronger an individual politician is locally (several local offices held in a row) the more he or she practices *cumul* – the coefficient is significant. The coefficient for the “party organization” variable, though less significant, confirms our findings: the stronger party organization is, the less likely a politician is to hold local offices. Finally, the impact of the “party leadership” variable is not statistically significant, but is in keeping with the initial hypothesis: party leaders are more often multiple office-holders than other MPs.

In terms of political cost, only the second variable gives a statistically significant result: in the constituencies with high population density, parliamentarians tend to hold fewer offices. MPs elected in more “autonomous” territories practice *cumul* slightly less than in the other metropolitan regions, but the coefficient is not significant at all. This result suggests that the degree of centralization is not a cause of *cumul des mandats*.

Finally, gender has no significant impact, contrary to the age variable. The older politicians tend to hold fewer offices than the others: the average age of office-holders is 56.3 years compared to 59.6 for non-office-holders. Actually, the rate of non-*cumul* for MPs aged 70 and over is much higher (43%) than in the rest of the sample (11%). We may thus propose a simple explanation: some older politicians are probably on their way to retirement, which explains why they decide to relinquish one local office.

In general terms, the first results suggest that, although the indicators relative to party organization and to the positions held within the party are hardly significant from a statistical perspective, the stronger a politician is *as an individual* and the weaker his or her party is *as an organized group*, the more *cumul* there is. These findings also corroborate the fact that the political cost of *cumul* is globally an important factor in a politician’s decision to hold several electoral offices: parliamentarians elected in constituencies where the cost of *cumul* is higher (that is, where the population is more concentrated) are less likely to hold two or three mandates simultaneously. On the other hand, there is no evidence indicating a link between centralization and *cumul des mandats*.

After analysing the various factors, we should now differentiate between four types of *cumul* – the combination of a parliamentary mandate with only one municipal, county, or regional mandate. The fourth category includes parliamentarians who hold at least two of the previously-mentioned local offices. These mandates depend on the specificities of local elections. In municipal elections the mayor and his councillors are directly elected in each town and *commune*. It is a two-round list system vote with a strong advantage given to the majority in terms of seats. The election of county councillors is based on the same system, but each councillor is elected in a single-member district. Regional councillors are elected according to a proportional list system. Through the different electoral systems we can thus indirectly test our fourth hypothesis according to which a single-member electoral system tends to favour *cumul*, whereas the list system does not. Moreover, this analysis aims at determining the respective influence of each of our six independent variables according to the type of local mandate held.

If we turn to the question of the impact of the electoral rule, our hypothesis is confirmed by the under-representation of regional councillors among MPs. 11% of parliamentarians are regional councillors, compared with 25% who are county councillors and 66% who are mayors or municipal councillors. The last figure can be explained by the fact that municipal offices are the most numerous in France. However the fact that MPs should hold offices at the county level more than at the regional level cannot be attributed to the greater number of county councillors compared to regional councillors (4038 and 1878 respectively). Only 3.5% of the regional councillors are MPs compared to 3.6% of the county councillors who are also MPs. Such a figure means that there is no real preference for county mandates. This result is all the more interesting since only 8% of MPs who are also county councillors are women, compared to 29% of MPs in regional councils. In Table 2, the gender variable is significant only in the case of MPs who are concurrently regional councillors, and it is favourable to women. Considering the fact that laws on gender parity were passed in France, the greater number of women in regional councils confirms our hypothesis that political parties play a more important role in the choice of candidates at the regional level.

This last hypothesis is all the more reinforced if one establishes a distinction between a “descending cumul” and an “ascending cumul”. The MPs who practice a descending cumul, and who have even more need of support from their party in order to accumulate, are most common in the regional councils (21% compared to 9% in the county councils and 15% in municipal councils). These figures suggest that, in the regional councils where there is a list system, the parties tend to place their own MPs, who usually have a descending trajectory and

are often either women or national leaders<sup>11</sup>. On the contrary in the county councils where the ballot is uninominal, the trajectories are ascending and very masculine. The model that we have proposed, based on the conflict between party and candidate, functions much better in the case of ascending *cumul*, as is shown in Table 2.

After analysing the direct impact of the electoral system on *cumul des mandats*, we propose, in Table 2, to assess the impact of our seven independent variables on different types of *cumul*, through a multinomial logistic regression.

### [Table 2]

Among the first three variables, it is interesting to differentiate between the variables that reveal a conflict of interest between parties and politicians (party organization and local strongholds) and those that show cooperation (party leadership). The first two variables assess the respective strength of parties and politicians. Together, they show the balance of power at work in the choice of candidates. The “cooperative variable” points to the cases in which parties and politicians are represented by the very same persons.

Table 1 highlights the fact that the “conflict variables” are more predictive of *cumul* than the “cooperative variables”. Table 2 shows that the conflict variables influence county councillors’ election, especially in the case of two local elective offices, whereas the cooperative variable only influences the election of regional councillors.

Since county elections are the only elections based on single-member districts, the decision of an individual politician to stand in the election is arguably easier, without or against his or her party’s support. There can only be one candidate for each party, and it is more difficult to find some form of compromise. In this configuration, the balance of power is a more decisive factor. When candidates run for two local elections, we suppose that parties are more opposed to nominating their representatives for local offices.

In the list system (at the regional level and, to a lesser extent, at the municipal level), the selection of candidates is more the result of a compromise between local politicians and parties. It is indeed possible to find some form of consensus on who should be on the list. For that reason, it is not surprising that the co-operative variable should be more significant. The findings are less clear in the case of municipal elections.

The findings for the two “cost-of-*cumul*” variables only partially confirm the impact of political cost in matters of *cumul*: they point to the expected direction for all types of local offices, but they are significant only with regard to population density. They also reveal a

cleavage between MPs who hold one local office and those who hold two. As far as the demographic situation of the *départements* is concerned, the results are statistically significant for MPs who hold one local office. This confirms that the choice to hold several functions depends on the density of the local population because local offices are difficult to hold on to in the more densely populated areas. MPs who hold two local offices do not seem to be influenced by this factor; we do not have any explanation for such a difference.

If we turn to the socio-demographic variables, the age factor is an incentive to run for several offices and gender is only significant in the case of regional elections – it is favourable to women, as we explained above. In the other cases, there is a bias for men, but it is not a significant one.

In short, our findings confirm the relationship that exists between the weakness of political parties and the *cumul des mandats*. The various types of party organization and the candidates' reputation and firm establishment at the local level have a clear impact on *cumul*. This impact is stronger than the influence of the positions held within the parties. These variables are more significant when the electoral system is based on a list system. Finally, as expected, population density have a negative impact on *cumul*. On the other hand, surprisingly, the degree of centralization does not seem to influence the decisions of politicians.

## **Conclusion**

The practice of *cumul des mandats* in France is massive though laws were passed with a view to limiting it. Nearly 90% of the members of the National Assembly hold local offices. As in our hypotheses, there are some obvious incentives for politicians to hold several electoral functions, but there are also some differentiated costs and opportunities. Generally speaking, the benefits outweigh the costs.

If we consider the political costs, our analysis reveals that the age factor is a significant constraint for ageing parliamentarians who tend to hold fewer functions. More importantly, the hypotheses relative to the territorial structure of the country are not fully confirmed. The demographic factor plays a significant role: the political cost is lower in sparsely populated areas; politicians thus have more opportunities to hold several offices. But, contrary to our expectations, the lack of local autonomy does not lessen the cost of holding a local office for a parliamentarian. The absence of a statistic link between the territorial organization and *cumul* seems to contradict the existing literature. It must be recognized, however, that as the degree

of centralization only slightly varies in France, our study – based on an analysis at the individual level – only allows for an imperfect test of this hypothesis.

Our general hypothesis based on a supposed conflict of interest between individual politicians who want to hold several offices, and political parties which prefer to limit the practice of *cumul* by their members is strongly confirmed. As the parties' own resources are weak, politicians tend to have more power. We should also highlight the fact that this factor is more important at the local level, in the case of a single member voting system than in a list system. In the first case, each politician with a strong local position has much more power than his or her party. In actual fact, *cumul* is just as commonly practiced in a list system, but we should rather speak of some form of “abnormal” *cumul* because the multiple office-holders are surprisingly not those politicians who are well-established in a region, but understandably the party leaders or women candidates. In a list system, parties use their clout in the balance of power to promote gender candidates and favour their leaders.

Ultimately, our study brings not only an empirical demonstration to the traditional thesis according to which the weakness of parties favour *cumul des mandats* in France. It also demonstrates that there are two distinct types of *cumul* according to which the direction is ascending or descending: the weakness of parties offers further explanation for the first case. It would be particularly interesting to apply this analytic model to other countries: this would pinpoint the effect weak parties have on *cumul des mandats*. It would also be an opportunity to verify if the absence of the impact of territorial centralization can be explained by the insufficiencies of our indicator or if this hypothesis ought to be definitively avoided.

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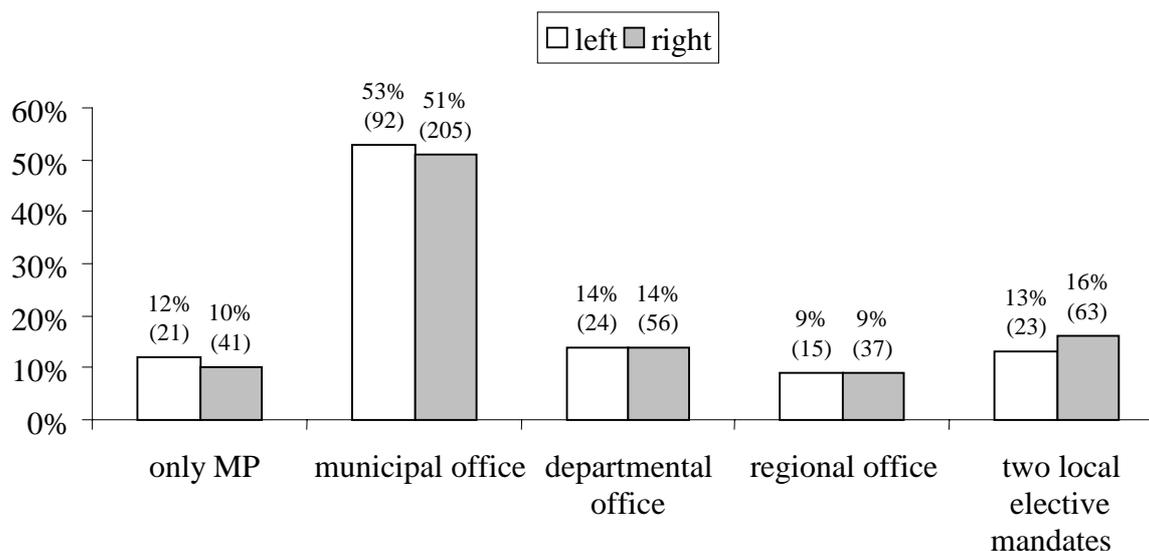
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**Fig 1.** Percentage and number of MPs who are multiple office-holders according to their political affiliation



Source: own calculus from data provided by the official website of the Assemblée nationale (accessed on 26 February 2006)

**Table 1** Factors of *cumul des mandats* in general (whatever the local office)

Logit estimates with robust standard errors

|                    | Robust<br>Coef. | Std. Err. | z     |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------|
| Party organization | -.769*          | (.457)    | -1.68 |
| Local strongholds  | .260***         | (.070)    | 3.70  |
| Party leadership   | .636            | (.461)    | 1.35  |
| Devolution         | -.489           | (.620)    | -0.72 |
| Density            | -.055**         | (.026)    | -2.11 |
| Age                | -.052***        | (.018)    | -2.91 |
| Gender             | .235            | (.393)    | 0.60  |
| Constant           | 5.031***        | (1.14)    | 4.40  |

\*\*\*p<.01, \*\*p<.05, \*p<.1

N = 577  
 LR chi2(6) = 36.48  
 Prob > chi2 = 0.0000  
 Pseudo R2 = 0.0927  
 Correctly classified = 89%

**Table 2** Which local elective office is preferred

Multinomial logistic regression

|                    | Municipal<br>councillors   | County<br>councillors     | Regional<br>councillors    | Two local<br>offices       |
|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Party organization | <b>-.355</b><br>(.476)     | <b>-1.426**</b><br>(.584) | <b>-.796</b><br>(.667)     | <b>-1.361**</b><br>(.575)  |
| Local strongholds  | <b>.230***</b><br>(.073)   | <b>.363***</b><br>(.085)  | <b>.074</b><br>(.100)      | <b>.371***</b><br>(.084)   |
| Party leadership   | <b>.661</b><br>(.491)      | <b>.538</b><br>(.577)     | <b>1.562***</b><br>(.567)  | <b>-.088</b><br>(.575)     |
| Devolution         | <b>-.517</b><br>(.702)     | <b>-.473</b><br>(.839)    | <b>-.043</b><br>(.883)     | <b>-1.088</b><br>(.978)    |
| Density            | <b>-.099***</b><br>(.033)  | <b>-.126*</b><br>(.065)   | <b>-.307**</b><br>(.146)   | <b>.047</b><br>(.030)      |
| Gender             | <b>.278</b><br>(.415)      | <b>.695</b><br>(.577)     | <b>-1.026**</b><br>(.491)  | <b>.831</b><br>(.559)      |
| Age                | <b>-.049***</b><br>(.018)  | <b>-.061**</b><br>(.023)  | <b>-.055*</b><br>(.025)    | <b>-.056**</b><br>(.022)   |
| Constant           | <b>4.016***</b><br>(1.187) | <b>3.563**</b><br>(1.468) | <b>4.324***</b><br>(1.564) | <b>3.026***</b><br>(1.448) |

\*\*\*p&lt;.01, \*\*p&lt;.05, \*p&lt;.1

Number of obs = 577  
LR chi2(24) = 127.77  
Prob > chi2 = 0.0000  
Pseudo R2 = 0.0816

## Appendix I. Local offices held by Members of the European Parliament in 2003

| Country        | No local office | One or more local office | N   |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----|
| France         | 49 (56.3%)      | 38 (43.7%)               | 87  |
| Luxembourg     | 4 (66.7%)       | 2 (33.3%)                | 6   |
| Belgium        | 20 (80%)        | 5 (20%)                  | 25  |
| Ireland        | 12 (80%)        | 3 (20%)                  | 15  |
| Italy          | 70 (80.5%)      | 17 (19.5%)               | 87  |
| Austria        | 17 (80.9%)      | 4 (19.1%)                | 21  |
| Finland        | 13 (81.3%)      | 3 (18.7%)                | 16  |
| Sweden         | 18 (81.8%)      | 4 (18.2%)                | 22  |
| Germany        | 85 (85.9%)      | 14 (14.1%)               | 99  |
| Portugal       | 22 (88%)        | 3 (12%)                  | 25  |
| Greece         | 23 (92%)        | 2 (8%)                   | 25  |
| Netherlands    | 29 (93.5%)      | 2 (6.5%)                 | 31  |
| Spain          | 60 (93.8%)      | 4 (6.2%)                 | 64  |
| United Kingdom | 83 (95.4%)      | 4 (4.6%)                 | 87  |
| Denmark        | 16 (100%)       | 0 (0%)                   | 16  |
| All            | 521 (83.2%)     | 105 (16.8%)              | 626 |

Source: own calculus based on data provided by the European Parliament (*Vade Mecum of the European Parliament*, Luxembourg, European Parliament, 2003)

## Appendix II. Indicators and data used to establish the typology of French parties according to their organization

|       | Parliamentarians (MPs, senators, MEPs) in party leadership | % of unelected politicians in party leadership | Office holders have a specific representation in the party leadership | Candidate selection for legislative elections according to party status | Membership/score at 1999 European election |
|-------|--|--|---|---|--|
| UDF   | 81% (N = 48)   | 4%   | Yes   | By party leadership   | 4,838                                      |
| UMP   | 73% (N = 86)   | 6%   | Yes   | By party leadership   | 11,718                                     |
| PS    | 65% (N = 54)   | 13%  | No  | By party members  | 5,454                                      |
| PCF   | 9% (N = 55)  | 55%  | No  | By party committee  | 22,058                                     |
| Verts | 0% (N = 13)  | 100%   | No  | By party committee  | 360  |

Source : official websites of the political parties (accessed on 21 February 2006), Hermet *et al.* (1998) for membership data and Ministère de l'Intérieur website for the 1999 European election results.

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<sup>2</sup> According to a survey conducted by IPSOS for *France Soir* (10-11 March 2000), 61% of those interviewed were in favour of prohibiting *cumul des mandats*. The score was slightly higher among the sympathisers of the left (64%) than those of the right (57%). Only 4% of the sample (920 individuals) did not answer.

<sup>3</sup> Loi organique n° 85-1405 and loi ordinaire n° 85-1406 modifying the Electoral Code, adopted on 30 December 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Loi organique n° 2000-294 and loi ordinaire n° 2000-295 adopted on 5 April 2000, and loi n° 2003-327 adopted on 11 April 2003.

<sup>5</sup> It is useful to remember that this percentage is not very different than those of previous legislatures. In 1978, it was 77%, in 1988 88% and in 1997 92% (Knapp, 2004: 8).

<sup>6</sup> In France, only 2% of those interviewed in the European Values Survey admitted belonging to a political party while for the entirety of the 32 European countries concerned by this investigation, the average is 4.3% (Halman, 2001: 22). Similarly, only 0.7% of French respondents admitted participating in voluntary work for a political party compared to 1.9% for the entirety. Thus, as much for party membership as volunteer work, France is the second last EU-15 country just ahead of Portugal.

<sup>7</sup> On the *UDF* party, see D. Hanley (1999).

<sup>8</sup> In a comparative review of urban political parties, Hoffmann-Martinot (1998) has shown that there was a correlation between the strength of party organization and the degree of partisanship in municipal politics. The index used, SPOIX (Strong Party Organization Index), corroborates our findings on the organization of political parties in France.

<sup>9</sup> An indicator measuring only the distance between the locality of the elected representative and parliament has been tested, but it did not yield any significant results. We did not retain it because of its strong correlation with the devolution variable.

<sup>10</sup> One might think that using the *département* as the only territorial scale is not relevant for municipal or regional mandates. Actually, the regional councillors are elected at the departemental level and represent their *département*. As for municipal representatives, the departemental scale serves to indicate the concentration of metropolitan zones in which one would suppose the work of a representative is undertaken.

<sup>11</sup> Among the « *cumulards* » 1 woman in 5 practices a descending *cumul*, whereas it is only 1 man in 8. Among women, the most well known is Ségolène Royal, first elected as MP in 1988, then regional councillor in 1992. Similarly, 1 leader in 5 practice descending *cumul*, compared 1 in 8 for the others.