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Less is more or the more the merrier? Analysing attitudes towards multiple-mandate holding among local officeholders

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Abstract

The practice of multiple-mandate holding is widespread across Europe. Critics argue that this practice contributes to a concentration of political power, a higher risk for conflicts of interest and damage to the public image of political actors. Advocates meanwhile claim that it provides clear benefits, such as local embeddedness of the national or regional political decision-making and a greater degree of professionalisation in politics. However, little is known about how political actors themselves look upon this practice. This especially in a context like Finland, where this practice is said to be embedded in the political culture and where another institutional level has recently been implemented, making it possible for political actors to simultaneously hold political mandates at the local-, regional- and national levels. This paper examines attitudes towards multiple-mandate holding among local political decision-makers using unique survey data gathered through a new online panel. The results suggest that councillors from a populist radical right party and those who perceive corruption and partial treatment as more common were the most negatively disposed towards this practice, while councillors from the traditionally strongest rural party were the most in favour.

KEYWORDS

corruption perceptions, localness, mandate accumulation, multiple-mandate holding

INTRODUCTION

Cumul des mandats, or the holding of more than one directly elected mandate simultaneously on different government tiers (henceforth multiple-mandate holding),¹ has been a controversial practice in multiple European countries. This includes countries such as Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and, last but not least, France, where it has even been singled out as one of the main contributing factors to the failings of the French political system (Mény, 1992a, 1992b).

Critics argue, among other things, that this practice increases the risk of conflicts of interest and corruption, concentrates political power and limits competition, blurs accountability, contributes to problems with time and other resource management and has a negative impact on the public image of politicians and institutions (François, 2006; Navarro, 2009; Ryyänen, 2009; Van de Voorde, 2019a, 2019b). Advocates meanwhile claim that it provides several benefits, such as local embeddedness, which enables multiple-office holders to defend local interests in regional and/or national political arenas, and a greater degree of professionalisation in politics (François, 2006; Navarro, 2009; Ryyänen, 2009; Van de Voorde, 2019a, 2019b). Still, the possibility of mandate accumulation has over time been restricted (e.g., Ireland, France) or even prohibited, as for example, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are prohibited since 2002 from becoming members of national parliaments (MPs). In countries without legal restriction, it is nevertheless still up to the politicians themselves to decide whether they want to become multiple-mandate holders or not, through a process of mandate accumulation (Van de Voorde, 2019b), or whether they are content with just focusing on handling the responsibilities involved with a single political mandate.

In Finland, mandate accumulation across institutional levels has been noted to be 'routine' among politicians (Arter, 2021, p. 350; see also Sandberg, 2014) and the institution of the *cumul* has even been described as 'deeply embedded in the Finnish political culture' (Arter & Söderlund, 2023, p. 82). This is arguably at least partly due to the candidate-centeredness of the compulsory preferential voting system used in Finland (Arter & Söderlund, 2023; Karlsson, 2018; Sandberg, 2014), as preferential voting has been shown to favour notable candidates, such as incumbents, since they are more appealing than unknown candidates (Dewoghélaère et al., 2006; Navarro, 2009). Moreover, in early 2022 Finland held elections for a new regional government tier of 21 so-called 'welfare districts' (*hyvinvointialueet*) based on historic counties, responsible for organising social and welfare services. This has enabled a situation where Finnish MPs can now hold offices on up to three different institutional levels simultaneously, creating a similar situation as in neighbouring Sweden where the tradition of multiple-mandate holding is although considered as being

considerably weaker than in Finland (Karlsson, 2017). Several of the factors identified in previous scholarships as institutional preconditions for the practice of multiple-mandate holding (Knapp, 1991; Navarro, 2009), therefore, now apply to Finland and are likely to stimulate the continued 'routineness', or even intensification, of this practice.

An overview of the bulk of previous scholarships shows that there is a lacuna in the literature regarding the important issue on how political actors themselves look upon the practice of multiple-mandate holding. Previous studies have primarily examined the (role) perceptions and attitudes among multiple-mandate holders themselves (Van de Voorde & de Vet, 2020), although studies on the attitudes towards this practice among politicians, in general, are scarce and mainly hint at scepticism (Meire et al., 2002). Examining attitudes towards multiple-mandate holding among political actors in more detail could potentially provide us with another piece in the puzzle to explain why this practice becomes prevalent in some systems.

Finland, as a decentralised welfare state, does not fit into traditional theories regarding the accumulation of mandates, since this practice has been theorised to mainly act as a type of compensatory mechanism in countries with weak local governments (Navarro, 2009; Page & Goldsmith, 1987; Sandberg, 2014), which also makes it an interesting case for studying this phenomenon. Moreover, the changing institutional framework makes Finland a particularly interesting setting. Leading up to the first welfare-district elections in 2022 this subject was also discussed by the national media (Palonen, 2022, p. 148), enabling a situation where the practice of multiple-mandate holding is arguably a subject of public concern. Furthermore, by using Finland as a case, we contribute to increasing our understanding of democratic processes related to political representation and attitudinal patterns among elected political representatives in liberal democracies towards a practice that is expected to divide opinions (Meire et al., 2002). The research aim of this paper is, therefore, to examine attitudes towards the practice of multiple-mandate holding among local decision-makers. The central research question is two-folded and reads as follows: *How do local councillors relate to the practice of multiple-mandate holding and what might explain variations in attitudes towards this practice?*

This research question will be explored using data from a unique decision-maker panel, which includes in toto over a thousand local councillors from 264 different municipalities in Finland. The views of local politicians on this topic can be argued to be especially interesting since they, if anyone, should be in an excellent position to recognise the potential benefits or drawbacks of having local-level decision-makers also represented in assemblies on the higher government tiers from the perspectives of the individual municipalities.

We here argue that trust in the system, or more specifically in its impartiality and lack of corruption, is a central factor when it comes to explaining more positive attitudes towards mandate accumulation. However, our results also

give some indications that ideological views on the importance of local interest representation, connected to parties belonging to the agrarian party family, could also play an important role in explaining these types of attitudes. The paper is structured as follows. Following this introductory section, we look at potential theoretical explanations for positive or negative attitudes towards this practice and form our hypotheses accordingly. In the third section, we briefly describe the phenomenon of multiple-mandate holding more generally from both a European and a Finnish perspective, whereafter we present our data, variables and method in the fourth section. Finally, we present our results and what we deem to be the main contribution of our study.

HYPOTHESISING ON LOCAL POLITICIANS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE *CUMUL*

In hypothesising on the factors that might explain how local politicians relate to the practice of multiple-mandate holding, we proceed from theoretical arguments on the potential consequences of this practice, which have been advanced in the literature. Here we have chosen to focus on the two most cited major consequences of multiple-mandate holding; concentration of political power and the potential problems it can be perceived to bring (e.g., power abuse, conflicts of interest) on the one hand, and the strengthening of local interest representation and local embeddedness as potential advantages on the other hand (Navarro, 2009; Van de Voorde, 2019b). Our argument is that certain kinds of politicians or parties should perceive some of these consequences as more salient than others, which, in turn, should influence how they relate to the practice of accumulating mandates.

Previous studies suggest that holding dual or triple mandates may be perceived as providing electoral advantages under some circumstances and it might therefore be considered rational for politicians and parties alike to pursue in order to increase their electoral performance (Bach, 2012; Foucault, 2006; but see Van de Voorde, 2019a). Likewise, from the voters' perspective, it is argued to be equally rational for them to favour these so-called *cumulards* since it combines two important determinants that cultivate the personal vote, the incumbency and the local background effect, thereby constituting a powerful personal vote-earning attribute or PVEA (Van de Voorde, 2019a, p. 134). However, although it might seem rational for politicians to accumulate offices, this does not necessarily mean that they perceive it as something generally desirable, especially in the case of other politicians.

A person's underlying views and preconceptions of the basic nature of politics, 'politicking', and governmental activities are likely to colour their judgement of multiple-mandate holding. Scholars have argued that the impartiality principle, that is, the principle that 'a state ought to treat equally those who deserve equally' (Kurer, 2005, p. 230), is almost universally

considered the basic cornerstone of good government (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008). Some have even posited that impartiality should be viewed as the opposite of corruption (Rothstein & Varraich, 2017). More precisely, it is impartiality in the *exercise* of public power, that is, the output side of government (e.g., the issuing of licenses, public procurement, etc.), that is viewed as central. However, violations of the impartiality principle also include a broader array of practices beyond what is traditionally conceived as corruption, such as certain forms of clientelism and patronage. Hence, in the words of Rothstein and Teorell (2008, p. 171), '[t]he absence of corruption does not preclude all forms of partial exercise of government power'.

Individuals who perceive acts of corruption and/or violations of the impartiality principle as relatively more common in their municipality should be more likely to be critical or even hostile towards this practice since it concentrates the power into the hands of a small 'elite within an elite' and increases the risk of conflicts of interest (Navarro, 2009). Accumulating mandates would hence be perceived as something that favours corrupt insiders, facilitates duplicitous exclusion (Warren, 2006) and increases the risks of power abuse even further. Subsequently, concern about political corruption should lead to a greater scepticism towards practices that promote the formation of political elites. Conversely, if you perceive public officials in general as honest, fair and civic-minded, you become more likely to accept that some of them are entrusted with more power than others due to the potential benefits that it could bring in the form of votes, professionalism and local embeddedness.

Moreover, there are reasons to expect that perceptions about this practice also differ across party families. Given the anti-establishment rhetoric used by populist radical right parties (PRRPs), it is not farfetched to expect these parties to be especially critical towards the practice of multiple-mandate holding (Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2016; Ziller & Schübel, 2015). According to Mudde's (2007) widely used definition, PRRPs are defined by nativist, populist and authoritarian policies, and are considered to be the most successful new party family emerging during the last three decades (Rathgeb & Busemeyer, 2022, p. 2). A key characteristic of this party family is thus its antiestablishment rhetoric, which emphasises 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'" (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). Representatives of PRRPs are thus likely to perceive the practice of multiple-mandate holding as yet another expression of elitism and power-concentration into the hands of a small minority, which they look upon with contempt. Hence, we have chosen to formulate our first two hypotheses accordingly:

Hypothesis 1 – *Councillors who perceive partiality and corruption as more common among public officials in their municipality are more negatively disposed towards multiple-mandate holding.*

Hypothesis 2 – *Councillors representing populist radical right parties are more negatively disposed towards multiple-mandate holding.*

The practice of combining offices is often justified by referring to the importance of local interest representation (Freiburghaus et al., 2021, p. 972; Van de Voorde, 2019b, p. 46). Multiple-mandate holders are said to function as brokers between the local and the supra-local government tiers, thus even becoming referred to as ‘political entrepreneurs par excellence’ (Freiburghaus et al., 2021, p. 975). Hence, access to this kind of channel might even be regarded as vital for smaller municipalities. Moreover, local councillors are expected to ‘voice place-bound grievances and problems during the central decision-making process to reassure a smooth transition from national policy to local implementation’ (Freiburghaus et al., 2021, p. 975).

Rural and semi-rural municipalities in the periphery often tend to experience quite severe challenges related to the combination of an ageing population and a migration movement towards the cities and growth areas located closer to the political centre (Sundqvist, 2021; Wolff & Wiechmann, 2018). Hence, one could expect that local councillors from these more affected areas would feel a greater necessity of being able to represent their trouble-ridden hometown in the national parliament or in a regional assembly. Furthermore, since smaller municipalities tend to have fewer tasks and responsibilities and hence less political weight at the centre, one could also, in line with Van de Voorde (2019b, p. 112), expect that they would benefit more from a direct link to the national governing bodies. The fact that smaller municipalities tend to play a more limited role also suggests that it should be easier for their representatives to hold additional mandates without having to sacrifice too much time and effort on the different mandates or neglect some of them. Some have even suggested that councillors from smaller municipalities are dependent on supra-local positions in order to become more visible and gain in status (Dewoghélaëre et al., 2006). Councillors in larger urban centres are meanwhile weighed down by a greater workload and have a higher likelihood of already being a household name, which could render an additional office unnecessary for their political career.

Using a similar logic, one would also expect representatives of parties that have their principal power base in the more rural parts of a country to be more welcoming of mandate accumulation. Agrarian parties were originally formed to represent the interests of farmers in the political system; however, processes of globalisation, urbanisation and extensive structural rationalisation of farm holdings have forced agrarian parties to try to expand their electoral appeal or continue shrinking into oblivion in the minds of the electorate (Batory & Sitter, 2004; Christensen, 1997). Today, parties belonging to this party family still often tend to draw on centre-periphery and urban-rural cleavages, even though they have, in many cases, left out ‘agrarian’ from their names and, as in the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish cases, often adopted the moniker ‘Centre

Party' instead (Batory & Sitter, 2004). Nevertheless, and especially for the people living in the more rural parts of a country, the conflict between the centre and periphery remains highly relevant (Kühn, 2015). Given the lower population density in the parts of a country where agrarian parties are stronger, it could also be expected that these parties are reluctant to restrict access to various political assemblies for the most competent and/or influential politicians. Hence, limiting the political manoeuvring space for these politicians could be considered as being contra-productive for the agrarian cause.

Others have, in turn, argued that it is more common for city councillors to aim for a national office, or rather the opposite; national figureheads aspiring for seats in city councils (François & Navarro, 2013). The reason for this is said to be that mandates in larger municipalities are perceived as more lucrative when it comes to providing political resources that could also be used as a potential safety net in case of a downturn in their national career. However, Van de Voorde (2019b, p. 112) argues that this is quite rare since most political careers proceed in a linear fashion from a local seat to a parliamentary one. Indeed, representatives of the periphery in the Nordic countries have also been demonstrated to have a higher tendency of emphasising the importance of promoting geographical interests compared to those representing the political centre (Bengtsson & Wass, 2011; Valen et al., 2000). Hence, we choose to proceed from the dominant theoretical view, and have, therefore, decided to formulate the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3 – *Councillors from rural municipalities are more positively disposed towards multiple-mandate holding.*

Hypothesis 4 – *Councillors representing agrarian parties are more positively disposed towards multiple-mandate holding.*

Next, we continue with presenting Finland as a case study on which to test the validity of our hypotheses.

CUMUL DES MANDATS IN FINLAND

The Nordic countries are among the most decentralised welfare states in the world, with the decentralisation strategy even being attributed as a significant factor contributing to the relative success of the so-called Nordic welfare model (Karlsson, 2017; Sellers & Lidström, 2007). The decentralisation strategy has thus contributed to the Nordic countries having multiple government levels, creating an environment where local-, regional- and national leaders may have diverging agendas (Karlsson, 2017, p. 289). Hence, as it is possible for political actors in the Nordic countries to be elected on two or even three different levels simultaneously, the political actors themselves may also face some internal challenges derived from diverging interests.

Finland represents an interesting case for studying *cumul des mandats* since, despite the commonness of this practice, it has been severely understudied (but see Arter & Söderlund, 2023). This especially in comparison to the extensive research done in France, Belgium and other countries where the practice is commonly occurring (François, 2013; Navarro, 2009; Van de Voorde, 2019b). Arter and Söderlund (2023, p. 97) even describe the scale of the Finnish *cumul* as ‘exceptional in [a] comparative perspective’. Moreover, Finland has been claimed to constitute a deviant case regarding multiple-mandate holding because it has traditionally been theorised to function as a ‘compensation mechanism’ in highly centralised states with weak and fragmented local governments, where this practice provides local decision-makers with direct access to the central government (Navarro, 2009; see also Sandberg, 2014). Finland, as other Nordic countries, has a decentralised welfare state, which to some extent contradicts popular theories regarding multiple-mandate holding. However, one can question if Finland truly constitutes a deviant case in this regard since at least Belgium also has a highly decentralised political system. An arguably stronger justification for choosing Finland as a case is that it can be labelled as what is known as an ‘outcome case’ that maximises variation on the outcome of interest (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016), in this case, multiple-mandate holding. Finnish politicians can be argued to be in an especially good position to judge the potential pros and cons of this practice since it has been so common here, especially in the case of dual-mandate holding.

At least two major factors associated with the opportunity structure in Finland are argued to have played a key role in fostering the practice of dual-mandate holding by shaping individual incentives. First, there is the open and inclusive rules on candidate eligibility in Finnish elections as no legal restrictions or internal party rules prohibit the simultaneous holding of electoral mandates on more than one political tier (Arter & Söderlund, 2023). Second, the Finnish variant of the preferential voting system (OLPR) is argued to be particularly incentivizing towards personal vote-seeking since citizens are required to vote for a single candidate on one of the party lists and because the candidate nomination process is described as inclusive and decentralised (Arter, 2021; Arter & Söderlund, 2023). The competition for votes is fierce both between rival parties and between candidates of the same party (copartisans), which is reflected in the frequent occurrence of intraparty incumbency defeats (see Arter & Söderlund, 2023, p. 82). One way for Finnish politicians to enhance their chances of being (re)elected is, therefore, by fostering their local-level experience and renown or ‘localness’, which can be viewed as an important candidate resource (Arter & Söderlund, 2023, p. 87). Local-level experience can differentiate candidates from their co-partisans in a context of intense intraparty competition and thereby help them attract more personal votes, which has also been empirically demonstrated by Tavits (2010). Van de Voorde (2019b) furthermore argues that strictly organised party systems encourage the

accumulation of mandates since ‘the party elite is almost compelled to embrace [it] due to the perceived electoral advantage’. Other plausible incentives for politicians to accumulate offices include the extra political resources that this is likely to bring in the form of more money, influence, logistical support in electoral campaigns, visibility and the potential deterrence of competition (François, 2006).

Arter and Söderlund's (2023) study examine the decisions of Finnish MPs on whether or not to take part in municipal elections and finds that first-term legislators and those occupying marginal list positions at the previous general election are more likely to accumulate, especially when they are located in large-municipality party strongholds with intense intraparty competition for votes. Moreover, they find that the incidence of multiple-mandate holding was lowest in the smallest municipalities and the largest cities, which could be linked to the greater share of ‘celebrity and household-name politicians’ (e.g., cabinet ministers and party chairs) in the cities who might regard a local council seat as an unnecessary option. However, the authors also conclude that the representational focus plays at least as large a role as electoral incentives and personal vote-earning: Finnish MPs are said to be local MPs at heart who strive to defend the interests of their own home municipality from whence they receive their core personal vote. Another study on Finnish MPs has furthermore shown MPs holding a local mandate to be more likely to present a motion in parliament related to local- or regional questions and to use arguments related to geographical aspects during debates (Sandberg, 2014). This is further supported by the fact that several veteran MPs who are not dependent on the *cumul* as an electoral resource still choose to keep a seat on the local council despite the extra workload. Furthermore, according to Arter and Söderlund (2023, p. 97), it is also reflected in the fact that the *cumul* has such a high incidence in Finland and that there exists a ‘broad cross-party consensus surrounding the practice’.

To test our second hypothesis, we first need to decide on which Finnish party or parties to treat as a PRRP. According to Jungar and Jupskås (2014), the Finns Party (formerly True Finns) is part of a broader family of Nordic PRRPs, together with the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti, DF), the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD) and, to some extent, also the Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet, FrP) in Norway. The Finns Party is historically grounded in agrarian populism and social conservatism (Jungar & Jupskås, 2014, p. 216), but has over time, developed into a more nationalist right-wing populist party (Kestilä-Kekkonen & Söderlund, 2014, p. 648). Since its electoral breakthrough in the parliamentary elections of 2011, it has constituted the only influential PRRP in Finland (Kestilä-Kekkonen & Söderlund, 2014; Koivula et al., 2020). The Finns Party has been a harsh critic of the government reform that created the 21 new welfare districts with directly elected councils, with the first election to these 21 councils conducted in January

2022. According to their election programme, the reform was tailored in accordance with the wishes of the formerly dominant agrarian party (i.e., the Centre Party) to maximise the number of regional offices or *'hillotolpat'*, a derogatory term coined by former chair Timo Soini for highly desirable offices that can be used to further the personal interests of the office holder (Perussuomalaiset, 2021). It would therefore seem logical for representatives of the Finns Party to be more hostile towards the accumulation of mandates, especially if it also involves offices in the new regional councils.

In relation to the role of location and our third hypothesis, Sandberg (2014, p. 8) noted that the number of MPs in local Finnish politics has been highest in the largest municipalities (population > 50,000) and that only 14% of dual-office holders hail from municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants. However, Sandberg also notes that those dual-office holders hailing from smaller municipalities in the periphery are more likely to work for particular local interests (Sandberg, 2014, p. 13). Moreover, Bengtsson and Wass (2011, p. 161) argued that representatives from the periphery also have a higher tendency of emphasising the importance of promoting geographical interests. The Centre Party (KESK, founded in 1906 as the Agrarian League) constitutes the main agrarian party in the Finnish party system. Even though it has broadened its voter base beyond Finnish-speaking farmers to try to become a 'catch-all' party, its core areas are still located in the sparsely populated northern, central, and eastern parts of Finland (Arter, 1999). In fact, it is currently the largest party in 187 of 309 municipalities (about 60%) and in nine of 21 welfare districts (43%), and it should, therefore, be regarded as *the* municipal/regional party due to its very strong local/regional-level positions, but considerably weaker national average support (Sjöblom, 2020). According to Arter (1999, p. 168), the Centre Party's national goals have included 'emphasis on the democratisation of society, including the desirability of the decentralisation of decision making'. This is also illustrated by the fact that the party is considered the primary advocate of the recent government reform that created the earlier mentioned new intermediate tier with direct elections to the welfare district assemblies (Sjöblom, 2020, pp. 165–168). Hence, there are good reasons to suspect Centre Party representatives to be more welcoming of the *cumul*, in line with our fourth hypothesis.

After the first direct elections to the newly created 21 welfare districts, it thus became possible for a majority of the Finnish MPs to simultaneously being elected at three institutional levels.² This subsequently resulted in a situation in which over 50% of the MPs now hold a triple mandate and almost 90% hold at minimum a dual mandate (see Table 1). Moreover, it is noteworthy that none of the MPs that got elected to the new regional assembly were not already elected at the local level. An overview of the occurrence of multiple-mandate holding based on the background of the MPs further shows that age could be an influential factor predicting whether an MP holds multiple mandates

TABLE 1 Multiple-mandate holding among Finnish MPs (%).

Variable	Single mandate	Dual mandate	Triple mandate
Total (<i>N</i> = 177)	11.0	32.0	57.0
Gender			
Female (<i>n</i> = 79)	12.7	30.4	57.0
Male (<i>n</i> = 98)	9.2	33.7	57.1
Age*			
18–39 (<i>n</i> = 38)	5.3	18.4	74.4
40–49 (<i>n</i> = 52)	11.5	38.5	50.0
50–59 (<i>n</i> = 50)	12.0	44.0	44.0
60+ (<i>n</i> = 37)	13.5	21.6	64.9
Type of community			
Rural (<i>n</i> = 18)	22.2	22.2	55.6
Intermediary (<i>n</i> = 24)	8.3	50.0	41.7
Urban (<i>n</i> = 135)	9.6	30.4	60.0
Electoral periods			
1 (<i>n</i> = 72)	6.9	29.2	63.9
2 (<i>n</i> = 48)	10.4	29.2	60.4
3+ (<i>n</i> = 57)	15.8	38.6	45.6
Political party			
SDP (<i>n</i> = 37)	5.4	43.2	51.4
PS (<i>n</i> = 35)	5.7	22.9	71.4
KOK (<i>n</i> = 32)	9.4	25.0	65.6
KESK (<i>n</i> = 31)	19.4	35.5	45.2
VIHR (<i>n</i> = 14)	21.4	21.4	57.1
VAS (<i>n</i> = 13)	15.4	30.8	53.8
RKP (<i>n</i> = 8)	0	62.5	37.5

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Variable	Single mandate	Dual mandate	Triple mandate
KD ($n = 5$)	0	20.0	80.0
Others ($n = 2$)	50.0	50.0	0

Note: Excluding MPs from Helsinki and Åland Islands as they lack the possibility to hold a triple-mandate. One-way ANOVA test of variance.

Abbreviations: ANOVA, analysis of variance; KD, Christian Democrats; KESK, Centre Party; KOK, National Coalition Party; MPs, members of national parliament; PS, Finns Party; RKP, Swedish People's Party; SDP, Social Democrats; VAS, Left Alliance; VIHR, Greens.

* $p < 0.05$.

(Karv & Malmberg, 2022, p. 43), and Arter and Söderlund (2023) have shown that the incentive for mandate accumulation also declines with time spent in parliament. Moreover, being an MP was clearly beneficial during the elections as only three MPs running as candidates failed to get elected to the regional assembly.³

Next, we shift focus and present our data, variables and method of analysis.

DATA, VARIABLES AND METHOD

In order to test our hypotheses, we employ survey data gathered in early 2022 through a recently created local decision-maker online panel containing a total of 1132 local councillors from 264 different municipalities in Finland (Beslutfattarpanelen, 2022). This panel is administered by the Social Science Institute at Åbo Akademi University as part of the Finnish Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion (FIRIPO). The number of councillors who finished filling in the questions on multiple-mandate holding is 563, which means that the response rate is approximately 49.7% (see Supporting Information: Table S6 in the Appendix for more information on the representativeness of the panel).

Our dependent variable, *anti-multiple-mandate holding index*, is operationalized using the following three survey items (for the original items in Finnish, see Supporting Information: Table S4 in the Appendix): [1] 'In your opinion, is it generally a positive or negative thing that some politicians have political assignments at up to three different political levels simultaneously in decision-making—at the municipal level, in the welfare districts and in Eduskunta?' (1: Very positive–5: Very negative); [2] 'In your opinion, how much does your municipality benefit from the fact that some of your municipal politicians have political assignments at more than one political level?' (1: Not at all–5: Very much); [3] 'In your opinion, how great is the risk of conflicts of interest when some politicians hold political positions at more than one political level at the same time?' (1: Almost non-existent–5: Very large). Factor analysis shows that

all three items load on the same dimension, while a reliability analysis gives a Cronbach's α of 0.768, which shows that the internal consistency of the items was satisfactory. Hence, we decide to construct a simple additive index where we add up all three items, after first having inverted the scale of the second item, and then divide it by three. We also transform the scale of the index so that it ranges from 0 to 10 where a higher score indicates a more negative disposition towards multiple-mandate holding (see Supporting Information: Figure S1 in the Appendix for a simple histogram of the distribution of the dependent variable).

Our first independent variable, the *Partiality index*, is operationalized using a battery of survey items that is replicated from Dahlström and Sundell (2013) and asks for perceptions 'about the extent to which allocation of apartments in public housing, building permits, environmental permissions, public procurement and recruitment of public servants were made in an impartial manner in the municipality' (Dahlström & Sundell, 2013, p. 7). The items use a five-point Likert scale where higher values indicate more impartiality and the internal consistency of all five items was high since Cronbach's α was 0.894. Therefore, we sum the values of all items and divide it by five, after which we recode and reverse the scale of the resulting index so that it ranges from 0 to 1.

Our second independent variable, the *Corruption index*, is operationalized using four survey items that also originate from Dahlström and Sundell (2013). One of them is directly related to bribery, while the rest of them include more ambiguous forms of corruption that involve political interference in public administration reports and questionable hiring practices in the municipality that suggest patronage or clientelism and other similar violations of the impartiality principle. The items use a five-point Likert scale where higher values indicate more corruption and the internal consistency of all four items was satisfactory since Cronbach's α was 0.767.⁴ Consequently, we use these items to create a similar index as the previous one. Since only one of the items is directly related to what is conventionally viewed as corruption, we will also perform our analyses using only this particular item as a dummy variable and report if there are any substantive differences in the results.

The councillors included in the panel represent all the political parties currently represented in *Eduskunta*. This includes the 'big three' in Finnish politics, which have traditionally been the Social Democratic Party (SDP, established 1899), the Centre Party (KESK, 1906) and the National Coalition Party (KOK, 1918). Besides these three there are several smaller parties, namely the Swedish People's Party (RKP, 1906), the Christian Democrats (KD, 1958), the Left Alliance (VAS, established 1990 as a successor to the radical left alliance SKDL [1944]), the Greens (VIHR, 1987), and the Finns Party (PS, established 1995 as a successor to the rural SMP [1959]). Nevertheless, in our regression models, party affiliation is coded with dummies for the two parties that are central to our hypotheses, the Centre Party and the Finns Party, while

those councillors representing parties not represented in *Eduskunta* ($n = 24$) are excluded. Nevertheless, we will also run regression models including these 24 as a robustness test. Our indicator of the type of municipality where the local councillor is seated is based on the typology of Statistics Finland that divides settlements into urban, intermediate and rural municipalities. We include these categories as dummy variables with urban as the reference category.

As controls, we include the standard control variables gender, age group (coded as a continuous variable) and a dummy for if the respondent has some type of college education. We also control for the respondent's ideological self-placement on the conventional left/right scale since previous studies have noted that left-wing parties are often more critical towards the *cumul* (Costa et al., 2011; Van de Voorde, 2019b). All controls are coded to vary between 0 and 1 (see Supporting Information: Table S5 in the Appendix for descriptive information). To analyse our data, we mainly utilise Ordinary Least Square (OLS)-regression analysis.

Analysis

We begin by presenting a descriptive summary of the relation between our main dependent and independent variables and several control variables (see Table 2). The overview shows that there is a statistically significant variation in all three indices based on which type and actual party the respondent represents and the type of community from whence the respondent hails. This confirms the need for further analyses.

Next, we present results from an OLS regression (see Table 3), using our anti-multiple-mandate holding index as our dependent variable. We proceed in a stepwise manner by first including our independent variables in three separate models before adding them all together with the controls in our fourth and final model.

From the first column in Table 3, we can see that both our indices of perceived partiality and corruption show highly significant positive coefficients ($B = 1.727$, $p = 0.000$ and $B = 2.198$, $p = 0.000$, respectively).⁵ These results suggest that councillors perceiving partiality and corruption as being more common among public officials in their own municipality are more likely to be negatively disposed towards multiple-mandate holding, thus confirming our H1. Model 2 in the second column, in turn, shows that councillors representing the Finns Party (PS) are more likely to be hostile towards multiple-mandate holding ($B = 1.401$, $p = 0.000$), hence also confirming our H2.

Moving on to model 3, we can see that being a councillor from a semi-rural municipality was a significant predictor for being more negatively disposed towards multiple-mandate holding ($B = 0.539$, $p = 0.026$), compared to being from an urban municipality, while there is no significant effect based on being from a rural community even though the coefficient shows the expected

TABLE 2 Mean level of attitude towards multiple-mandate holding and perceptions of partiality and corruption across parties and type of community.

Variable	Anti-multiple-mandate holding index	Partiality index	Corruption index
Mean	5.66 (2.25)	0.33 (0.24)	0.33 (0.22)
Party	***	***	***
SDP ($n = 95$)	5.86 (2.10)	0.39 (0.25)	0.30 (0.19)
PS ($n = 72$)	7.08 (2.01)	0.44 (0.24)	0.43 (0.22)
KOK ($n = 131$)	5.87 (2.23)	0.33 (0.20)	0.33 (0.22)
KESK ($n = 136$)	4.60 (2.20)	0.23 (0.21)	0.24 (0.20)
VIHR ($n = 46$)	5.62 (1.77)	0.33 (0.20)	0.38 (0.21)
VAS ($n = 44$)	5.42 (2.57)	0.39 (0.18)	0.39 (0.19)
RKP ($n = 59$)	5.53 (1.94)	0.26 (0.26)	0.31 (0.21)
KD ($n = 20$)	4.66 (1.59)	0.33 (0.23)	0.30 (0.25)
Others ($n = 24$)	7.18 (1.70)	0.36 (0.22)	0.41 (0.21)
Type of community	**	*	***
Rural community ($n = 217$)	5.35 (2.22)	0.35 (0.23)	0.38 (0.22)
Intermediary community ($n = 160$)	6.16 (2.40)	0.35 (0.22)	0.34 (0.22)
Urban community ($n = 250$)	5.62 (2.15)	0.29 (0.25)	0.26 (0.19)

Note: Anti-multiple-mandate holding index scale from 0 to 10 where a higher score indicates a more negative disposition towards multiple-mandate holding. Partiality index scale 0–1 where higher values indicate more partiality. *Corruption index* scale 0–1 where higher values indicate more corruption. See Supporting Information: Appendix Table S5 for descriptive statistics for gender, age and education.

Abbreviations: ANOVA, analysis of variance; KD, Christian Democrats; KESK, Centre Party; KOK, National Coalition Party; PS, Finns Party; RKP, Swedish People's Party; SDP, Social Democrats; VAS, Left Alliance; VIHR, Greens.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

negative sign ($B = -0.338$, $p = 0.131$). Hence, we are unable to confirm our H3. However, the highly significant negative coefficient in model 2 indicates that being a member of the Centre Party (KESK) clearly predicts more positive attitudes towards multiple-mandate holding ($B = -1.086$, $p = 0.000$), and thus confirming our H4. In model 4, we include all our independent variables from our previous models plus our control variables. This model confirms our previous conclusions that suspicions of misconduct in local government activities and party ID are the strongest predictors of being against the accumulation of mandates. None of our control variables are, however,

TABLE 3 OLS regression results: Anti-multiple-mandate holding index.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Independent variables				
Partiality index (0–1)	1.727 (0.419)***			1.253 (0.461)**
Corruption index (0–1)	2.198 (0.465)***			1.816 (0.502)***
Party affiliation (ref. Other)				
KESK		–1.086 (0.223)***		–0.972 (0.253)***
PS		1.401 (0.284)***		0.840 (0.331)*
Type of community (ref. Urban)				
Semi-rural			0.539 (0.242)*	0.596 (0.249)*
Rural			–0.338 (0.224)	0.061 (0.249)
Control variables				
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)				–0.203 (0.211)
Age groups (0–1)				0.374 (0.470)
College education (Dummy: 0 = no, 1 = yes)				0.161 (0.219)
Left-right self-placement				0.713 (0.441)
Intercept	6.039 (0.371)	5.682 (0.115)	5.582 (0.153)	5.136 (0.597)
Respondents	515	542	542	464
R ² (adjusted)	0.098	0.098	0.019	0.155

Note: OLS: Unstandardised coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.

Abbreviations: KESK, Centre Party; OLS, Ordinary Least Square; PS, Finns Party.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

significant. With our final model, we were, nevertheless, only able to explain 15.5% of the attitudinal variation.

A few caveats are in order concerning the limitations of this study. One caveat is that we cannot be certain of how representative our sample of local councillors is of the larger population of local councillors in Finland. While the online panel itself is quite representative of the population (see Supporting Information: Table S6 in the Appendix), just about half of the panel chose to answer our questions. One possible implication of this is that it was those councillors who are the busiest, potentially because they have accumulated several mandates and therefore have a greater understanding for this practice, who have chosen to skip the survey altogether. Hence, it could be the least busy councillors who are least inclined to accept additional assignments who have chosen to dedicate their time to answering our questions.⁶ A further limitation is that due to the cross-sectional nature of this study, we cannot prove any causal directions, which would require times series panel data or some kind of experimental setting.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Given our findings, there are some clear indications that power concentration and power abuse on the one hand and local brokerage and local embeddedness on the other hand could play important roles in explaining attitudes towards multiple-mandate holding among local councillors. Most parties seem relatively neutral or slightly negatively inclined on the question of mandate accumulation, as one would perhaps not expect when there is a relatively broad tolerance for this practice in Finnish political culture. However, both the Centre Party and the Finns Party stand out with their somewhat polarised attitudes on the matter. Hence, the broad cross-party consensus towards this practice in Finland, as suggested by Arter and Söderlund (2023, p. 97), might be somewhat of an exaggeration.

Still, even though members of the Finns Party were clearly the most negative group towards multiple-mandate holding, most likely partly due to their misgivings regarding traditional (party) politics and their self-claimed status as ‘political outsiders’ (Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2016), it was also the party with the highest share of MPs holding a triple mandate among the larger parties in *Eduskunta* (71.4%). This is similar to the situation in Sweden, where MPs from the Swedish Democrats (SD) have previously been shown to be the most prone to mandate accumulation in the parliament (Karlsson, 2018, p. 215), perhaps suggesting this could be something of a populist right-wing political phenomenon. Still, in a Finnish context, it could also be explained by the candidate-centred voting system used (Arter & Söderlund, 2023), possibly driving the Finns Party to place their ‘household-names’ on the ballot irrespective of the election. Interestingly, even as members of the Centre Party

were the most positive group towards multiple-mandate holding they had the lowest share of MPs holding a triple mandate among the larger parties (45.2%). There thus seems to be a contradiction here between the actual occurrence of *cumul des mandats* and attitudes towards the practice among councillors from the political parties themselves. Presumably, this may be since the traditional parties, given their more extensive party organisations and local roots, may have a broader spectrum of vote-gathering politicians to choose from and are thus not as dependent on a few ‘stars’ to attract voters during elections. Hence, even if the members of the Finns Party oppose this practice in theory, in practice, they might feel that they are more-or-less forced to accept it due to reasons of vote-maximising possibilities. This thus provides some evidence to the suggestion that political parties, in the end, are prone to act in a way that will maximise their chances for electoral success (see, e.g., Downs, 1957, p. 27).

Since perceptions of corruption and favouritism in local government were found to be related to a more hostile attitude towards multiple-mandate holding, one could speculate that a relatively high level of trust in government could be yet another contributing factor as to why this practice is so common in some countries compared to others. People are simply more willing to accept that some politicians are entrusted with more than one mandate since they trust the system to check potential abuses. Hence, the fact that Finland is one of the European countries with the highest levels of trust in government (Söderlund, 2019), with corruption scandals being relatively rare (Karv & Strandberg, 2022), might explain why there has been so little discussion concerning limiting the possibilities for mandate accumulation. In other words, systems that incentivise the accumulation of mandates, thereby fostering a more distinct political elite, require trust in order to be legitimate. If this trust is undermined by the more widespread diffusion of this practice, it could have serious repercussions for long-term system stability. Moreover, in countries where corruption is considerably more common and trust is lower than in Finland, an electoral system that both allows and incentivises multiple-mandate holding could be downright harmful for legitimacy.

One relevant question, however, is if our partiality and corruption indices are any indications of the *actual* occurrence of partial and corrupt behaviour in the different municipalities of our respondents, *or* if some of the respondents are just more pessimistic or cynical to their nature than others. Is it the actual presence of local corruption that reduces the legitimacy of mandate accumulation or is it more likely to be some type of psychological perception effect? We cannot give any definitive answer to this question here, since we can impossibly know what exactly went on in our respondents' heads when they were answering the survey items. Since corruption in its more traditional and clear-cut forms is repeatedly said to be quite rare in Finland, we very much doubt that many respondents sat on any hard concrete information concerning the extent of power abuse in their home municipality. Hence, we lean more towards the second explanation.

The creation of regional welfare districts in Finland has transferred some important decision-making powers from the local- to the regional level, in turn, creating powerful regional assemblies. Even as the reform did not transform Finland in a more centralised direction per se it has indeed radically changed the character of the decentralised Finnish welfare system (Valkama & Oulasvirta, 2021, p. 449). Moreover, the reform has created a new tier of political actors in-between the local- and national-level, enabling the possibility of what could be considered to be an unhealthy level of possibilities for mandate accumulation in Finland. This is a position largely supported by members of the political elites, as there is a majority in only two parties being favourable towards the possibility of multiple-mandate holding. Hence, according to our interpretation, holding dual-mandates might be acceptable, while holding triple mandates should not be. So, even though this practice has previously been regarded as an integral part of the Finnish political system (Arter, 2021; Arter & Söderlund, 2023; Sandberg, 2014), our results suggest that the political actors themselves agree that this needs to change due to the new possibilities/risks created by the reform. Whether the best way to restrict this practice is to implement new electoral laws (see France) or whether the political parties themselves could perhaps work out some kind of 'silent agreement' to limit it is open for debate.

We consider our results to further add to other recent scholarships about multiple-mandate holding in Europe (see Van de Voorde & de Vet, 2020), which have largely concentrated on a handful of Francophone countries, and in the Nordics more specifically (see Arter & Söderlund, 2023), by focusing on explaining attitudes towards the practice among political actors themselves. This is a perspective that has been largely lacking in previous scholarships, and we consider our study to contribute to filling that void. The theoretical framework of multiple-mandate holding can only be refined by looking at the phenomenon from as many different perspectives as possible. Future research could try to explore attitudes towards this practice from a citizen perspective, in and across countries where *cumul des mandats* has become the norm among political actors. While we were able to explain some of the attitudinal variations when it comes to multiple-mandate holding, much variation remains unexplained. Future studies should try to further 'unpack' why exactly representatives of an agrarian party are more positive towards this practice while representatives of a PRRP are more negative towards it. One way forward would be to compare these results with results from other countries and see if it is possible to find similar attitudinal patterns among parties of the same ideological orientation. Future studies should also try to incorporate other potential explanatory variables, such as the respondent's political experience and their view on representative roles, when formulating survey questions for similar purposes. These studies could also explore attitudes towards specific mandate-combinations.

One further limitation with this study is that we were unable to identify which, if any, of our respondents were multiple-mandate holders. Nevertheless, even if we were able to identify these among the respondents, they would still probably be too few in our panel to draw any robust conclusions regarding the attitudes of multiple-mandate holders themselves. With future studies in mind, we, therefore, recommend the creation of a panel that targets welfare district councillors since as many as 77% of them are also local councillors (Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, 2022). This will enable studies exploring whether attitudes towards multiple-mandate holding differ depending on whether a politician has multiple-mandates or not. It would also be of great value to explore the attitudes of dual-, and especially triple-, mandate holders in *Eduskunta* using both surveys and more qualitative research methods.

By exploring attitudes towards the practice of multiple-mandate holding among local councillors, we believe that we have contributed with a few broader general insights to this research field. First, right-wing populists do not like the practice of mandate accumulation. Nevertheless, as our overview of multiple-mandate holding among MPs showed, the share of triple-mandate holders was, in fact, the highest among MPs from the sole PRRP represented in parliament, showing an interesting discrepancy between political rhetoric and reality. Second, the practice of multiple-mandate holding is not particularly popular among the councillors themselves. This suggests that also in high-trusting countries with well-functioning political institutions and a consolidated liberal form of democracy, the political actors seem to be aware of the long-term risks associated with too much concentration of political power into the hands of the few. From the perspective of long-term democratic stability, this could be considered an encouraging finding.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Also known as multiple-office holding.
- ² Excluding MPs from Helsinki and Åland Islands as they lack the possibility to hold a triple mandate.
- ³ Mikko Kärnä (KESK), Ville Vähämäki (PS) and Antero Laukkanen (KD).
- ⁴ In Dahlström and Sundell (2013), the recruitment items and the bribery items load on two separate dimensions and are hence used as separate indices. Here, however, factor analysis reveals that all four items load on the same dimension and are, therefore, combined into one single index.
- ⁵ One standard deviation (SD) change in the *Partiality index* has the effect of approximately 0.41 on the *Anti-multiple-mandate holding index*. The corresponding effect of the *Corruption index* is 0.48.
- ⁶ A dropout analysis provides some potential support for this speculation. Individuals belonging to the age groups 30–39 and 40–49, that is, those who probably are in the most hectic stage of their respective careers, are somewhat overrepresented among those who did not answer our survey questions. The results from the dropout analysis are not shown here, but they are available upon request.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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