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Competing Principals in a Multinational State: Legislative Behavior in Imperial Austria, 1907–1914

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ABSTRACT

This article examines legislative behavior in the lower house of the Imperial Austrian Reichsrat, a historical legislature representing a multinational society. The coincidence of economic and center-periphery cleavages in that democratizing state presents an excellent opportunity to examine the influence of multiple competing principals on representatives' legislative behavior. Drawing on an original dataset, we test under which conditions representatives voted against their parliamentary party group between 1907 and 1914. We find relatively high levels of unity, especially for the transnational Social Democrats. Where deviations occur, they are associated with the ethno-national and economic composition of representatives' electoral districts and initially with membership in parliamentary professional associations. The findings highlight the importance of the center-periphery (respectively transnational) cleavage as an additional driver of legislative behavior in parliaments, like the European Parliament or the parliaments of Spain or the United Kingdom, that represent multiple nations.

1 | Introduction

The French Revolution is often portrayed as the common origin of both electoral democracy and the nation-state in Europe. Much subsequent democratic theory therefore has taken the boundaries of both democracy's territorial unit (“the nation-state”) and the demos (“the nation”) as givens. (For critical discussion, cf. Held 1991; Shapiro and Hacker-Cordón 1999). Over the last two centuries, however, government through elected representatives also has been practiced in polities where voters identify with multiple nations. In these contexts, representatives regularly debate not only taxes, education, or civil rights but also the very nature of the state and the place of their national groups within it. In the decades before WWI, for example, Czech, German, and other representatives elected to the Imperial Austrian Reichsrat's lower house offered competing claims about group rights, while socialists strove to replace monarchy with

multinational democracy. In the present-day Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, Basque, Catalan, and Spanish parties have been debating how to accommodate peripheral nations ever since the country democratized. Meanwhile, representatives elected to the European Parliament (EP) from 27 democratic nation-states alternatively defend further European integration and democratization or advocate returning greater sovereignty to the member states.

How do representatives behave when they face not only partisan and electoral but also multiple national principals? Two unconnected literatures have dealt with this question, a smaller literature on legislatures in multinational democracies, and a larger one on the EP as a transnational legislature. Tully (2001, 2–3) defines multinational democracies as “constitutional associations that contain two or more nations or peoples. The members of the nations are, or aspire

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to be, recognized as self-governing peoples with the right of self-determination” (Tully 2001, 2–3; cf. Keating 2001 and Popelier 2018, E230). In these contexts, electoral mobilization and political representation are characterized by a salient center-periphery cleavage that pits majority nationalists seeking to dominate the state against minority nationalists calling for self-government (Cetrà and Brown Swan 2020; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Examples of multinational states are Belgium, Canada, India, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

The conventional literature on legislative organization has not studied parliaments in multinational democracies as such (see Brady and Bullock III 1983). More case-centric literatures have dealt with the parliaments of several multinational democracies but have not applied general theories of legislative behavior to these contexts. The literature on Belgium, a society divided into Walloons, Flemings, and Germans, includes early attempts to measure legislative cleavages (Dierickx 1978; Frogner 1978) and appraisals of the relationship between devolution and bicameralism (Popelier 2018). Studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a federation comprising Serb and Bosniak-Croat-dominated entities, argue that “entity voting” allows nationalist veto players to hijack the central parliament (Bahtic-Kunrath 2011), but also that civic parties that transcend national lines there promote stability, moderation, and democracy (Murtagh 2020). In the United Kingdom, asymmetrical devolution has raised questions about whether the House of Commons can represent both the multinational union and the English nation, which, unlike Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, does not have a regional parliament (Bogdanor 2010; Gover and Kenny 2018). Finally, the literature on the Spanish parliament examines the role of party leadership and legal provisions in explaining unusually high party unity (Field 2013; Sánchez Medero and Bernabé Aldeguer 2018) and the functioning of minority governments in a parliamentary system characterized by a salient center-periphery conflict (Field 2016).

The European Union is not a multinational democracy, but a supranational organization comprising 27 member states. Its supranational parliament, however, has genuine legislative power while representing a society including more than one nation, inviting potential conflict between nationally minded voters and the EP’s transnational party groups. Following early work by Faas (2003), research on the EP conceptualizes Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) as agents of multiple principals, their transnational party groups, national parties, and electorates. Researchers have confirmed that party group cohesion remains high and has increased over time (cf. Bowler and McElroy 2015) and that party groups primarily compete along the ideological left–right spectrum (Hix et al. 2005; Högenauer 2017; McElroy and Benoit 2012). Recent elections to the EP have seen the rise of Eurosceptic MEPs who (much like peripheral nationalists in multinational states) challenge the goal of European integration from below and demand the return of political authority to the nation-states. Their entry has led to policy preferences aligning along a single dimension that combines economic, socio-cultural, and EU integration issues (Hix et al. 2024). MEP defections from their transnational party groups can be explained by issue salience and distance between national and transnational party positions (Klüver and Spoon 2015), as well as by pressure from

national government parties on “their” MEPs (Costello and Thomson 2016; Willumsen 2018). When tensions between national parties and transnational party groups emerge, MEPs frequently use abstentions and non-voting to evade cross-pressures (Font 2020; Mühlböck and Yordanova 2017; Noury 2004; Steinecke and Heermann 2024). Overall, the study of voting in the EP is thus much more developed than that of other parliaments representing multiple nations; like the latter, however, it has remained case-centric.

This article bridges these two literatures by proposing *parliaments in multinational societies* as an overarching category that enables comparative research and theory development. We conceptualize parliaments with exclusively mono-national party groups (e.g., the Belgian Chamber of Representatives), parliaments with a mix of mono- and transnational party groups (e.g., the Spanish Congress of Deputies), and parliaments with exclusively trans-national party groups (e.g., the EP) as variants of this same higher order class of legislatures. We argue that competing principals theory (CPT; Baumann et al. 2017; Carey 2007; Itzkovitch-Malka and Hazan 2017; Sieberer 2010) needs to be extended to explain legislative behavior in these parliaments, integrating dominant national groups in representatives’ electoral districts as additional principals.

The extended framework is then applied to representatives’ behavior in the Imperial Austrian House of Representatives (*Abgeordnetenhaus*) following the full implementation of universal manhood suffrage in 1907. Given the coincidence of economic and center-periphery cleavages in Imperial Austria’s multinational, democratizing society, this case presents an excellent opportunity to examine the influence of multiple national and other competing principals on representatives’ legislative behavior. To study how partisan, electoral, and organizational cross-pressures systematically affected Imperial Austrian representatives’ roll-call votes (RCVs) between 1907 and 1914, we compiled an original dataset which records representatives’ votes; electoral party labels and ideologies; and membership in parliamentary clubs and professional associations, as well as their electoral districts’ socio-economic and ethno-national composition (Howe et al. 2025).¹ Given Austria’s ongoing parliamentarization (Davidsson 2025), CPT’s assumption that parties or party groups are the primary principals cannot be taken for granted. First, to verify whether this assumption holds and to identify relevant competing principals, we employ the dyadic approach to assess inductively which commonalities and differences correspond with pairs of legislators voting together (Alemán et al. 2009; van der Veer 2018). Second, following Sieberer (2010), we run multilevel logistic regression models to test for the relative effect of the competing principals thus identified on individual representatives’ deviation from their party group.

Given Austria’s early stage of parliamentarization (Davidsson 2025), we find relatively high levels of unity, in particular for the transnational Social Democratic party group. In general, though merely correlational, the most plausible explanation for the co-voting patterns we find is that organizational principals, especially party groups and parties, were able to induce unified voting behavior among representatives. Furthermore, we find evidence for the influence of district and functional

principals. Specifically, representatives from districts with different dominant ethnonational groups or economic sectors are more likely to deviate throughout the whole period of analysis, while the influence of parliamentary professional associations diminishes after 1911. The findings support the argument that district-level national groups should be integrated as additional principals when studying legislative behavior in multinational societies. This highlights the importance of center-periphery cleavages and, analogously, of the transnational cleavage in European party systems (Hooghe and Marks 2018). Furthermore, the study contributes a novel case to the growing body of political science scholarship on historical parliaments (Cirone and Van Coppenolle 2018; Eggers and Spirling 2014; Koß 2018; Schröder and Manow 2014; Sieberer and Herrmann 2019, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, this article is the first political science study of legislative behavior in the Imperial Austrian Reichsrat, confirming that contemporary theories can be successfully applied to democratizing historical contexts.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 introduces our conceptualization of parliaments in multinational societies and amends CPT to make it applicable to these contexts. This is followed by an overview of representative institutions and political organizations in Imperial Austria, as well as of that society's demographic characteristics (Section 3). Section 4 justifies the methodology used to explore the relative importance of various competing principals for representatives' voting in parliament. Section 5 summarizes our findings, and Section 6 concludes.

2 | Competing Principals Theory and the Study of Parliaments in Multinational Societies

CPT attempts to predict when individual representatives follow or deviate from the party line. Assuming that representatives' primary goal is reelection, the key question in the original formulation of the theory was whether they need to cast a personal rather than a party vote to pursue that goal (Carey 2007). In addition to seeking reelection, representatives also strive to control the policy-making process and, in the case of parliamentary government, may also pursue a cabinet appointment. The expectation is that individual representatives deviate from the party line when their goals can better be reached without the party, while the party's importance is influenced by institutional context, most prominently by the electoral system (Sieberer 2010). The central idea of CPT is that, whereas the political party is the default principal, other principals pressure representatives to diverge from their parties' expectations to varying degrees. As Carey puts it:

almost all legislators are subordinate to party leaders within their assembly, and the extent to which party groups are unified or cohesive depends on whether other principals, with competing demands, also control resources to pressure legislators. To the extent that such competing principals elicit responsiveness from legislators, they drive wedges into party groups, which we observe in vote patterns and vote outcomes.

(Carey 2007, 105)

Although Carey (2007) addresses incentives to deviate at the level of the individual legislator, he tests his expectations at the party level, drawing on legislative vote data and using institutions that affect principals' resources for pressuring legislators to predict party unity across 19 democracies. These resources can stem from: the electoral system, which adds a potentially competing electoral principal to the party principal (e.g., under SMD plurality or open-list PR); rules for government formation and votes of no confidence; and federalism, which decreases the resources of the national party in favor of subnational party branches.

By contrast, Sieberer's (2010) study of the German parliament tests CPT at the level of individual representatives rather than at the level of the party, treating the district constituency as an additional principal. In addition to analyzing RCVs, he approximates representatives' motivations through a content analysis of their public explanations for their vote (see also Sieberer 2015). This tackles the problem that several mechanisms might explain observed voting *unity: cohesion* (casting the same vote due to similar preferences), *loyalty* (following the social norm that the party line should be toed), and *discipline* (voting together due to party pressure) (Iitzkovitch-Malka and Hazan 2017, 453).²

While Sieberer mentions interest groups as potential additional principals (2015, 285), neither he nor Carey theorizes the role played by social identities (e.g., nationality or class) or legislative organizations besides political parties. In multinational societies, however, representatives bring not only different partisan affiliations but also the interests of different national groups to the table. Drawing on the literature on the political representation of ethno-national groups helps us theorize the impact of diverse national identities.

The ethno-national representation literature has developed increasingly sophisticated accounts of the relationship between group identity and party organization. Much of that research views ethnicity as a powerful information short-cut, one that helps voters recognize the party most likely to cater to their interests when information is limited, particularly in situations involving high uncertainty, such as during regime change (Birbir 2007; Hale 2008). Subsequently, this literature has refined its argument, having discovered that the effect of co-ethnicity (descriptive representation) on substantive representation is moderated by party affiliation (Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Hänni 2017; Zuber 2015). Without using the terminology of competing principals, theories of ethno-national representation thereby present an argument that theories of legislative behavior have overlooked, one that is particularly relevant to legislatures in multinational societies: that ethno-national groups in the electorate can compete with party groups over influence on representatives.

An example can clarify the relevant cross-pressures. Imagine a representative who is elected in Catalonia from PSC, the regional branch of PSOE, a Spanish state-wide social democratic party. While her party principal is oriented toward social democracy and prioritizes territorial solidarity, her district principals would make her inclined to stand up for Catalan autonomy. The extent of these representative cross-pressures

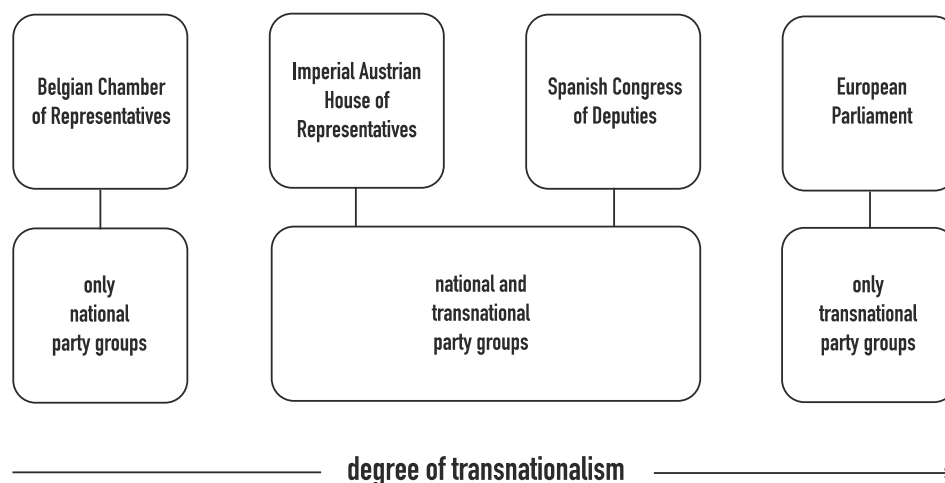


FIGURE 1 | Categorizing parliaments in multinational societies.

depends on the degree to which the party platform and the interests of the district's dominant national group coincide (Zuber 2015).

We therefore propose an extended version of CPT that can explain legislative behavior in multinational contexts. CPT already models the cross-pressures that result from district principals' and parties' diverging preferences. To make this theory applicable to multinational societies, we add an insight from the ethnic representation literature: that cross-pressures on representatives can *also* emerge from district constituencies' diverging national interests. If center-periphery conflicts are salient, dominant national groups in a representative's district need to be integrated as additional, potentially competing principals.

Figure 1 illustrates the universe of cases to which this extension of CPT applies. The wider class of parliaments that fall under our theory all represent multinational societies. In these contexts, representatives face pressures from more than one nation aiming for self-determination. Within democratic states, this has been labeled the center-periphery conflict (Keating 2001; Lipset and Rokkan 1967); in the case of European integration, it has been termed the transnational conflict (Hooghe and Marks 2018). The two are analytically equivalent, in that they capture the tension between efforts to integrate multiple nations into a higher order polity and those nations' desires for cultural and political autonomy.

The extent to which party groups correspond with or cut across national groups differentiates parliaments in multinational societies. The degree of transnationalism is influenced by the electoral system and the rules for the formation of party groups in parliament. At one extreme, all party groups follow national divisions. An example is Belgium, where the electoral system forces parties to compete in either the Flemish or the Walloon part of the country (the exception being the Brussels region) (Frognier 1978, 112). All party groups in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives therefore identify as “French-speaking” or “Flemish-speaking.” Although this does not prevent cooperation across party groups on an ideological basis, the coincidence of party groups and national identity limits nation-based cross-pressures.

At the other end of the arrow in Figure 1, we can locate parliaments in which all party groups are transnational. The only example we are aware of is the EP, which brings together representatives from independent nation-states who legislate on matters over which these states have transferred sovereignty to the EU. The EP's rules for forming parliamentary groups prescribe transnational party groups that “shall consist of Members elected in at least one-quarter of the Member States” (Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, Rule 33 (2), Version November 2023). Representatives of such parliaments should face high cross-pressures, being torn between representing national electorates and transnational party groups.

Most parliaments in multinational societies sit somewhere between these two extremes. Among these, we can differentiate two further constellations. In the Imperial Austrian House of Representatives (like in the Bosnian House of Representatives), a majority of party groups follow national lines, along with a significant transnational club, the Social Democrats. The final category comprises parliaments in which a majority of groups are transnational. This seems to be typical of democracies that have a demographic national majority. Core examples of this are the Spanish Congress of Deputies and the UK House of Commons, where mainstream parties appeal to voters across national divides while Basque, Catalan, Scottish, or Welsh nationalists form mono-national party groups.

Based on these reflections, we can now formulate two hypotheses to guide the empirical analysis of legislative behavior in multinational societies. The first hypothesis, a standard expectation of CPT, is that district principals rooted in an ordinary economic cleavage provide incentives for representatives to deviate from their party group; the second, our extension, makes a similar claim about the center-periphery cleavage:

H1. *Misalignment between the interests of dominant economic sectors in their district and the dominant economic interests represented by the party group increases the probability that representatives deviate from their party group.*

H2. *Misalignment between the interests of dominant national groups in their district and the dominant national interests*

represented by the party group increases the probability that representatives deviate from their party group.

Beyond these general expectations, which should hold for all multinational contexts, we will discuss some additional, potentially competing principals in Imperial Austria in the next section.

3 | Elections and Legislative Politics in Imperial Austria

“Imperial Austria” refers to the “Western” half of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, a state which resulted from the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (*Ausgleich*) of 1867 and which ceased to exist following defeat in World War I. Austria-Hungary comprised two constitutional monarchies, Imperial Austria and the Kingdom of Hungary (who shared the person of the monarch); the semi-autonomous Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia within Hungary; and the jointly administered territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this section, we introduce the Imperial Austrian political system, with a particular focus on the parliament, followed by its multinational, industrializing society.

3.1 | Representative Institutions and Political Organization in Imperial Austria

By the early 20th century, Imperial Austria had become a semi-democratic proto-consociational political system (Howe et al. 2016; Howe, Lorman et al. 2025). Remaining constraints on democracy included Austro-Hungarian Dualism, which curtailed joint political institutions’ impact on the Monarchy as a whole; formally unaccountable cabinets; a bicameral Reichsrat with an unelected, aristocratic House of Lords (*Herrenhaus*); and federalism, which left much power in the hands of Austria’s 17 provincial governments and elected diets.

Imperial Austria gradually expanded the franchise for its *Abgeordnetenhaus* through a series of electoral reforms. The 1873 reform replaced the selection of lower house representatives by the regional diets with state-wide elections through four socio-economic curiae (great landowners, cities and markets, chambers of commerce, and rural communities) (*Reichsgesetzblatt* 40 1873). The 1896 reform added 72 seats to the lower house, which were elected through universal manhood suffrage by a newly created 5th Curia. Finally, the 1907 reform abolished the curial system entirely, expanding the *Abgeordnetenhaus* to 516 seats elected exclusively through universal, direct manhood suffrage. These elections largely took place using an SMD majority runoff formula. However, 36 districts in Eastern Galicia used two-member districts, requiring a much more elaborate runoff formula, in an ill-conceived attempt to assure one representative each for the Polish and Ruthenian communities in that highly mixed region (*Reichsgesetzblatt* 17 1907). This article focuses on legislative behavior after 1907, due to these elections’ greater similarity to those in fully fledged democracies.

Within the *Abgeordnetenhaus*, legislative behavior was coordinated by clubs (*Klubs*, *Fraktionen*), which served as voting

blocs in the plenary. Parliamentary clubs often comprised diverse electoral parties from different regions of Austria and coexisted with an array of other legislative organizations.³ Furthermore, clubs occasionally formed umbrella organizations (*Dachverbände*). Although nearly all representatives belonged to a club, clubs usually comprised more than one party (notable exceptions were the Social Democrats and, after 1911, the German Christian Socialists); members of the same party might belong to different clubs; and representatives elected to both the central Reichsrat and a provincial diet might belong to a different club in each legislature (see Appendix S1 for an overview).

Interestingly, clubs lacked any formal legal basis—they are not even mentioned in Parliament’s Rules of Procedure!—although membership was constitutionally protected under the freedom of association. They nevertheless played a central role in legislative decision-making, influencing: the introduction of proposals, interpellations, and petitions; votes and speeches in the plenary; signing onto other clubs’ motions and interpellations; elections to parliamentary offices, committees, and commissions; and specific instructions given to their members serving on parliamentary commissions. They also had their own meetings and budgets. Despite lacking formal status, they were given meeting space, reimbursed for work materials, and protected by both parliamentary sovereignty and representatives’ immunity. Their powers tended to increase after 1907, and eventually there were calls to give them a more solid legal basis, although this never actually took place (Luft 2012, 481–490).

Parliamentary clubs coexisted with several other forms of political organizations, each a potential competing principal. One of these was parties, a term which here refers to electoral parties, specifically the party labels used in election campaigns.⁴ Mass parties began to replace cadre parties in Austria with the partial introduction of universal male suffrage in 1896 and consolidated further after its full implementation in 1907. Parties developed more centralized leadership atop local and provincial hierarchies, which typically took control of party newspapers, the primary means of mobilizing voters. Simultaneously, parties became increasingly independent from the legislative clubs while expanding their connections to civil society organizations (Luft 2012, 95–97). They also tended to overlap with identity groups. Except for the transnational Social Democrats and a couple of the larger German parties, they were highly regionalized, often running in only one province, and typically claimed to represent voters sharing a specific ideological orientation and a single national identity.

Within the lower house, representatives frequently joined another form of organization, the largely understudied associations (*Vereine*) (Anonymous 1907–1917). Luft describes one such form of organization among Czech representatives, multi-party (and occasionally pan-Slavic) ethnic associations (Luft 2012, 520–540). However, associational membership was mostly based on shared professional or economic interests, thereby representing functional, rather than ethnonational societal groups. In the first session following the 1907 elections, for example, these included associations for agrarians, German workers, representatives of health resorts, commerce, industry, judges, doctors, and lawyers (Appendix S2).

3.2 | Imperial Austrian Demographic Diversity and the Representation of District Principals

Apart from these organizational principals, Imperial Austria had numerous potential district principals. One of the fascinating features of Austria's electoral systems is the diverse ways in which electoral institutions intersected with demographic characteristics. Imperial Austria's geographic scope was vast, encompassing not only the territories of the present-day Austrian Second Republic but also parts of what is now Croatia, Czechia, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Ukraine. The resulting social and cultural heterogeneity provided numerous opportunities for politically mobilizing group identities and interests. The most famous of these was its linguistic diversity. Austria had no linguistic majority, being divided among two large minorities, German speakers and Czechs (35.58% and 23.02% of the overall population respectively, as of the 1910 census); two smaller minorities, Poles (17.77%) and Ruthenians (12.58%); and several much smaller linguistic groups, including Slovenians (4.48%), Italians (2.75%), Serbo-Croats (2.80%), Romanians (0.98%), and Magyars and Armenians (0.04%) (Urbanitsch 1980, table 1). These data are further complicated by the ambiguities of interpreting responses to the census, as well as the reality of widespread multilingualism (Brix 1982; King 2002). Nevertheless, nationalist mobilization along linguistic lines was a prominent aspect of fin-de-siècle Austrian politics, raising the possibility that district-level linguistic patterns influenced elected representatives' behavior.

The rise of industrial capitalism had diversified Austria socio-economically, while increasingly integrating the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy's economy as a whole (Good 1984). As of 1910, 53.1% of Austrians were employed in agriculture and 24.0% in industry. Economic development varied greatly by language group, ranging from 37.11% of Czechs, 36.99% of Germans, and 23.40% of Italians being employed in industry down to 5.32% of Serbo-Croatians, 3.81% of Romanians, and 2.72% of Ruthenians (Urbanitsch 1980, table 16). Importantly, district-level socio-economic composition in terms of class and sector was relevant for parties' electoral success in the 1907 elections (Howe et al. 2022). The expectation that this influenced legislative behavior is therefore reasonable.⁵

The ways in which the *Abgeordnetenhaus* represented this heterogeneous population varied by electoral system. The 72 5th Curia electoral districts added in 1896 were quite large, often encompassing an entire province, and therefore quite diverse. By contrast, the 516 new districts created in 1907 were not only much smaller in terms of geographic area and population but were deliberately delineated to be either rural or urban and as linguistically homogeneous as possible. In practice, this meant that all SMDs but one (Silesia 6) had a linguistic majority. However, only districts in Moravia, where voters registered in separate Czech and German cadasters (*Wahlkataster*), might claim actual ethnic homogeneity.⁶

The interplay between the most salient cleavages at the time, the center-periphery and class cleavages (Szöcsik et al. 2024), and Austria's SMDs leads us to expect that representatives elected after 1907 were cross-pressured by their legislative clubs and electoral parties, on the one hand, and the demands

of district-level economic sectors (H1) and ethnolinguistic groups (H2), on the other hand.

4 | Methodology and Operationalization

This study applies a two-step approach. First, we use the dyadic approach and linear multilevel regressions to assess inductively which organizational and electoral district characteristics led representatives to vote together. This step is warranted because CPT's assumption that parties or party groups are representatives' primary principals cannot be taken for granted, due to Imperial Austria's developing stage of parliamentarism (cf. Davidsson 2025). Second, we employ multilevel logistic regressions to predict when representatives deviate from parties and party groups, their primary principals as identified in step 1. Both analyses focus on representatives elected in 1907 and 1911, the first—and last—elections conducted entirely using universal manhood suffrage.

Most votes in the Imperial Austrian parliament were unrecorded, as decisions were commonly reached by the standing vote procedure (*durch Aufstehen und Sitzenbleiben*). Apart from specific constitutional and procedural matters, the Lower House made decisions by absolute majority with a quorum of 100 members, each casting a simple Yea or Nay vote without clarification. Abstentions were not recorded, and ties counted as rejection, while the Parliamentary President abstained. An RCV (*namentliche Abstimmung*) could either be called by the President if the result was unclear or requested by at least 50 representatives, who alternatively could request a secret ballot (*geheime Abstimmung*) (Neißer 1909, §§42, 47, 59, 63).

Two aspects of the RCV procedure are noteworthy. First, it presumably was reserved for matters that the representatives wanted on public record. Second, the ability of small proportions of representatives (9.69% as of 1907) to call for an RCV made it a convenient method of parliamentary obstruction. Hence, it is unclear whether RCVs were representative of legislative voting in the *Abgeordnetenhaus*. However, our analytical strategy is to determine the *relative* importance of competing principals, not an *absolute* measure of their typical influence.

For these analyses, we collected the votes of 444 representatives across all 70 RCVs between 1907 and the onset of the World War I.⁷ The dataset includes 29 RCVs taken across the 1907 legislature's three sessions (Sessions 18, 19, and 20) and 41 RCVs from the 1911 legislature's 21st and only session. The potential number of votes to be analyzed therefore equals the number of RCVs multiplied by 444 representatives, totaling 12,876 individual vote choices in the 1907–1911 term and 18,204 in 1911–1914. However, the actual number of votes analyzed is somewhat lower because we exclude instances in which a representative did not vote. Because representatives could not vote “abstain,” it is impossible to distinguish abstentions from absences. Excluding these cases avoids attributing substantive motivations to non-voting behavior (cf. Carey 2007; Sieberer 2010). The literature on modern parliaments, including the EP, shows that explicit abstentions, non-voting while present, and absences all can be deliberate strategies to avoid choosing between competing principals (c.f. Rosas et al. 2015; Steinecke and

Heermann 2024). This, however, is unlikely to be an issue in our context. Voting “no” when the majority of one’s club votes “yes” sends a stronger and more overt signal of dissent than merely abstaining. Hence, if more subtle strategies to avoid cross-pressures were used in the *Abgeordnetenhaus* (c.f. Font 2020; Mühlböck and Yordanova 2017; Steinecke and Heermann 2024), then excluding them from our analysis, if anything, *underestimates* the effect of competing principals on voting behavior, resulting in a conservative estimate.

These RCVs covered numerous topics, including foreign and military policy (e.g., military recruit contingents), economic policy (e.g., abandoning tariffs for wheat and animal feed), morality policy (e.g., reforming marriage law), multiculturalism (e.g., funding minority schools in Bohemia), and of course several votes related to budgetary issues (see Appendix S3 for a complete list).

4.1 | The Dyadic Approach

In the first step of our analysis, we establish whether CPT’s core assumption, that party groups and parties are representatives’ primary principals, is valid for our case. The dyadic approach, initially developed to analyze co-sponsorship patterns, has since been adapted to analyze RCVs (Alemán et al. 2009; van der Veer 2018). It is particularly suited for investigating the relational characteristics of parliamentary behavior (Van der Veer and Otjes 2021, 830). By comparing the voting behavior of all legislators, the dyadic approach creates a dataset in which each observation represents a unique pairwise comparison between two representatives.

Our adaptation of the dyadic approach aggregates representatives’ voting behavior, not across entire legislative terms, but rather across volumes of *Klubs des Abgeordnetenhauses* (Anonymous 1907–1917). This lower level of aggregation allows us to capture changes in legislators’ characteristics, such as shifts in club membership, that otherwise would be lost. Specifically, the dependent variable measures the proportion of instances in which both legislators in a given dyad voted identically, across all RCVs in which they participated, during the period covered in a given volume of *Klubs*.⁸

Because some clubs formed umbrella organizations, we test two operationalizations of the club variable: the first treats each club independently; the second aggregates clubs into umbrella organizations when these existed. In the first legislative term, slightly less than half of the clubs were members of one of four umbrella organizations; by the second term, almost all clubs were organized within one of six (see Appendix S1).

The dyadic approach involves relational data and repeated inclusion of individual legislators’ voting decisions, thereby violating the assumption of independent observations (van der Veer 2018, 143–144). We therefore employ linear multilevel regression analysis, including identifiers for each legislator within a dyad and for the dyads themselves, as cross-classified random effects (Louwerse and Otjes 2015, 485). This method accounts for the nested and interdependent structure of the data. The null model yielded an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.387 for the pooled model (0.345 for the first term and 0.554 for the second). Such a large, positive ICC strongly suggests multilevel modeling

to avoid underestimating standard errors, which could lead us to infer falsely that predictors are significant (Steenbergen and Jones 2002, 220).

4.2 | Measuring Deviations From Parliamentary Club Votes

In the second step, we examine the influence of competing principals on individual legislators’ deviations from their parliamentary club (and in Appendix S5, from their electoral party). This empirical strategy is inspired by Sieberer (2010), who analyzed German legislators. The advantage of Sieberer’s approach is that it predicts deviations at the level of the individual representatives—where choices are, in fact, made—rather than at the aggregate party level (as in Carey 2007). In contrast to the dyadic approach, where the unit of analysis is a pair of legislators, here we focus on representatives’ individual votes.

The deviation analysis therefore involves regressing individual representatives’ deviations from their club’s vote on a set of predictors operationalizing the influence of potentially competing principals. Since the dependent variable is binary (deviation from vs. alignment with the club vote), we use logistic regression analysis. We run a multilevel logistic regression for each legislative period, including cross-classified random effects for each legislator and bill. This accounts for the fact that votes taken by the same representative or on the same bill cannot be treated as independent observations. The null model yielded an intraclass correlation coefficient of 0.652 for the first term and 0.610 for the second term, again urging the use of a multilevel model (Steenbergen and Jones 2002, 220).

To build the dependent variable for legislators’ deviation from their club, we first determine each club’s dominant vote per RCV. The dependent variable equals 1 if the representative voted against and 0 if they voted with their club on a given RCV. If the representative or the plurality of club members abstained or were absent, we exclude the observation from the analysis. Similarly, we exclude observations where there was a tie among club members or where a club had fewer than three members. We constructed an analogous variable to record deviation from the electoral party (cf. Appendix S5).

4.3 | Independent and Control Variables

To capture the hypothesized influence of competing district principals, we assess the ethno-national and socio-economic composition of representatives’ districts. For the former, we record the dominant language group of each representative’s district. Because the ethnic homogeneity of clubs varied, we measure each club’s dominant language group via the plurality of its members’ districts. We then construct a binary variable indicating whether (0) or not (1) representatives’ districts have the same dominant language group as the plurality of their club colleagues, which serves as our indicator for the dominant ethno-national identity of MPs’ districts. For the socio-economic composition of each representative’s district, we first calculate the share of registered voters working in the industrial, agricultural, and public sectors, drawing on a study of the 1907

electorate conducted by Austria's Central Statistical Commission (K.K. Statistische Centralkommission 91.1 1912 1882; Howe et al. 2022). Finding every district to be dominated by either industry or agriculture, we then construct a binary variable indicating whether (0) or not (1) representatives' districts have the same dominant sector as the plurality of the club. We also expect district principals to exert greater influence when legislators face high electoral pressure. To capture this, we use the largest candidate vote share in the first-round vote as an indicator of electoral competitiveness, reasoning that candidates might prioritize constituency interests to bolster reelection prospects in competitive districts.

Beyond district principals, parliamentary professional associations may have served as competing functional principals in our case. We therefore include a binary indicator to denote MPs' associational memberships, drawing once again on *Klubs des Abgeordnetenhauses* (Anonymous 1907–1917). The variable indicates whether (0) or not (1) representatives share the same set of association memberships with the plurality of their club colleagues. To control for representatives' preference alignment with their club, we also include a measure of whether their party shares their club's dominant ideology. First, we categorize electoral parties into four groups: social-democratic, clerical-conservative, agrarian, and liberal-national, using a residual “unclear” category for some very minor parties.⁹ Because clubs' ideological homogeneity varied, we measure each club's dominant ideology as the plurality of its members' party ideologies.

Then, we construct a binary variable indicating whether (0) or not (1) representatives' electoral parties share their ideology with their club.

We use the same variables for the dyadic approach. However, there we set them in relation to the values of the other representative in a dyad rather than those of the representative's own club. These relational traits include: shared club, party, or associational membership; representation of districts sharing a dominant national identity (language), occupational sector, or region; and shared party ideology. Each independent variable is binary and denotes shared (1) or different (0) traits.

5 | Analysis

5.1 | Who Votes With Whom? The Dyadic Approach

We begin by applying the dyadic approach to assess inductively which organizational and electoral district characteristics correlate with voting together. Figure 2 presents the average predicted probabilities (at observed values, cf. Hanmer and Kalkan 2013) that two legislators vote together based on the results from the linear multilevel regression analysis with crossed random effects for each legislator within a dyad, and the dyads themselves. We test two operationalizations of the club variable: one where clubs were aggregated into umbrella organizations

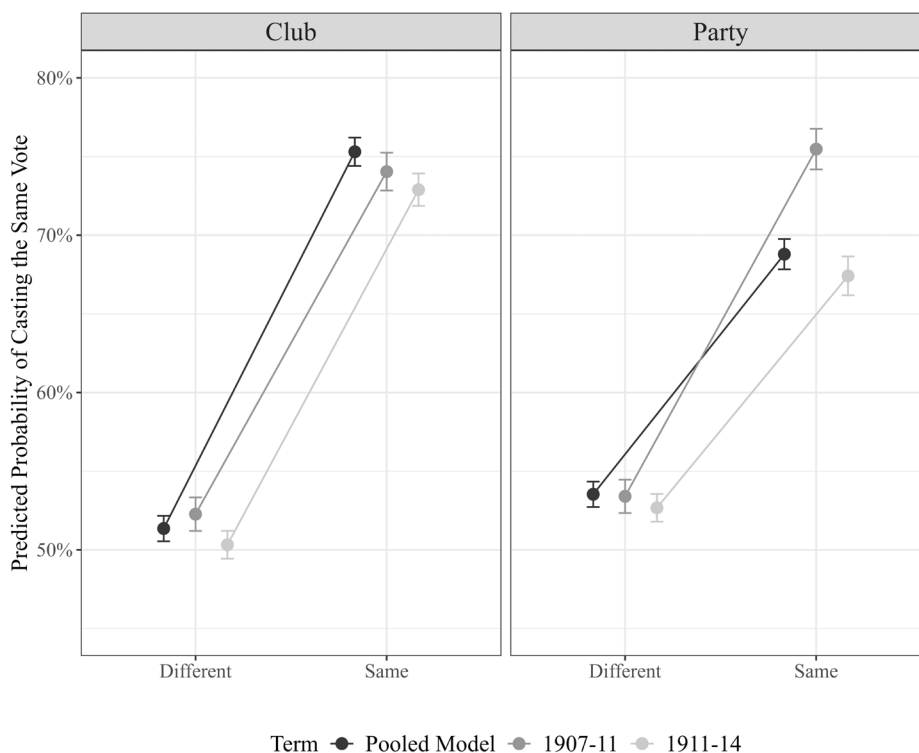


FIGURE 2 | Average predicted probabilities from the dyadic analysis using linear multilevel regression with three crossed random effects. This figure displays average predicted probabilities at observed values from a dyadic analysis, where observations represent unique pairwise comparisons between MPs. The dependent variable measures the proportion of votes on which legislators within a dyad agree, while the independent variables capture similarities and differences in legislators' traits. The bars are 95% Confidence Intervals. For the detailed regression results, see Appendix SS—Table 1. Pooled model: AIC = 621,940.76, BIC = 622,080.54, Log Likelihood = -310,958.38, 845,638 observations/166,012 dyads/623 legislators. Model 1907–11: AIC = 485,460.61, BIC = 485,595.54, Log Likelihood = -242,718.30, 564,794 observations/107,911 dyads/467 legislators. Model 1911–14: AIC = 123,716.47, BIC = 123,843.02, Log Likelihood = -61,846.24, 280,844 observations/100,635 dyads/449 legislators.

(see figures in text and Appendix S5—Table 1 for detailed results) and one where each club is treated independently (see Appendix S5—Table 2 for detailed results). All statements regarding significance refer to the 95% confidence intervals of the underlying model coefficients.

The analysis reveals that organizational affiliations, especially shared party and club membership, are the strongest predictors of similar voting behavior among Imperial Austrian representatives. This finding is robust for both operationalizations of the club variable, although the order of influence between the affiliations varies. When clubs are aggregated into umbrella organizations, the model fit improves substantially (as indicated by lower AIC, BIC, and log-likelihood values). We therefore report the effect sizes for the models based on this specification of the club variable.

In the pooled model, shared club membership increases the predicted probability of two MPs voting together by 23.95 percentage points (51.35%–75.30%). This effect is consistent across both legislative terms, with increases of 21.77 percentage points in 1907–1911 (52.27%–74.04%) and 22.57 percentage points in 1911–1914 (50.32%–72.89%). Shared electoral party affiliation also raises the predicted probability of voting together, although to a lesser extent, and with sizeable differences between the two terms. In the pooled model, the increase amounts to 15.26 percentage points (53.53%–68.79%). Notably, in 1907–1911, party colleagues were 22.07 percentage points more likely to vote together (53.40%–75.47%), which even slightly exceeds the effect of shared club membership in that term. However, in 1911–1914, the effect of party affiliation drops to 14.74 percentage points (52.67%–67.41%), which is substantially lower than the effect of clubs in the same period.

These findings indicate that, in the first legislative period (1907–1911), shared party and club memberships are comparably strong predictors of voting alignment, indicating that both organizations played a crucial role in shaping legislative behavior. However, in the second legislative period, the role of shared party affiliation declines, while shared club membership, when aggregated into umbrella organizations, emerges as the more influential predictor of voting behavior. This trend suggests a shift in the underlying dynamics of legislative cooperation and voting alignment in the *Abgeordnetenhaus* and reflects the increasingly important role of parliamentary party groups in shaping legislative behavior.

Other affiliations and district-related traits also affected voting patterns. Shared membership in professional associations, ideological alignment, and representing districts with the same dominant economic sector or national identity are all positively associated with similar voting behavior, albeit to a lesser degree (see Appendix S5—Table 1 for detailed results). Across both periods, parties and clubs are therefore the primary principals, a finding that validates the core assumption of CPT for our historical context.

5.2 | The Voting Unity of Clubs as Primary Principals

Having identified parliamentary clubs and their umbrella organizations as legislators' primary principals, we now assess

how unified their voting behavior actually was. Figure 3 shows the unity of clubs and their umbrella organizations measured by the agreement index (Hix et al. 2007, 91) (see Appendix S6 for the agreement index of parliamentary clubs without aggregation into umbrella organizations and Appendix S7 for the agreement index of electoral parties). The index ranges from 0 (complete discord) to 1 (perfect unity). Between 1907 and 1911, the average agreement across the 20 clubs and 29 recorded votes was 0.726, indicating a quite high degree of agreement. In the 1911–1914 period, unity decreased, with the average agreement across the 12 clubs and 41 votes dropping to 0.596. Voting unity in the *Abgeordnetenhaus* was therefore very similar to that of the European Parliament, whose average agreement scores between 1979 and 2004 ranged from 0.5 to 0.8 (Hix et al. 2007, 93), and that of the German Frankfurt Assembly of 1848/49, whose agreement scores ranged from 0.44 to 0.9 (Sieberer and Herrmann 2020). To aid comparison with other historical parliaments, we also calculated the frequently used Rice score, which, unlike the agreement index, does not take abstentions into account. With Rice scores between 0.6 and 1 and most clubs scoring above 0.8, voting unity in the *Abgeordnetenhaus* was comparable, if somewhat less united, than in the German Reichstag (1890–1918) and the Weimar National Assembly (1919–1933), for which scholars report Rice Indices between 0.8 and 1 (Schröder and Manow 2014, 536; Hansen and Debus 2011, 712).

The most unified club in the 1907–11 legislature was the Czech Progressives. However, this club was only established in the 19th session and had merely two members. More noteworthy is the high level of unity maintained by the Social Democrats, whose 85 members represented diverse national identities. The least united club was the Association of South Slavs, which comprised both clerical and progressive Slovenians as well as a Serbian party, leaving room for both nationality-based and ideological disagreements.

In the 1911–1914 period, clubs were less united overall. Standard sources for this period identify different linguistic branches of the Social Democrats as individual clubs, although they remained united under the umbrella organization. The exception was the Czech Social Democrats, who broke off before the 1911 election to form their own Autonomist club (although Centralist candidates, who remained aligned with the multinational club, continued to receive a small share of votes). Some variance in their unity is observable, with the German Social Democrats appearing slightly more unified than their Polish and Czech counterparts (see Appendix S7). The Latin Union and, somewhat ironically, the Unified Bohemian Club, both umbrella organizations, were the *least* unified after 1911, followed by the Polish Club. Contrary to common perceptions of late Imperial Austrian politics, these findings showcase the difficulty of holding a nationality-based club together in the face of intra-national ideological divisions.

5.3 | Why Do MPs Deviate From Their Clubs?

Having established that the voting unity of representatives' primary principal, their parliamentary club, was quite high, we can now assess the conditions under which they nonetheless broke ranks.

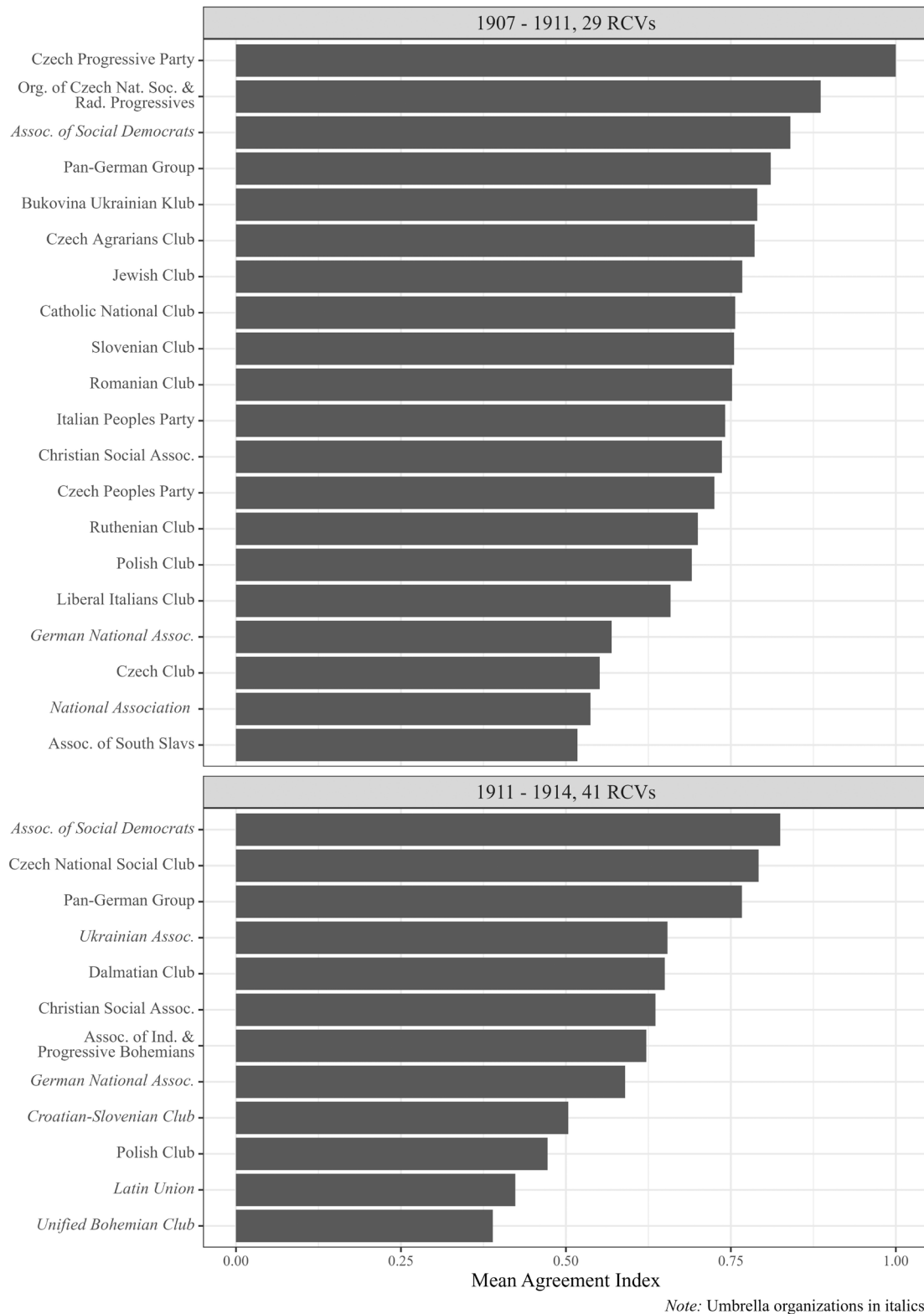


FIGURE 3 | Index of agreement for parliamentary clubs and umbrella organizations. Umbrella organizations in italics.

We test the influence of different competing principals using separate models followed by a combined one. The *district principal model* assesses the impact of electoral principals, testing for pressures from the dominant ethno-national groups and economic sectors in representatives' districts. Next, the *ideological heterogeneity model* tests the influence of shared ideology, while the *functional*

principal model tests for the effect of shared membership in professional associations. Lastly, the *combined model* combines the variables of all three models. All models employ logistic multi-level regression analysis with crossed random effects for legislators and bills. Unless stated otherwise, all reported effect sizes stem from the *combined model* aggregating clubs into umbrella

organizations. All statements regarding significance refer to the 95 percent confidence intervals of the underlying model coefficients. Detailed regression results for the combined and partial models are presented in Appendix S5 (Tables 3 and 4), including alternative operationalizations of the club variable (Tables 5 and 6), and tests of deviations from the electoral party (Tables 7 and 8).

Figure 4 presents the average predicted probabilities (at observed values, cf. Hanmer and Kalkan 2013) that a legislator deviates from their club's plurality vote for our two main variables of interest in the *combined model*. In the 1907–1911 term, MPs representing districts with a different dominant economic sector than the plurality of their club were significantly more likely to deviate. The predicted probability of deviation increases by 7.29 percentage points for MPs representing a different national identity (3.10%–10.38%), corroborating hypothesis 1. By a similar margin of 7.45 percentage points (4.14%–11.59%), MPs with diverging ethno-national district principals were also significantly more likely to deviate, corroborating hypothesis 2.

Turning to our case-specific principals and control variables shows that misalignments in ideology and associational membership also increase the predicted probability of deviation, respectively, by 5.87 (4.09%–9.96%) and 4.62 percentage points (2.68%–7.30%).

This could indicate that party groups did in fact compete with organized professional interests in influencing representatives' legislative behavior. District competitiveness does not play a role.

Most of these patterns persist in the 1911–1914 term. MPs representing districts with a different dominant economic sector than the plurality of their club remain significantly more likely to deviate from the club vote, but the effect size increases drastically. The predicted probability of deviation increases by 24.83 percentage points (3.83%–28.65%) for MPs representing a different economic sector, again supporting hypothesis 1. Also, representatives from districts with a different ethno-national majority than the plurality of their club remain more likely to deviate, further corroborating hypothesis 2. The predicted probability of deviation increases by 6.89 percentage points (7.57%–14.46%) for MPs representing a different national identity than the plurality of their club colleagues.

District competitiveness still makes no difference, but ideological divergence from one's club is no longer significantly associated with deviating votes. Similarly, associations appear to lose much of their influence as competing principals, which might be explained by the considerable decay of associational memberships between legislative periods.

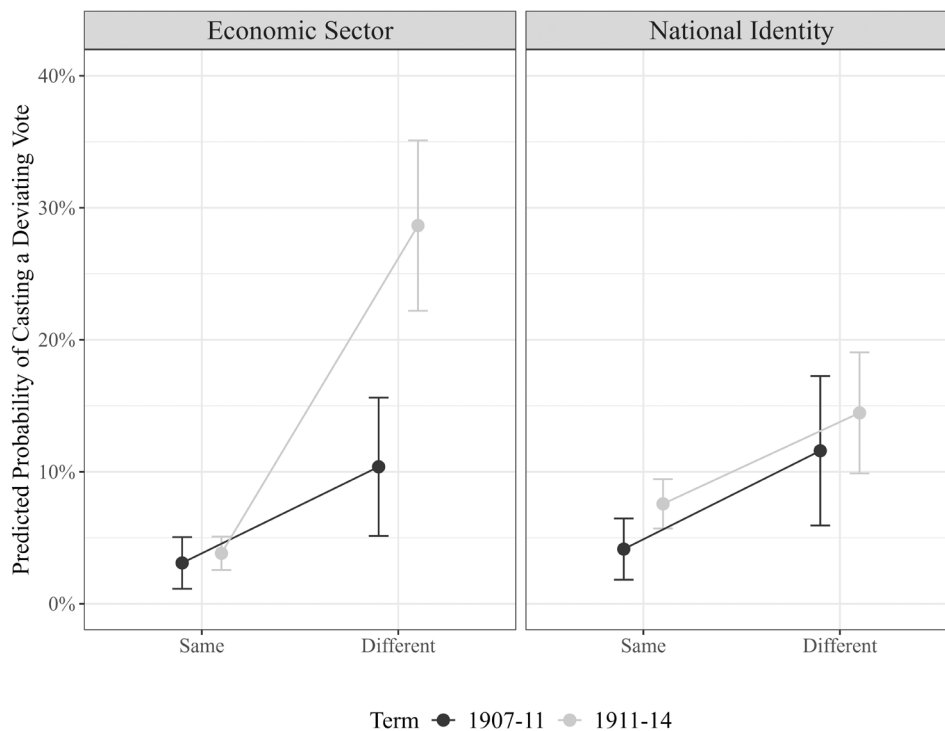


FIGURE 4 | Average predicted probabilities from the deviation analysis using logistic multilevel regression with two crossed random effects. This figure displays the average predicted probabilities at observed values of legislators to deviate from their club's plurality vote in roll call votes. Club affiliation is operationalized using umbrella organizations where applicable. Economic Sector refers to MPs representing a district with a different dominant economic sector than the plurality of their club colleagues. National Identity refers to MPs representing a district with a different dominant language group than the plurality of their club colleagues. The bars are 95% Confidence Intervals. While the confidence intervals overlap, the underlying model coefficients are statistically significant. This discrepancy arises because predicted probabilities average over observed values of all other covariates, and their confidence intervals reflect this variation. For the detailed regression results, see Appendix S5—Table 3 and 4. Model 1907–11: AIC=2583.30, BIC=2720.22, Log Likelihood = -1272.65, 9957 observations/459 legislators/29 RCVs. Model 1911–14: AIC=4984.09, BIC=5110.95, Log Likelihood = -2475.04, 12,865 observations/435 legislators/41 RCVs.

6 | Conclusion

This article has theorized legislative voting in parliaments representing multinational societies. We have argued that the salient center-periphery conflict characteristic of these societies implies that national identity groups can act as competing principals within representatives' districts. This extension of CPT establishes a common conceptual basis for studying legislative behavior in multinational democracies and the transnational European Parliament, allowing for comparative insights that a predominantly case-centric approach has so far impeded. Given the fragmentary literature on parliaments in multinational states and the scarcity of transnational parliaments beyond the EP, there is great benefit in combining both into a larger set of cases.

Empirically, we have demonstrated the value of the proposed extension of CPT through a study of legislative voting in the Imperial Austrian *Abgeordnetenhaus*. That case provides an excellent opportunity to determine the factors that influence behavior in parliaments in multinational societies, due to its complex organizational structure, its nationally diverse electorate, and the high quality of the data available. Our conceptualization shows that the *Abgeordnetenhaus*, like the majority of parliaments in multinational societies, produced both national and transnational party groups. It therefore had intermediate potential for cross-pressures compared to the EP, where cross pressures between national identities and party groups, which are transnational by design, are a priori the highest. Empirical findings corroborate the extended version of CPT. Misaligned economic interests are a strong predictor of deviation, and we also find that representatives whose district's dominant national group is different from that of their party group are significantly more likely to deviate from the latter.

Several additional findings relevant to our specific historical case stand out as well. Specifically, we found that: (1) Just like today, parliamentary party groups and electoral parties are the most important predictors of representatives voting together; however, sharing an associational membership or having the same dominant district-level ethnonational or economic group also covaries with voting behavior. (2) Party groups were relatively unified during a period of early mass elections, in which many representatives were learning how to coordinate for the first time. The fact that Social Democratic votes were so unified points to ideology's capacity to transcend seemingly more immediate national divisions, ones that presumably should have been particularly pressing in this transnational club. This is also corroborated by the comparatively low unity of the Polish and South Slav clubs, which brought together representatives from ideologically diverse parties representing the same or related nationalities. (3) Between 1907 and 1914, parliamentary party groups gained importance as coordinating devices over the much more fragmented electoral parties. In contrast, professional associations (functional principals) lost importance after 1911, likely because they had become more fragmented. Finally, (4) district principals related to the center-periphery cleavage and the locally dominant economic sector retained and even increased their importance between 1907 and 1914 (cf. Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Szöcsik et al. 2024).

These findings reinforce a general trend in Habsburg studies toward recognizing the Reichsrat's underappreciated political achievements (Adlgasser et al. 2015; Rumppler and Urbanitsch 2000). This research contributes to that literature, providing the first systematic analysis of RCVs in the *Abgeordnetenhaus* while drawing attention to the largely overlooked role played by parliamentary associations. Although there are limits to how much one might generalize from RCVs to other forms of legislative voting, it is nevertheless striking that we find a clear structure in line with the extended version of CPT.

Furthermore, the Reichsrat was specifically the parliament of a multinational society, requiring legislators to balance partisan interests with ethnonational and socio-economic ones. Like contemporary parliaments in multinational societies, the *Abgeordnetenhaus* included representatives from different nations who faced a salient center-periphery conflict over the future of the political system. Adding the Imperial Austrian case to the repertoire of legislative studies is therefore particularly relevant for scholars interested in the functioning of other such parliaments. Furthermore, Imperial Austria, like the EU, was democratizing. The increasing salience of a second, transnational dimension in the European Parliament, one that pits integrationists against Eurosceptics, therefore no longer appears as an aberration from "normal left-right politics." Rather, this appears to be an expected feature of legislatures representing multiple nations.

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Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Consent

The authors have nothing to report.

Data Availability Statement

Replication code and all data used in this article are available via the Harvard Dataverse: Howe et al. (2025).

Endnotes

- ¹ Replication code and all data used in this article are available via the Harvard Dataverse (<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/A9GINX>).
- ² In this study, we focus on voting *unity* as the observable outcome of RCVs (Itzkovic-Malka and Hazan 2017, 453), regardless of whether this unity stems from similar preferences, loyalty or party pressure.
- ³ This discussion draws heavily on Luft's (2012) work on Czech representatives elected after 1907, an approach that is justified by the fact that Czechs and Germans, the two most industrialized peoples of the Monarchy, also had developed the most elaborate party systems by the turn of the century.
- ⁴ We use our own English translations of the labels recorded in the official statistical almanac, *Österreichische Statistik*, our primary source for Imperial Austrian electoral data (cf. Appendix S4).
- ⁵ Next to ethno-linguistic and socio-economic identities, regional identity, tied to Austria's seventeen provinces and their distinct histories within the federal system, was another base for group mobilization (Leisching 1985, table 3).
- ⁶ Regarding the Moravian *Wahlkataster*, see Glassl 1967, 236–238.
- ⁷ We exclude the 72 representatives elected from 2-member districts in Galicia. Competition in these districts between and within large Polish and Ruthenian communities over two legislative mandates presumably involved different behavioral incentives than those in SMDs dominated by a single nationality. Furthermore, although Imperial Austrian elections were generally quite clean, Eastern Galicia experienced widespread electoral fraud, undermining the reliability of those electoral data (Jenks 1950, 178).
- ⁸ We assume that club and association memberships remain constant until the release of a subsequent volume. Twelve volumes of *Klubs des Abgeordnetenhauses* were published in 1907–1914. Our analysis is based on only ten volumes, as one could not be located and another covers a period without any RCVs.
- ⁹ For parties communicating in Czech and German (ca. 2/3 of lower house seats), this categorization draws on Szöcsik et al.'s (2024) analysis of historical party manifestos. For the remaining parties, we classified ideologies based on parties' names (for details see Appendix S4).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Appendix S1.** Parliamentary clubs, umbrella organizations and electoral party labels. **Appendix S2.** Parliamentary associations and clubs. **Appendix S3.** List of roll call votes and coding of their issue area, 1907–1914. **Appendix S4.** Classifying electoral parties into ideological camps. **Appendix S5.** Detailed regression results. **Appendix S6.** Index of agreement for parliamentary clubs without umbrella organizations. **Appendix S7.** Index of agreement for electoral parties. **Appendix S8.** Index of agreement of major clubs by policy area.