

Experience and the distribution of portfolio payoffs in the European Commission

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Abstract. This article tests four theories of portfolio distribution within the European Commission and assesses whether experience plays a role in the process of allocating policy responsibilities. The share of portfolios that each Member State is assigned, through its Commissioners, is strongly related to its resources and voting power, as predicted by the proportionality norm and bargaining theory, respectively. Additionally, Member States with Commissioners that have experience in the relevant portfolios are assigned shares that are significantly above what one may expect from these two theories. For half of the portfolios, Commissioners have moderate views along the dimension of the policy they manage, but appointed Commissioners also have significantly more experience in both supranational portfolios and similar national portfolios than the median Commissioner. The difference in experience in supranational and, more weakly, national portfolios significantly accounts for the difference in preference between the appointed and the median Commissioner. Finally, salience matters as well. Left/right leaning Commissioners are significantly more likely to be assigned portfolios with a left-wing/right-wing ideological profile, but this strong relation disappears for Commissioners with above average experience in the Commission, in the relevant supranational portfolios or in national governments.

Introduction: Four theories of portfolio distribution

In this article, I test four theories of portfolio distribution within the European Commission. Additionally, I show how a previously ignored factor – experience – also matters for the quantitative and qualitative distribution of portfolios. Along with the study of the composition and the duration of governments, there is a very rich literature in comparative politics that investigates the determinants of the quantitative and qualitative distribution of cabinet portfolios in parliamentary democracies. In these systems, one of the benefits accruing to a party joining a coalition government is a share of the posts that are necessary for running the government. An enduring empirical finding about the quantitative distribution of these posts among coalition parties goes back to Browne and Franklin (1973) who showed that a party's share of ministerial portfolios closely approximates its proportion of parliamentary seats. Browne and Franklin saw this as confirmation of what later became

known Gamson's (1961: 376) hypothesis, according to which 'any participant will expect others to demand from a coalition a share of the payoff proportional to the amount of resources which they contribute to a coalition'.

This empirical finding has stood up against intense criticisms, one of which was the failure to distinguish between types of portfolios. Undoubtedly, the payoff accruing to a coalition party for holding the prime ministership cannot plausibly be considered to be equal to the payoff accruing for heading the ministry of equal opportunities (e.g., Browne & Feste 1975; Browne & Fren-deis 1980; Warwick & Druckman 2001). Druckman and Warwick have taken this challenge the farthest. They have produced a set of portfolio salience scores for 14 Western European countries derived from an expert survey (Druckman & Warwick 2005), and have shown that salience-weighted portfolio payoffs to a coalition party are still predominantly related to its share of parliamentary seats (Warwick & Druckman 2006).

An alternative to Gamson's hypothesis is bargaining theory. According to this perspective, the distribution of coalition payoffs can be plausibly conceived as a 'divide-the-dollar' game whereby actors negotiate their share of the payoff strategically exploiting institutional rules and differences among players. For example, Baron and Ferejohn's (1989) well-known model consists of a randomly selected legislator making proposals for the division of the payoff that must be approved by a majority in the chamber. The model predicts that legislators will receive a share of the payoff that is proportional to their voting weight, while the proposer will receive a share that is disproportionately larger than its weight. Other formal models, such as Morelli's (1999) demand bargaining model, do not expect such an advantage to the proposer. The share of the payoff accruing to each actor is purely proportional to its voting weight.¹

Empirical evidence on portfolio distribution in parliamentary democracies does not definitely support bargaining theory in favour of Gamson's hypothesis. Earlier, as well as more recent, works have actually found stronger support for Gamson's hypothesis (Mershon 2001; Schofield & Laver 1985; Warwick & Druckman 2001, 2006). Ansolabehere et al. (2005), however, point out that most of these works (the exception being Warwick & Druckman 2006) do not correctly operationalise the crucial variable underpinning the expectations of bargaining theory (i.e., the voting weight of players) and they illustrate the power of this theory when the variable is correctly measured. Still, they fail to reject Gamson's hypothesis in favour of bargaining theory, as much as they fail to reject the latter in favour of the former (Ansolabehere et al. 2005: 558).

There are fewer formal and empirical works on the qualitative distribution of portfolios, or rather on the factors explaining why specific policy responsibilities are allocated to specific parties or, even politicians. Until the second half of the 1990s, scholars who proposed theories of government formation

ignored the distribution of portfolios (e.g., Baron 1991; Schofield 1993).² Since then, the single most important advance has been Laver and Shepsle's (1996) model of government formation. One main expectation of this work is that the dimension-by-dimension median cabinet is an equilibrium if there is no alternative government in its winset. In other words, if there is no majority that can beat this cabinet, a stable government configuration consists of portfolios allocated to the parties that are in a median position along the different policy dimensions.³ Laver and Shepsle (1996: 164–166) provide strong empirical support for this expectation in their analysis of the composition of Western European coalition governments.

A second, less developed theory of qualitative portfolio distribution puts emphasis on the fact that different political actors are likely to weight the same portfolio differently because the benefits derived from running a specific policy have different distributive impacts on the key constituencies supporting these actors. In other words, policy dimensions are likely to be weighted differently. For instance, social democratic parties tend to care more about welfare state policies, while conservative parties weight finance-related and law-and-order policies more heavily. Browne and Feste (1975) were the first to notice how specific party types are more likely to obtain specific ministries in parliamentary democracies, and Budge and Keman (1990: 89–131) provide an extensive review of the empirical evidence.⁴ The fact that politicians are likely to attach different values to portfolios should not come as a surprise. Politicians have different support constituencies whose interests are likely to be better served by some rather than other policies. Moreover, there is at least some support for the contention that the specific distribution of portfolios matters for policy outcomes (Giannetti & Laver 2005; Thomson 2001).

Portfolio distribution and the role of experience

In this article, I test these four theories on the distribution of portfolios for the European Commission between 1958 and 2004. I also show that political experience is another important factor that can affect these decisions. From Baron and Ferejohn (1989) to Laver and Shepsle (1996), all the models on payoff distribution, including those specifically designed to explain portfolio allocation, assume that players consume their payoff once office benefits have been distributed. In reality, we know that this is not the case. In coalition governments, parties realise their payoffs when policies are implemented by ministers throughout the life of the government. Having someone in place at the relevant ministry is clearly different from having someone implementing policies that generate the necessary electoral support for the coalition party in

particular and for the government more generally. This creates an important disjuncture between the allocation decision and the realisation of benefits and it inserts an important element of uncertainty. What if ministers are incapable of taking measures that benefit the government? Second, the distribution of portfolios is not a zero-sum, purely distributive game as the literature implies. In parliamentary systems, the fortunes of parties in a coalition government are frequently tied together. Certainly, a party in an office-seeking mode tries to maximise its share of government posts, but its electoral destiny is undoubtedly linked to the performance of ministers of coalition partners.

Consider this very simple scenario. An actor G has to appoint an agent to be in charge of a portfolio and she can choose between two agents, A and B. Players have single-peaked preferences represented by ideal points x_i for $i = a, b, g$, in a unidimensional policy space $X = \mathfrak{R}^1$. Additionally, $x_g = x_a = 0$ and $x_b > 0$. In other words, G and A share the same preferences. Once the agent is appointed, she takes the specific policy measure m , but the realisation of this action is $m + \omega$, where ω is a homogeneous random shock distributed uniformly in the $-R_n$ and R_n range, where $n = a, b$ and $R_a > R_b$.⁵ Players have quadratic preferences over the final policy outcome x , that is $U_i(x) = -(x - x_i)^2$. In other words, G has to choose between A, with whom she shares policy preferences but whose actions could lead to more erratic policy outcomes because of his greater inexperience, and B who is a more distant, but more experienced, agent, producing more consistent policies.

The game can be easily solved by backward induction. Agent A will take the measure $m = 0$, the expected utility for both agent A and actor G will be therefore

$$EU^a = - \int_{-R_a}^{R_a} \frac{\omega^2}{2R_a} d\omega = \frac{-R_a^2}{3}.$$

While, agent B will take the measure $m = x_b$, so the expected utility for actor G is

$$EU^b = - \int_{-R_b}^{R_b} \frac{(\omega + x_b)^2}{2R_b} d\omega = \frac{-R_b^2}{3} - x_b^2.$$

Actor G will prefer to appoint agent B when $EU^b > EU^a$, that is when

$$x_b < \sqrt{\frac{R_a^2 - R_b^2}{3}}.$$

In other words, if the policy bias of agent B is proportionally lower than the difference in experience between agents A and B, G will appoint the more biased, but also more experienced, agent. Contrary to models of delegation where an unbiased agent is always the best option (e.g., Epstein & O'Halloran 1999), there are therefore circumstances where biased agents may be preferred. Needless to say, the ideal scenario is having an unbiased and experienced agent; A would be the optimal choice and there would be no trade-off between bias and experience if $R_a \leq R_b$. Experience therefore should be seen as a rationale for portfolio distribution that is complementary to, rather than strictly contending with, other theories. When unbiased and experienced agents are unavailable, divergence from the expectations of existing theories could be explained using the experience rationale.

The remainder of this article is organised as follows. In the next section, I discuss the extent to which this literature is relevant for explaining the distribution of portfolios within the European Commission. I also present the institutional features of the process of portfolio allocation within this institution and some descriptive statistics. The following section introduces the operationalisation of the dependent and independent variables, the methodology and the results from testing the quantitative theories. In a similar fashion, the final section of the article tests the qualitative theories of portfolio distribution. Both these sections evaluate how experience complements the existing approaches. In the conclusion I summarise the findings and briefly consider if the latest procedural changes will affect the politics of allocation in the future.

The study of the European Commission and portfolio distribution

The Commission is an extensively studied institution. Works cover its bureaucracy and internal organisation; its legislative and executive powers; its roles as policy entrepreneur, administrator and supervisor of national implementation; and the strategies and institutions employed to control its activities.⁶ As far as Commissioners are concerned, there are a few studies on their backgrounds (MacMullen 2000; Page 1997) and on the operation of the College of Commissioners (Donnelly & Ritchie 1994; Peterson 2001; Ross 1995). Crombez (1997) puts forward a model to explain the selection of Commissioners by Member States, while Döring (2007) provides the first theory-driven empirical analysis of Member States' designation of Commissioners. However, to my knowledge, there are no works that systemically explain the distribution of portfolio responsibilities among Commissioners. And yet, who does what within the College is crucially important because Commissioners draft and

initiate legislative proposals, execute policies at the supranational level and monitor implementation at the national level.

In my view, works on the quantitative and qualitative distribution of portfolios in parliamentary systems can be extended, with due caution, to the supranational executive of the European Union (EU). Joining the EU is like joining a coalition – in this case, a coalition of states – rather than parties, and having the opportunity to appoint members of the Commission is a payoff of this membership. Theoretical predictions can be translated to the EU context because the number and types of portfolios assigned to each Member State via its designated Commissioner(s) are political choices subject to negotiation. Similar to coalition party leaders, heads of governments and their designated Commissioners plausibly could be considered to be involved in a distributive game.

Experience can play an equally important role. Member States benefit from the measures taken by the Commissioners during their mandate, rather than simply when they appoint them, but Commissioners could be incapable of taking these actions. The disjuncture between the allocation decision and the realisation of benefits also applies in this case. Similarly, a Member State would, on balance, prefer its Commissioner to hold more rather than fewer portfolios, or more salient ones, but it is plausible that it would benefit more from a Commissioner running a specific policy in a highly competent manner, regardless of his or her nationality or even views, than from its own, maybe more friendly, but also less experienced, Commissioner.

However, the EU institutional context clearly differs from that of parliamentary democracies. Due caution should hence be exercised in extrapolating from the strategic implications of a different institutional set-up and in operationalising theory-based variables that are meaningful for the EU level. In the remainder of this section, I review this context and provide some descriptive statistics.

From 1958–1993, members of the Commission were appointed by unanimity by the Member States for a four-year period. The 1993 Maastricht Treaty specifies that the Member States have to consult the European Parliament before nominating the President. They also have to consult the nominee for President before nominating the other members of the Commission. After approval by the Parliament, the entire College is then appointed by the Member States.⁷ The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty further modifies the text by specifying that the nomination of the President also requires the approval of the Parliament. The 2001 Treaty of Nice shifts the entire procedure from unanimity to qualified majority voting in the Council.

By setting the number of Commissioners, the Treaty establishes the size of the office benefits that have to be distributed among Member States. The 1958

nine-member Commission has increased with each enlargement to the current size of 27.⁸ The Treaty also establishes the minimum and maximum payoffs accruing to each Member State. Article 10 of the 1967 Merger Treaty specifies that: 'The Commission must include at least one national of each of the Member States, but may not include more than two Members having the nationality of the same State.'⁹ Barely any mention is made of portfolio distribution in the Treaty, apart from the fact that Member States choose the President and, until 1993, the Vice Presidents, for a renewable two-year period. Until 1995, the Commission officially decided the allocation of responsibilities among its members at its first meeting a few weeks after its appointment, although the distribution frequently was agreed in an earlier informal meeting. The procedure has changed as a result of the increased power of the Parliament, especially with the Treaty of Amsterdam. After the nominee for President is approved by the Parliament, the nominees for the various portfolios must hold a public hearing before the relevant parliamentary committees. This has given the Parliament the opportunity to voice its disapproval and make its support for the Commission conditional on changes. In 2004, the Parliament flexed its muscle and forced the President-elect Barroso to replace the Italian and Latvian Commissioners Buttiglione and Udre, with Frattini and Piebalgs, respectively, and to reallocate the related portfolios.

Table 1 lists the portfolios that have been distributed among the Commissioners from 1958 to the 2004 Barroso Commission. This information has been collected from the *General Report on the Activities of the European Union*, the *Bulletin of the European Union* and the EU website. The rationale I have used to create this list is that each portfolio should represent a reasonably coherent service function or policy area – the latter preferably with a clear Treaty base. Issues that are frequently allocated to a single Commissioner, such as social affairs and employment or industrial affairs and innovation, have been grouped together. Moreover, the allocation of each portfolio, as classified in the table, has been reported in the *Report* or the *Bulletin* at least 30 per cent of the time (four out of 13 Commissions).

I have identified three types of portfolio. First, the President is the most public figure of the Commission. He is responsible for developing the annual work programme, and he convenes and sets the agenda for the meetings of the College of Commissioners. Hix and Lord (1997) see the presidency as a political prize that is worth more than a ministership in a Member State government. The importance of this portfolio should not be overestimated however. The President is still very much a *primus inter pares* in the Commission. He has the same one vote in the College as the other members, although, in the event of a tie, his vote is decisive. In the last two amendments of the Treaty, his position has been moderately strengthened. The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam

Table 1. Portfolios in the European Commission

Portfolio	Frequency	Mode/opportunities*	Substantive categories	Ideological profile
President	13	FRA		
Policy portfolios				
Agriculture	13	AUT (NET)	Agriculture and Farmers	Right
Commercial Policy	13	UK	Protectionism and Economy	Right
Competition	13	LUX, NET	Market-Planned Economy	Right
Consumer Protection	9	IRE, ITA	Market-Planned Economy	Left
Credit and Investment (ECSC)	10	SPA	Industry and Economy	Left
Culture	7	LUX	Culture	Left
Customs Union	13	GER, ITA	Market-Planned Economy	Right
Development	13	FRA	External Relations	Left
Economic and Monetary Affairs	13	FRA	Market-Planned Economy	Right
Education and Training	9	GER	Expansion-Limitation Education	Left
Employment and Social Affairs	13	IRE	Welfare and Labour	Left
Energy	11	SPA	Industry and Economy	Left/Right
Enlargement	7	FIN (ITA)	Protectionism and Economy	Right
Environment	9	ITA, SWE	Environmental Protection	Left
External Relations	13	SPA, UK	External Relations	Right
Financial Services and Institutions	9	UK	Market-Planned Economy	Right
Fisheries	8	AUT (GRE)	Agriculture and Farmers	Right
Industrial Affairs and Innovation	11	GER	Industry and Economy	Right
Information Society	6	GER	Industry and Economy	Right
Internal Market	13	GER	Market-Planned Economy	Right
Justice and Home Affairs	4	SWE (IRE, ITA, POR)	Law and Order	Right
Regional Policy	11	GER	Economy and Social Justice	Left
Research	13	GER	Technology and Education	Left
Small and Medium Enterprises	4	GRE, ITA, POR, SPA	Middle Class and Economy	Right
Taxation	13	GER	Market-Planned Economy	Right
Tourism	4	GER	Middle Class and Economy	Right
Transport	13	SPA	Industry and Economy	Right
Service portfolios				
Administration	13	UK		
Budget and Audit	13	GER		
Information and Communication	12	LUX		
Institutional Relations	9	SWE (IRE, ITA)		

Note: * Shared portfolios are included, but substitutions that do not lead to reshuffling are excluded. Countries of the 2004 enlargement excluded. Countries with the second highest values are in parenthesis when the top country is from the 1994 enlargement.

acknowledges an established *modus operandi* by specifying that the ‘Commission shall work under the political guidance of its President’. The 2001 Treaty of Nice confers upon the President the power to allocate and reshuffle portfolio responsibilities, although reshuffling has occurred in the past under the guidance of the President. The most distinctive new resource is the power to dismiss members of the College, subject to approval of the entire College.

The second group in Table 1 covers policy portfolios. They are based on articles of the Treaty and constitute the core of the activities undertaken by the Commission. The final group in Table 1 lists horizontal portfolios servicing the main policy functions of the Commission. With the exception of Budget and Audit, they do not have a specific legal base in the Treaty. It is quite common for Commissioners to be responsible for more than one of the portfolios listed in Table 1, but it is less common for some of these portfolios to be shared among two or more Commissioners. Only 35 out of the 335 portfolios allocated since 1958 have been shared; three service portfolios (Institutional Relations, Information and Communication, and Budget and Audit) are the most likely to be shared, while 21 out of the 32 portfolios have never been shared.

The second column of Table 1 lists the number of Commissions in which these portfolios have been clearly allocated to a Commissioner. The fourth and last columns cover the substantive dimensions and the ideological profiles of the policy portfolios. I will discuss these in greater detail below. The third column lists the countries that have held each portfolio most frequently, controlling for the number of opportunities to allocate the relevant portfolio to the relevant country.¹⁰ It is worth briefly exploring this list in light of the qualitative theories of portfolio distribution. There appear to be different logics at work. In some circumstances, it is clear that salience matters. Commissioners from Germany, the industrial power house of Europe, have been most frequently allocated the Industry and Internal Market portfolios. Liberal Britain, with the City and its extensive diplomatic ties across the world, has most frequently been in charge of Commercial Policy, Financial Services and External Relations. Greek Commissioners had Fisheries and Tourism. Yet salience is certainly not the only factor at work as moderate preference may also play a role. Agriculture, for instance, has never been allocated to its greatest supporter (France) and almost never to its greatest detractor (Britain).¹¹ The country that has been most frequently in charge of regional policy is not a Member State that benefits the most from regional funds. Environment had been most frequently allocated to Italy and Sweden – two countries that are likely to be at opposite ends of the spectrum on issues of environmental protection. Enlargement frequently has been given to Commissioners from countries neighbouring candidate states.

The quantitative distribution of portfolios in the European Commission and experience

If our dependent variable were the number of Commissioners given to each Member State, the test of the quantitative distribution theories would be a trivial exercise and would not reveal much about the impact of experience. It is, however, worth noticing that the 49 posts of second Commissioner allocated since 1958 and, in theory, subject to negotiation,¹² have been invariably allocated to the most populous Member States even though, until 2004, Commissioners were appointed by unanimity, which equalises bargaining power across states. Gamson's hypothesis is clearly superior, in this circumstance at least. For the bargaining perspective to carry some explanatory weight, one should plausibly expect, in a 40-year period, at least one assignment of a second Commissioner to a less populous state. It has never occurred and, if a sacrifice had to be made, it was the smallest state that gave up its payoff. In the merged 1967 Commission, each state had at least two Commissioners, with the exception of Luxembourg.

Portfolio shares and weighted portfolio shares

We proceed now to test the quantitative theories of portfolio distribution and assess the importance of experience. Our dependent variable is the portfolio share S allocated to each Member State, through its Commissioner(s), in each Commission. It is calculated with the following formula:

$$S = \frac{\sum_i^n \frac{1}{c_i}}{P} \text{ for } i = 1 \dots n,$$

where P is the total number of different portfolios, as listed in Table 1, allocated in a given Commission, n is the number of portfolios allocated to a specific Member State, while c_i equals the number of Commissioners sharing the relevant portfolio. As mentioned earlier, sharing has occurred only occasionally, thus c_i equals 1 in 90 per cent of the cases.

A simple example should illustrate clearly how this variable is generated. In the first Commission of 1958, 15 portfolios were distributed among the Member States. The two German Commissioners, Walter Hallstein and Hans Von der Groeben, were in charge of six portfolios, but one, Internal Market, was shared with Piero Malvestiti, one of the Italian Commissioners. The portfolio share of Germany in this Commission was therefore 36.7 per cent ($5.5/15$). We have recorded this portfolio share every time a new Commission

took office (143 observations). We have then added 33 cases resulting from substitutions of Commissioners and/or reshuffling of portfolio responsibilities.

Portfolios clearly are not of equal importance. We have referred above to the common criticism of studies on portfolio distribution for failing to distinguish between types of portfolios and to the recent advances on this issue. Thus, how should we weight the Commission portfolios? Commissioners carry out two essential tasks. First, they draft legislation that the Commission then proposes to the Council or, if involved, the Parliament, for approval. Second, they ensure that policies are correctly implemented at the national level and, in some cases, they directly implement and administer common policies. I have therefore developed two saliency measures that are primarily related to these two activities.

Since the Commission has greater proposal power when its legislative proposals are adopted in the Council by qualified majority voting rather than unanimity (Crombez 1996; Steunenberg 1994; Tsebelis & Garrett 2000), I have allocated a weight of 1 for portfolios that are predominantly based on unanimity voting and a weight of 2 for those predominantly based on majority voting.¹³ The presidency also takes the value of 2, while the portfolios with no Treaty base take the value of 1. In other words, I assume the presidency and the portfolios that operate under majority voting are twice as important as the other portfolios.¹⁴

I base the second weighting of portfolios on the principles underpinning the policy cycle. As in many political systems, for new policies the emphasis is initially put on agenda setting, formulation and adoption of laws and regulations. As times goes by, emphasis tends to shift towards delivery, implementation and enforcement. Additionally, I would also argue that long established and more frequently allocated portfolios tend to be the most important ones. In order to capture the policy cycle dynamics and the historical importance, I weight the portfolios according to the frequency they have been allocated over the past 13 Commissions, as listed in Table 1. In my view, they reflect relatively well the formulation-implementation balance and the historical importance. The only clear exceptions are the service portfolios at the bottom of the table. Any EU expert would challenge a weighting system that gives equal salience to the Presidency and the Administration portfolio, or to the Institutional Relations and the Environment portfolios. I have, therefore, assigned the mean frequency value of 10 to the Administration and Budget and Audit portfolios and the lowest value of 4 to the Information and Communication and Institutional Relations portfolios. The weighted portfolio share *WS* for each Member State in each Commission is calculated as follows:

$$WS = \frac{\sum_i^n \frac{w_i}{c_i}}{W} \text{ for } i = 1 \dots n,$$

where w_i is the salience of portfolio i and W is the sum of the weights of all the allocated portfolios in a given Commission.

Resources, voting weights and experience

Scholars of comparative politics use the share of seats in the legislature of each coalition party as a measure of resources (Browne & Franklin 1973; Browne & Frendeis 1980; Schofield & Laver 1985; Warwick & Druckman 2001, 2006). Although we lack a similar measurement in the EU, there are plenty of proxies for resources that can be used. I use the population share of each Member State and, as a specification check, the share of voting weights that the Treaty allocates to each Member State when the Council decides by majority voting (results are unaffected, see Note 19 below). Matters are slightly more complicated for bargaining theory. There is no legal text that specifies the decision-making procedure for the distribution of portfolios among Commissioners. We only know that, until recently, this is the first decision taken by a new Commission and that the College operates by absolute majority.¹⁵ It is rather straightforward to measure the voting power that each Member State yields, through its Commissioners, within the Commission. I have employed the procedure developed by Strauss et al. (2003) and used by Ansolabehere et al. (2005) and Warwick and Druckman (2006) to calculate the share of each Member State's minimum-integer voting weight within the Commission.¹⁶ According to Ansolabehere et al. (2005: 3–4), this is 'the theoretically appropriate independent variable that measures . . . bargaining strength'.

I am aware that one could argue that, until recently, the allocation decision has been *de facto* taken by the ministers unanimously after they appoint the Commissioners, and then it is essentially ratified by the Commission at its first meeting. If this were true, however, and we do not have much evidence in favour of this view, each Member State would have the same bargaining power and the theory could not predict variance in the quantitative distribution of portfolios.

As far as experience is concerned, I follow Huber and Martinez-Gallardo's (2004) distinction between portfolio and political experience. These scholars have investigated the accumulation of experience by cabinet ministers in 19 parliamentary democracies. They define 'portfolio experience' as the experi-

ence of cabinet ministers in the specific portfolios they hold and ‘political experience’ as experience in any significant portfolio. I use four measures: two related to the experience of Commissioners at the supranational level and two to their experience at the national level. Supranational experience in Commission measures the number of years that Commissioners have spent in the College of Commissioners at the time of the portfolio allocation decision, while supranational experience in portfolio measures the number of years that Commissioners have held the specific portfolios they have been allocated. National experience in government is the number of years Commissioners have been in ministerial posts, excluding junior minister positions, while national experience in portfolio gauges the number of years Commissioners have held national portfolios that resemble the portfolio allocated at the supranational level.¹⁷

Finally, I add two dummy control variables for the 33 cases of substitution of Commissioners and/or reshuffling of portfolio responsibilities. Some Commissioners have left the Commission before the end of their mandate and been replaced by, and their portfolio reallocated to, a new Commissioner proposed by the relevant Member State. In the same or other circumstances, portfolios have been reshuffled among the Commissioners. *Substitution* takes the value of 1 when a Commissioner is substituted. *Reshuffling* takes the same value when portfolios are reshuffled. These variables control for allocation decisions that are taken in a different context from the standard appointment procedure. I have no specific grounds to suspect that the decision-making rationale differs, but, given the different circumstances, I opt for including these controls.

Methodology and analysis of the results

The dataset consists of observations of a set of units (the share of portfolios held by each Member State through its Commissioners) at the several points in time when the portfolio allocation decisions are taken. The estimation of models that use time-series data with cross-sections with ordinary least square (OLS) is inappropriate because the error structure violates standard OLS assumptions. In particular, errors may show panel heteroskedasticity and may be spatially and serially correlated. I have proceeded as follows to deal with these problems. First, as suggested by Beck and Katz (1996: 5), I have included the lagged dependent variable in the specification to deal with serial correlation; I have then estimated the resulting specification by OLS with standard errors that correct for panel heteroskedasticity and spatially correlated errors (Beck & Katz 1996).¹⁸ Note also that the coefficients of the lagged dependent

variable in Tables 2 and 3 are not close to 1, hence we can reject the possibility that a unit root exists.

Tables 2 and 3 report the results of this exercise. They provide strong evidence in favour of both Gamson's hypothesis and the bargaining models across both the unweighted and weighted model specifications. A standard deviation increase of *Population share*, roughly equivalent to the difference between Spain and Germany in 2004, leads to an increase of between 1.7 and 2.3 per cent in portfolio share, which is almost equivalent, in unweighted terms, to an additional portfolio in the list in Table 1. Moving from the *Voting weight share* that small countries have within the College through their Commissioners in 1999 to the share of large countries leads to a similar increase of between 2.6 and 3.2 per cent. It is also worth noticing that a Davidson and MacKinnon J-test of alternative models rejects Gamson's hypothesis in favour of the bargaining theory, while it cannot reject the bargaining theory in favour of Gamson's hypothesis (the relevant statistics for each of the 24 regressions of Tables 2 and 3 is available from the author on request). The former therefore appears superior in explaining the quantitative distribution of portfolios.

The experience variable also produces interesting results. Specifically, Member States with Commissioners who have experience in the relevant portfolios appear to receive unweighted and weighted shares of portfolios that are significantly above what one would expect simply from Gamson's hypothesis or bargaining theory. Certainly, we are not talking about major changes; four years experience in the specific supranational portfolio, the length of a Commission term until 1999, generates a share increase of between 1 and 1.3 per cent across all the models in Tables 2 and 3. In other words, the unweighted and weighted shares on the several occasions where portfolios have been confirmed to the same Commissioner are between 3 and 3.5 per cent higher than the mean. It is experience in the specific supranational portfolio that matters, not broader political experience within the Commission. As far as the national level is concerned, portfolio experience is correctly signed in four out of six models, but fails to pass the conventional level of significance, while national political experience appears to have a negative impact on the share of portfolio, but the results are less robust (see Note 19 below).

It is important to underline that my measurement of supranational portfolio experience is strongly biased against the rejection of the null hypothesis. One could have included experience in 'contiguous' portfolios (i.e., those policy areas that share similar features and require similar expertise). Nevertheless, the results remain quite robust across various specification checks.¹⁹

Table 2. The impact of resources and experience on the share of portfolios

	Dependent variable: Share of portfolio											
	Unweighted					Weighted (frequency)						Weighted (decision rules)
Constant	2.038 (2.94)	2.275 (3.38)	3.119 (3.57)	2.115 (2.85)	1.933 (2.87)	2.200 (3.29)	2.970 (3.60)	1.903 (2.60)	2.236 (3.12)	2.555 (3.6)	3.030 (3.42)	2.235 (2.91)
Population share	0.231 (3.20)	0.205 (3.18)	0.234 (3.46)	0.234 (3.36)	0.231 (3.13)	0.203 (3.08)	0.236 (3.42)	0.237 (3.31)	0.193 (2.85)	0.172 (2.81)	0.197 (3.10)	0.198 (3.06)
Supranational experience												
- in Commission	0.012 (0.12)	-	-	-	0.040 (0.38)	-	-	-	0.034 (0.30)	-	-	-
- in portfolio	-	0.274 (3.23)	-	-	-	0.298 (3.66)	-	-	-	0.264 (2.85)	-	-
National experience												
- in government	-	-	-0.167 (-2.24)	-	-	-	-0.156 (-2.17)	-	-	-	-0.117 (-1.47)	-
- in portfolio	-	-	-	-0.013 (-0.23)	-	-	-	0.024 (0.49)	-	-	-	0.011 (0.20)
Substitution	0.663 (0.68)	0.471 (0.51)	0.535 (0.55)	0.619 (0.63)	0.611 (0.63)	0.397 (0.44)	0.469 (0.49)	0.618 (0.64)	0.708 (0.68)	0.491 (0.49)	0.593 (0.57)	0.698 (0.66)
Reshuffling	0.038 (0.04)	-0.386 (-0.41)	-0.093 (-0.09)	0.036 (0.04)	-0.003 (-0.00)	-0.458 (-0.51)	-0.104 (-0.10)	0.065 (0.07)	-0.218 (-0.22)	-0.604 (-0.65)	-0.286 (-0.28)	-0.172 (-0.17)
Lag of portfolio share	0.492 (4.84)	0.436 (4.35)	0.467 (4.62)	0.489 (4.77)	0.497 (4.50)	0.442 (4.06)	0.477 (4.39)	0.499 (4.50)	0.505 (5.03)	0.445 (4.47)	0.489 (4.82)	0.507 (5.05)
R ²	0.65	0.68	0.66	0.65	0.66	0.69	0.67	0.66	0.60	0.63	0.61	0.60

Note: OLS regressions with panel corrected standard errors, z-statistics in parentheses, N = 151. Unbalanced panel, missing observations treated with pairwise selection.

Table 3. The impact of voting weight share and experience on the share of portfolios

	Dependent variable: Share of portfolio											
	Unweighted			Weighted (frequency)			Weighted (decision rules)					
Constant	-0.402 (-0.73)	-0.007 (-0.01)	0.718 (1.08)	-0.327 (-0.57)	-0.452 (-0.91)	-0.010 (-0.02)	0.583 (0.95)	-0.524 (-0.96)	-0.001 (-0.00)	0.415 (0.69)	0.820 (1.26)	-0.010 (-0.02)
Voting weight share	0.634 (5.41)	0.559 (5.18)	0.622 (5.68)	0.616 (5.44)	0.612 (4.89)	0.539 (4.64)	0.609 (5.18)	0.604 (5.00)	0.576 (4.88)	0.517 (4.79)	0.569 (5.14)	0.566 (5.04)
Supranational experience												
- in Commission	-0.056 (-0.62)	-	-	-	-0.020 (-0.21)	-	-	-	-0.034 (-0.33)	-	-	-
- in portfolio	-	0.232 (3.09)	-	-	-	0.256 (3.57)	-	-	-	0.220 (2.58)	-	-
National experience												
- in government	-	-	-0.184 (-2.56)	-	-	-	-0.169 (-2.43)	-	-	-	-0.132 (-1.76)	-
- in portfolio	-	-	-	-0.022 (-0.46)	-	-	-	0.0172 (0.41)	-	-	-	0.001 (0.01)
Substitution	-0.384 (-0.46)	-0.371 (-0.47)	-0.441 (-0.53)	-0.350 (-0.41)	-0.347 (-0.41)	-0.375 (-0.48)	-0.435 (-0.52)	-0.275 (-0.33)	-0.317 (-0.34)	-0.357 (-0.41)	-0.371 (-0.40)	-0.268 (-0.29)
Reshuffling	-0.211 (-0.37)	-0.600 (-1.05)	-0.421 (-0.74)	-0.285 (-0.49)	-0.278 (-0.46)	-0.686 (-1.16)	-0.452 (-0.75)	-0.274 (-0.47)	-0.463 (-0.74)	-0.816 (-1.34)	-0.609 (-0.96)	-0.491 (-0.79)
Lag of portfolio share	0.391 (4.15)	0.352 (3.75)	0.363 (3.97)	0.390 (4.11)	0.408 (3.98)	0.368 (3.60)	0.384 (3.89)	0.411 (3.97)	0.402 (4.12)	0.354 (3.65)	0.379 (3.93)	0.401 (4.11)
R ²	0.70	0.72	0.72	0.70	0.71	0.73	0.72	0.71	0.66	0.68	0.67	0.66

Note: OLS regressions with panel corrected standard errors, z-statistics in parentheses, N = 151. Unbalanced panel, missing observations treated with pairwise selection.

The qualitative distribution of portfolios in the European Commission and experience

Dimension-by-dimension median and experience

For our purposes, the important hypothesis from Laver and Shepsle's (1996) model is that the median Commissioner along the dimension underlying a specific policy is the most likely to be assigned the relevant portfolio. In this section, I will investigate this expectation and assess whether discrepancies can be explained by differences in experience among Commissioners.

I have identified the substantive dimensions that underlie each policy portfolio using the policy categories of Budge et al.'s (2001) manifesto research group data. These are listed in Table 1.²⁰ The preferences of the Commissioners along these dimensions are those of their parties at the time of appointment.²¹ Party allegiance can be easily derived from the biographies available from the *Bulletin* and several other information sources. For independent Commissioners, who are commonly top-rank bureaucrats, diplomats or trade unionists, I have used the position of the relevant national government at the time of appointment. Following Budge et al. (2001: 166), this value is computed as the sum of the preferences of each party forming the government weighted by the share of cabinet ministerships held by the relevant party. Data on national portfolio allocations have been collected from Müller and Strøm (2000) and complemented with data from Woldendorp et al. (1998, 2000) and the *European Journal of Political Research* 'Political Data Yearbook' (Katz 2003; Katz & Koole 2002; Van Biezen & Katz 2004, 2005).

Since preferences cannot be compared across dimensions because they are generated using different policy categories, I have produced a standardised measure, ranging from 0 to 100, for each Commissioner and dimension at the relevant times of portfolio assignment.²² The expectation from Laver and Shepsle's (1996) model implies that, for a given Commission, policy dimension and portfolio, the difference between the median Commissioner and the Commissioner responsible for that portfolio should be small. For each portfolio, I have carried out a series of one-sample *t*-tests on whether the means of the absolute difference between the preferences of the median and appointed Commissioner are significantly greater than 15 per cent.²³

Results, listed in the second column in Table 4, appear to be fairly supportive of the Laver and Shepsle hypothesis. The difference in preference is not significantly greater than 15 per cent in half of the portfolios. Some of these are quite important, such as Economic and Monetary Affairs and Internal Market. In these circumstances, appointed Commissioners tend to have moderate preferences. The overall difference however is clearly above 15 per cent.

Table 4. t-tests of the differences in preference and experience between appointed and median Commissioner

Portfolio	Experience difference						N
	Supranational			National			
	Preference difference	Commission	Portfolio	Government	Portfolio		
Agriculture	2.078 ^b	0.634	3.023 ^c	1.994 ^b	4.119 ^c	23	
Commercial Policy	1.751 ^b	1.216	2.434 ^b	0.092	1.725 ^a	17	
Competition	1.738 ^a	-1.092	2.191 ^b	-2.691	-1.381	18	
Consumer Protection	1.637 ^a	-4.278	*	-3.533	*	13	
Credit and Investment (ECSC)	1.473 ^a	-0.742	1.842 ^b	-0.733	2.566 ^b	16	
Culture	2.555 ^b	-2.771	-1.000	0.434	1.861 ^b	10	
Customs Union	1.644 ^c	-1.179	-0.398	-2.752	0.236	19	
Development	-4.262	0.950	2.132 ^b	-1.263	-1.435	22	
Economic and Monetary Affairs	0.066	-1.785	2.722 ^c	0.664	2.277 ^b	26	
Education and Training	-1.074	-3.299	1.000	-0.737	1.102	14	
Employment and Social Affairs	1.841 ^b	-2.067	1.872 ^b	0.422	-0.153	23	
Energy	1.877 ^b	-1.422	1.000	-2.013	-1.000	16	
Enlargement	-1.242	0.293	1.835 ^a	1.050	-1.000	9	
Environment	-1.205	-1.469	*	0.369	*	12	
External Relations	1.116	0.715	0.541	1.589	1.531 ^a	30	
Financial Services and Institutions	1.892 ^b	-2.837	1.477 ^a	-2.588	1.720 ^a	13	
Fisheries	1.133	-0.489	*	-0.529	1.217	12	
Industrial Affairs and Innovation	1.358 ^a	-0.512	2.747 ^c	-1.477	0.000	23	
Information Society	0.783	-0.483	*	0.179	1.463 ^a	10	
Internal Market	0.754	-1.215	0.994	-2.453	-0.546	21	
Justice and Home Affairs	0.160	-1.508	*	2.194 ^b	1.901 ^a	5	
Regional Policy	0.084	-0.708	1.608 ^a	0.204	0.926	24	
Research	0.698	-1.813	1.000	0.842	2.042 ^b	20	
Small and Medium Enterprises	-4.839	1.000	*	-1.398	-1.000	5	
Taxation	2.584 ^c	-0.551	1.747 ^b	-3.416	-0.622	18	
Tourism	-9.735	-0.554	*	-1.754	-1.713	7	
Transport	3.437 ^c	-2.336	1.000	0.097	0.209	19	
All	5.284 ^c	-3.851	6.472 ^c	-2.050	3.565 ^c	445	

Note: One-sample t statistics for a mean standardised difference in preference greater than 15 per cent, and for a mean difference in experience greater than zero. ^a $p \leq 0.1$; ^b $p \leq 0.05$; ^c $p \leq 0.01$. * No difference in experience.

As far as experience is concerned, the next four columns in Table 4 list the *t*-test statistics on whether the differences in experience between median and appointed Commissioner are significantly greater than zero. Two observations are noteworthy here. First, the overall differences in supranational and national portfolios experience are significantly greater than zero. The appointed Commissioner is significantly more experienced than the median Commissioner and this experience originates from being responsible of either the relevant portfolio at the supranational level or a similar portfolio at the national level. Agriculture, Commercial Policy and Economic and Monetary Affairs are important portfolios where we can see these differences clearly. On average, agriculture Commissioners have 2.9 and 4.9 more years in, respectively, supranational and national portfolio experience than the median Commissioner. For Economic and Monetary Affairs, these values are 0.9 and 2 years, for Commercial Policy they are 0.9 in both cases.

Second, Table 4 also illustrates that portfolios that show large differences in preference also reveal substantial differences in experience in the relevant supranational and national portfolios. Differences in preference and in supranational portfolio experience are correlated (the correlation coefficient is 0.14, $p = 0.004$), while differences in preference and in national portfolio experience are weakly correlated (correlation coefficient of 0.09, $p = 0.067$). Note that, as I have illustrated earlier, one would ideally prefer having experienced and unbiased (i.e., centrally located, from Laver and Shepsle's perspective) Commissioners. In this ideal world, we should see no correlation between the differences in preferences and experience. The former variable would be close to zero while the latter would be significantly positive. In the real world, the persons nominated by the Member States to become Commissioners have different views and experience across the various policy dimensions. It is therefore noticeable that, where necessary, preferences and experience are traded-off in the portfolio distribution game.

The results are confirmed in Table 5 where I regress the difference in preference on the difference in experience, controlling for substitutions and reshuffling. Of course, we are not talking about causation here. We are testing whether the assignment of a portfolio to a Commissioner with relatively extreme preferences could be justified by her experience. Additionally, we should not expect too high a correlation because experience is also valued for centrally located Commissioners (hence the low R^2). Nevertheless, results suggest that a difference of four years in supranational portfolio experience between appointed and median Commissioner accounts for a difference in preference of 5.0 per cent. This estimate varies between 1.6 and 8.4 per cent.²⁴ Difference in national portfolio experience remains weakly related to preference bias. Its coefficient is significant only at the 0.1 level, but this result

Table 5. The relation between preference and experience difference of appointed and median Commissioner

	Dependent variable: Preference difference			
Constant	19.952 (20.96)	19.305 (19.95)	20.166 (21.14)	19.826 (20.62)
Supranational experience				
– in Commission	–0.308 (–1.61)	–	–	–
– in portfolio	–	1.233 (2.81)	–	–
National experience				
– in government	–	–	0.075 (0.48)	–
– in portfolio	–	–	–	0.448 (1.67)
Substitution	–5.551 (–2.18)	–3.900 (–1.58)	–4.741 (–1.93)	–4.163 (–1.68)
Reshuffling	–2.565 (–0.75)	–2.411 (–0.70)	–2.453 (–0.72)	–2.595 (–0.76)
R ²	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01

Note: Robust regressions, t-statistics in parentheses. N = 445.

appears to be driven by influential outliers. If we eliminate observations with Cook's distance greater than $4/n$, where n is the size of the dataset, the coefficient becomes 0.437 ($p = 0.02$). Four years of experience in a similar national portfolio accounts for 1.7 per cent difference in preference.

Salience, ideological profiles of portfolios and experience

This final section tests the salience hypothesis and investigates if experience also comes into play in this circumstance. Some actors care more about specific policies than others. In the introduction, I have reviewed a few works that emphasise how some portfolios are more appealing to specific types of parties. By analogy, it is plausible that some Commission portfolios are likely to attract specific types of Commissioners, simply because they convey benefits to sectors of the European electorate whose interests the Commissioner wants to protect.

The portfolios of the Commission indeed reflect different ideological profiles. These profiles can be easily derived from the Treaty provisions establish-

ing each policy and from the subsequent legislation. For instance, Title IX establishing the commercial policy, starts with the following sentence: ‘Member States aim to contribute . . . to the harmonious development of world trade, the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade and the lowering of customs barriers’ (Article 131). Despite some undeniable protectionist features, it is quite obvious that this policy has a strong liberal bias. The same can be said of almost all policies. As shown in Table 1, I have coded the left-right ideological profile of each policy portfolio with a dichotomous variable taking the value of zero for right-of-centre portfolios and of one for left-of-centre ones.²⁵ My expectation is that left-of-centre Commissioners are likely to weight left-of-centre portfolios more highly and, *ceteris paribus*, are therefore more likely to be allocated those portfolios. If experience matters, however, we should expect this logic to disappear at high levels of experience.

The left-right preferences of Commissioners are produced using Gabel and Huber’s (2000) left-right estimates of the positions of national parties. Their method consists in performing a factor analysis on all the policy categories of Budge et al.’s (2001) manifesto research group data for the entire postwar period and converting the resulting factor scores into an eleven-point left-right scale (Gabel & Huber 2000: 97–96). Higher values imply more left-wing positions. Gabel and Huber have demonstrated how this approach consistently produces the best estimates of party positions and is accurate especially for governing parties. The latter point is particularly significant for us because national governments appoint the Commissioners. Party allegiance has been determined as explained in the previous section.²⁶

In a final transformation, I have ranked the pool of Commissioners appointed at the time of each allocation decision along the left-right dimension and produced a left-right percentile rank for each Commissioner.²⁷ For instance, Sicco Mansholt was a labour minister of agriculture before joining the Commission in 1958. Gabel and Huber’s (2000) left-right estimate of the Dutch PvdA was 3.14 in 1958. Relative to the positions of all the Commissioners, Mansholt’s left-right percentile rank is 38.89. I use these ranks as a measure of ideological position because they allow an appropriate inter-temporal comparison of data. Consider the situation wherein all the Commissioners have quite right-of-centre preferences and, consistent with our expectation, the most left-wing Commissioners of this pool are allocated left-of-centre portfolios. If we do not use percentile ranks, it would appear that right-wing Commissioners are allocated left-of-centre portfolios while, in reality and consistent with our expectation, the most left-wing Commissioners of the available pool are correctly allocated left-wing portfolios.

Table 6 shows the results of a series of probit regressions where the dependent variable is left-right ideological profile of portfolios and the independent variable is the left-right percentile rank of Commissioners, controlling for substitution and reshuffling.²⁸ In the first column, the data is pooled in a single regression. The remaining regressions test whether experience affects the salience-based explanation of portfolio distribution. In order to do so, I have carried out a Chow test – a procedure used to test the presence of structural breaks in time-series data.

The pooled regression strongly suggests that left/right leaning Commissioners are more likely to be assigned portfolios with a left-wing/right-wing ideological profile. A standard deviation shift to the left in the percentile rank of a Commissioner increases the probability that this Commissioner is assigned a left-of-centre portfolio by 8.6 per cent. This estimate ranges between 3.4 and 13.9 per cent. Equally interesting, in three out of the four remaining regressions, this relation is stronger in case of Commissioners with below average experience and it loses significance in the sub-sample of Commissioners with above average experience. A standard deviation shift to the left in the rank of a less experienced Commissioner increases the probability of this Commissioner being assigned a left-of-centre portfolio by between 9.7 and 15.1 per cent (+/- approx. 7 per cent). However, left-right positions do not play a role in the assignment of portfolios for Commissioners with above average experience in the Commission, in the relevant supranational portfolios or in national governments. Additionally, the Chow test tends to support the presence of a structural break between the two sub-samples.

Conclusion

This article has tested four theories of portfolio distribution within the European Commission and assessed whether experience plays a role in the process of allocating policy responsibilities. With regard to the quantitative distribution, our results provide strong evidence in favour of both Gamson's hypothesis and the bargaining models. If we simply look at the number of Commissioners, Gamson's hypothesis performs better, but if we analyse the number of portfolios allocated to each Member State through its Commissioner(s), bargaining theory is superior. Additionally, Member States with Commissioners that have experience in the relevant portfolios receive shares of portfolios that are significantly above what one would expect.

With regard to the qualitative theories, Laver and Shepsle's (1996) expectation that Commissioners are likely to have moderate views along the dimension of the portfolio they manage is confirmed for half of the portfolios.

Table 6. The impact of left-right preferences and experience of Commissioners on the distribution of portfolios

	Dependent variable: Ideological profile of portfolio								
	Supranational experience				National experience				
	In Commission		In portfolio		In government		In portfolio		
	below	above	below	above	below	above	below	above	
Constant	-0.739 (-5.19)	-0.734 (-4.25)	-0.657 (-2.63)	-0.729 (-4.67)	-0.790 (-2.25)	-0.820 (-4.33)	-0.706 (-3.22)	-0.560 (-3.42)	-1.377 (-4.42)
Left-right	0.008 (3.21)	0.010 (3.44)	0.002 (0.50)	0.008 (3.03)	0.006 (1.07)	0.013 (3.81)	0.004 (0.97)	0.006 (2.24)	0.014 (2.59)
Substitution	-0.029 (-0.11)	-0.172 (-0.62)	**	-0.050 (-0.18)	**	-0.242 (-0.72)	0.262 (0.62)	-0.077 (-0.28)	* **
Reshuffling	0.000 (0.00)	0.374 (0.84)	* (0.50)	-0.059 (-0.12)	0.283 (0.31)	0.069 (0.15)	* (0.17)	-0.074 (-0.17)	**
Wald χ^2	10.36	40.09		36.09		44.79		40.81	
N	332	330		332		331		331	
Chow test (χ^2)	-	5.54 ^a		0.71		9.29 ^b		7.17 ^b	

Note: Robust probit regressions, z-statistics in parentheses. * Variable dropped for lack of variance. ** Variable dropped for collinearity. For the Chow test: ^a $p \leq 0.1$; ^b $p \leq 0.05$.

However, we have also shown that appointed Commissioners have significantly more experience in both supranational portfolios and similar national portfolios than the median Commissioner. The differences in experience in supranational and, more weakly, national portfolios also significantly account for the differences in preference between the appointed and the median Commissioner.

Finally, we have also found strong support for the salience-based explanation of portfolio distribution. Left/right leaning Commissioners are significantly more likely to be assigned portfolios with a left-wing/right-wing ideological profile, but this strong relationship disappears for Commissioners with above average experience in the Commission, in the relevant supranational portfolios or in national governments.

In addition to resources, bargaining power, preferences and salience, experience does seem to matter, but specific types of experience matter most. Experience in managing supranational portfolios or similar national portfolios are more important than broad political experience. Further theoretical and empirical work is necessary to investigate the reasons for this finding. Indeed, some of these results are driven by the patterns of reconfirmation of supranational portfolio responsibilities, but my definition of portfolio experience is also extremely strict and certainly not designed to facilitate rejection of the null hypotheses. Part of the expertise that a politician acquires from running a policy is undoubtedly transferable to other policies. Future works that take transferable skills into account could help us to explain further both the assignment and the rotation of portfolios among Commissioners.

Will the increasingly influential role of the European Parliament in determining portfolio distribution within the Commission change the patterns we have seen so far? It is early days for such an assessment, but the latest developments suggest that the Parliament cares about both preferences and experience. The Parliament forced the withdrawal of Buttiglione's candidature as Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security primarily because his views were considered too conservative. It also successfully demanded that the Energy portfolio be moved from Kovács to Piebalgs. After the confirmation hearings, the chairman of the committee on energy stated in a letter to the President of the Parliament that Kovács 'could not satisfy most members regarding his professional knowledge and expertise in the field of energy'. Instead, after Piebalgs' hearing, 'members were convinced by [his] good qualifications and professional knowledge'.²⁹

Would these results travel across political systems? Given the rules for appointing Commissioners, we are likely to see much greater variance in, especially supranational, experience among Commissioners designate. It is probably for this reason that experience matters in this circumstance. The pool

of experienced ‘ministerables’ may be large enough at the national level in parliamentary systems for the relevance of this factor to be diluted, but, in principle, we cannot exclude the idea that politicians are likely to face similar choices in national settings.

Acknowledgements

This paper was presented at the seminar of the Department of Social and Political Studies of the University of Milan and at the 2006 *BJPoIS* Conference, London. I would like to thank the participants, Luigi Curini, Gerald Schneider, Francesco Zucchini and the two anonymous reviewers of *EJPR* for their helpful comments.

Notes

1. Ansolabehere et al. (2005) list more than two dozen articles, published in the last 15 years, that employ Baron and Ferejohn’s proposal-based bargaining, and several others, employing different modeling strategies, that negate the advantage accruing to the proposer. Recently, Carroll and Cox (2007) showed that proportionality can be a bargaining equilibrium if preelection pacts are factored in. I shall not extend the review further in this context.
2. The only exception was the model introduced by Austen-Smith and Banks (1990), which was, however, predominantly concerned with how the process of portfolio allocation increases stability by impeding parties to successfully propose alternative portfolio allocations underpinning different governments and policies.
3. An alternative government configuration, which is of less interest in this context, could be one that is preferred by a strong party to the dimension-by-dimension median cabinet. A party is strong when it is a member of every possible equilibrium cabinet (Laver & Shepsle 1996: 73).
4. To my knowledge, there are no formal models that tease out clear empirical implications of attaching different salience weights to policy dimensions for the qualitative distribution of portfolios. Laver and Shepsle (1996) assume that parties weight each dimension equally, but they also show that this assumption is not problematic for both the theoretical and empirical implications of their model. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that salience should have an important role for portfolio distribution. Warwick and Druckman have collected data on portfolio salience in 14 Western European countries, and they recognise the importance of knowing how each party in a given parliamentary system rates each portfolio (Druckman & Warwick 2005; Warwick & Druckman 2006: 640).
5. This set up is similar to models of delegation (e.g., Epstein & O’Halloran 1999), but the agents still face a degree of uncertainty in their actions. Huber and McCarty (2004) present a similar model with two levels of uncertainty: one related to the expertise of agents (and therefore to the benefit of delegating powers to them) and a second to

- bureaucratic capacity, which cannot be solved by agency actions. As in Huber and McCarty (2004), my model assumes that the agents still face a degree of uncertainty, but it does not consider the uncertainty facing the principal as it would unnecessarily complicate the model without yielding additional interesting insights.
6. I will not review this sizeable literature. Textbook treatments are available from Hix (2005).
 7. The term of office has also been extended to five years and made to coincide with the European elections. A secondary, qualitative, change was that Vice Presidents are appointed by the Commission itself rather than the Member States.
 8. The only exception was the 1967 Rey Commission that included 14 members, rather than the nine set by the Treaty. This was the result of the 1967 Treaty merging the executives of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), European Economic Community (EEC) and European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). The subsequent Malfatti Commission went back to nine members.
 9. Before July 1967, the three founding treaties (ECSC, EEC and Euratom) had their own supranational executives. They set the sizes of these executives and the maximum number of members accruing to each Member State, but they did not specify a minimum. The five-member Euratom Commission was designed to exclude one state.
 10. The table excludes the countries of the 2004 and 2007 enlargements as, for their portfolios, the mode/opportunities value would be always the highest since it equals 1.
 11. Britain has only come close to holding such a portfolio when Clinton Davis was responsible for forestry for one year in 1985.
 12. Recall that the Treaty sets the size of the Commission and the minimum and maximum payoff (number of Commissioners) for each Member State, but there are no provisions specifying which state is entitled to the additional Commissioner. The 49 positions include three posts from the first four Commissions (1958–1970), four from the following three (1973–1981) and five from the subsequent five (1985–1999). The current Barroso Commission has one Commissioner per Member State; therefore there are no negotiable posts.
 13. I use the rules operating at the time of a given Commission's tenure, so they have changed over the years. The assignment of a voting rule to a portfolio is generally a straightforward matter. In some instances, however, the policy operates under both decision rules. Some policy sub-issues use unanimity; others use majority voting. I have used two rules in these situations. First, if there are issues that are clearly of much greater importance than others, I have used the weight of the rule of these issues. Second, if issues within the policy appear of equal importance, I allocate the weight of the rule with the higher frequency.
 14. I have decided against giving a higher weight to the presidency essentially because, as discussed earlier, the President historically has been mostly a *primus inter pares*. I also avoid an additional degree of arbitrariness in assigning weights.
 15. This applies up to the 1999 Prodi Commission. In 2004, both the nominee for President and the Parliament have exerted greater influence in shaping the allocation of portfolios, but the underlying logic of distribution is not necessarily unique. The results in this section hold if we exclude the 2004 Barroso Commission.
 16. A Member State's minimum integer weight is produced using Strauss et al.'s (2003) algorithm. To calculate a state's share, this value is divided by the sum of the minimum integer weights of the Member States in a given Commission. For instance, the minimum integer weight of large states in the 1958 College of Commissioners was 2, their

share of the voting weight was 22.22% (=2/9). The share of small states was 11.11% (=1/9).

17. For instance, the number of years that the Commissioner for agriculture has been minister of agriculture in his or her national government, or the Commissioner for the EU budget has been finance minister. If a Commissioner has been prime minister, I have added the number of years holding this position.
18. For each estimation presented, I conducted a Lagrange multiplier test following Beck and Katz (1996: 9). The tests show that the remaining errors are serially independent.
19. I have run two types of specification tests. First, I have used different estimation techniques: GLS random-effects and fixed-effects models. Results are confirmed with the exception of national experience in government, which loses significance in four fixed-effects models. Second, I have operationalised resources as the voting weight allocated to each Member State when qualified majority voting is used in the Council of Ministers, divided by the sum of weights. Results are confirmed, including the J-test on the superiority of bargaining theory. The only exception is, again, national experience in government that loses significance in the decision rule-weighted model.
20. A report is available from the author discussing in detail the assignment of Budge et al.'s (2001) substantive categories and left-right ideological profiles to each portfolio, as illustrated in Table 1.
21. Since the data of Budge et al. (2001) are not updated to the latest election rounds, I have only included Commissioners up to the 1999 Prodi Commission. It is difficult to speculate about party positions along these dimensions thereafter, especially for the new Member States.
22. For any set of Commissioners at a specific point in time, let P be the preference value of a given Commissioner, and Min and Max be the lowest and highest values in the set.

The standardised preference is $\frac{100*(P - Min)}{Max - Min}$.

23. If the size of College of Commissioner is an even number, I have taken two measurements, one for each median Commissioner.
24. I employ the *Clarify* simulation program of Tomz et al. (2003) to estimate these 95% confidence intervals.
25. An alternative measure of salience could have been based on nationality as it seems to emerge from Table 1. For instance, one could speculate that Germany values industrial portfolios more. The difficulty here is deriving sensible measures of salience for each policy portfolio and each Member State. For instance, how can we produce salience measures across each Member State for Justice and Home Affairs, Culture or External Relations? The assignment of a left-right ideological profile to the portfolios is certainly more defensible.
26. For post 2000 appointments I have used the latest available data from Budge et al. (2001). For the parties from the ten new Member States that joined in 2004, I have used their declared policy platforms, their affiliations to international confederations (e.g., Liberal International), their memberships in European Parliament Groups (e.g., European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party) or their positions from Benoit and Laver's (2006) expert surveys to estimate their closest party studied by Budge et al. (2001: 166) and used this latter party's left-right position.

27. Specifically, I used Hazen's rule, according to which the left-right percentile rank = $100 * (\text{left-right rank} - 0.5) / n$, where n is the number of Commissioners at the time of the allocation decision.
28. I employ probit regressions because it is plausible to assume that the dependent variable reflects an underlying quantitative variable of salience.
29. These letters are available from the hearings section of the European Parliament website.

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