The Beauty Premium of Politicians in Office

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Abstract

The beauty premium in politics shows that attractive politicians are more likely to get elected to office than less attractive politicians, but little is known about whether beauty also shapes the behavior of members of parliament (MPs) once in office. We use newly collected data on the attractiveness and parliamentary activity of 866 MPs in the German Bundestag over the period 2009-2017 to examine the link between beauty and parliamentary work. Our results show that attractive MPs are more likely to be absent from parliament and less active in labor-intensive background work than others. Consistent with our hypothesis of opportunities created by attractiveness, we find that more attractive MPs have higher outside earnings and appear more often on television talk shows. Our results suggest that attractive MPs re-allocate their time from parliamentary work to other activity that increases their income and popularity.

Keywords: attractiveness of politicians, parliamentary activity, members of parliament, political economy.

JEL Codes: D72, H11, J45, J70, K40

1 Introduction

How large is the premium to attractiveness in politics? Previous work on the "beauty premium in politics" has shown that more attractive politicians are more successful in elections (e.g., Rosar et al., 2008; Leigh and Susilo, 2009; King and Leigh, 2009; Rosar, 2009; Berggren et al., 2010, 2017; Potrafke et al., 2020). Being attractive may also open up opportunities once being elected into office. Little is known, however, whether and to what extent elected politicians exploit their attractiveness for their own benefit after entering parliament.

In this paper, we provide the first empirical evidence on the impact of attractiveness on the work of members of parliament (MPs). We use unique data on the attractiveness of German MPs, which is classified by manual raters from the United States using standardized pictures of German MPs. In our empirical analysis, we are interested in whether attractive MPs substitute parliamentary work with other activities that arise from a wider range of opportunities. These opportunities especially include a larger potential for outside work to increase income as well as greater media visibility to increase popularity. The German case offers a unique laboratory to investigate these hypotheses. First, outside activities of MPs in the German parliament have been subject to declaration since the 17th legislative period. Second, appearances on TV talk shows are an important tool to raise popularity in the German political arena.

Regarding outside employment, the new declaration rules allow us to collect detailed individual-level data on outside earnings for all MPs. We also self-compile a new dataset on the appearance of MPs in all major German TV talk shows, including a total of 2,923 TV shows with a broadcasting time of approximately 212,350 minutes between 2009 and 2017. We complement these data with a new dataset on newspaper mentions of all MPs, which covers 7,250 printed editions of Germany's most important newspapers and all online content released between 2009 and 2013. We observe substantial between and within-party variation in terms of commitment to parliament and the degree to which MPs engage in outside work and media activity. We hypothesize that the beauty of MPs might be a missing piece contributing to the stark heterogeneity across MPs in outside work.

We report three main results. The first main result is that attractive MPs are more likely to be absent from parliament than less attractive MPs. This result is robust across a number of model specifications that account for a series of MP-level and party-level controls. The strong correlation between the attractiveness of MPs and

their absence from parliament is consistent with our hypothesis that beauty generates outside options that crowd out parliamentary work.

The second main result is that attractive MPs do not compensate for their higher absence from parliament with other parliamentary activities. We find null effects of beauty on visible activities and negative effects of beauty on other, more labor-intensive activities that are typically conducted in the background. These results are consistent with attractive MPs making use of their outside options by abstaining from other time-consuming tasks in parliament. Examining heterogeneity, we find some evidence that the results are stronger for younger MPs and for MPs with left-wing political ideology. We also find gender differentials suggesting that the beauty effect is weaker for male than female MPs.

A natural question that follows from our first two results is how attractive parliamentarians use their additional time if they are absent more often from parliament than others. Our main hypothesis is that MPs exploit the additional opportunities generated by their attractiveness to engage in other activities outside parliament to raise income and popularity. Our third main result is consistent with this hypothesis, showing that attractive MPs have higher earnings from outside activities. Accounting for the systematic differentials in outside activity across political parties, we find that the substitution of parliamentary work with outside employment is stronger for MPs from left-wing parties than for other MPs. We also demonstrate that more attractive MPs are more often present in television talk shows. Using newspaper mentions as a falsification test to separate the initial popularity of MPs from beauty effects, we conclude that time-consuming media activities are a second channel via which the effect of attractiveness on parliamentary activity materializes.

Our results have important policy implications. Elected representatives are expected to fulfill their duties in parliament and to represent the will of their constituencies. When electing attractive politicians, a pattern that is repeatedly found in empirical data, voters open the door for politicians who make use of the opportunities created by their attractiveness, substituting parliamentary work with outside activity. Such behavior can be at the expense of a functioning political and democratic process.

Contribution to the literature: Our main contribution is to provide first empirical evidence on the relation between MPs' attractiveness and their activities in parliament. Many previous studies have examined the extent to which voters reward physically

attractive politicians. There is almost no evidence on how politicians' attractiveness influences their activities in parliament, an exception being Bickley et al. (2022), who examine the contents of MPs' voting records in parliament. Our innovation is to (i) focus on MPs' presence in roll-call votes and other activities (including speeches and interpellations), and (ii) examine time re-allocation of physically attractive MPs from parliamentary activity to other self-rewarding activities that boost their income and popularity.

More broadly, our study contributes to the literature investigating the extent to which beauty pays. The role of beauty has been examined, for example, for labor market outcomes (e.g., Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994; Ruffle and Shtudiner, 2015; Deryugina and Shurchkov, 2015b; Stinebrickner et al., 2019; Shtudiner and Klein, 2020), educational and cognitive developments (e.g., Deryugina and Shurchkov, 2015a; Hamermesh et al., 2023), sports (e.g., Bakkenbüll and Kiefer, 2015; Chan et al., 2022; Pieper and Schulze, 2023) and even elections in the American Economic Association (Hamermesh, 2006).

We also contribute to the literature on determinants of MPs' parliamentary activities (e.g., Geys, 2013; Geys and Mause, 2012, 2013; Arnold et al., 2014; Wochner, 2022). Studies in this literature investigate whether and why MPs are present in parliament when roll-call votes take place and which MPs are active in group initiatives or speeches. There is no study yet that examines how MPs' attractiveness influences their presence and activities in parliament.

Organization: The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section (2) describes the institutional background of Germany, which we exploit as a testing ground for the beauty premium of politicians. We describe our data collection process and descriptive statistics in Section (3). The empirical strategy is explained in Section (4), with results presented in Section (5). In Section (6) we examine channels via which beauty crowds out parliamentary activity. Finally, Section (7) concludes.

2 Institutional background

2.1 Political parties in Germany

Since World War II, German politics has been largely dominated by two major parties: the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the center-right Christian Demo-

cratic Union (CDU). In Bavaria, one of Germany's largest states, the CDU is replaced by its sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), which holds significant political influence in the region. Together, the CDU and CSU form a single faction in the national parliament. It's worth noting that all German chancellors since World War II were members of either the SPD or the CDU. Similarly, the majority of prime ministers in German states have belonged to the SPD or the CDU/CSU coalition.

In the 1980s, the Green party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) entered the political arena and has maintained a presence in the German Bundestag since 1983. Over the years, the Greens have engaged in coalition partnerships with the CDU, SPD, and Free Democratic Party (FDP) at the state level. Initially rooted in traditional left-wing values, the Greens underwent significant development. Notably, from 1998 to 2005, the SPD and the Greens formed a coalition government at the national level.

In 2007, the Left Party (Die LINKE) was established through the merger of the socialist party in East Germany and a socialist splinter group from the SPD. At the state level, the Left Party has formed coalitions with the SPD and the Greens.

Government coalitions: Over the past seven decades, government coalitions in Germany are typically formed between two or three parties (including the sister parties CDU and CSU). Our analysis rests on data for the 17th and 18th legislative periods. In the 17th legislative period (2009–2013), the government coalition was formed between the center-right CDU/CSU and the market-oriented FDP, while in the 18th legislative period (2013–2017) there was a grand coalition between the center-right CDU/CSU and the center-left SPD.

2.2 Germany as a testing ground for the beauty premium of politicians in office

The German case offers a well-suited laboratory to study the beauty premium for politicians in office for two reasons. First, a necessary requirement to explore our analysis is quantifying the degree of outside activity of members of parliament. Pursuing such outside activities is illegal in many countries, but is allowed in Germany. Since the 17th legislative period (2009–2013), outside activity in Germany is also subject to declaration. Our collection of reported outside earnings from the official web pages of MPs, which we describe in detail below, uncovers stark heterogeneity in outside activity across MPs. Examining party differentials, we also find strong heterogeneity both

within and across political parties. These differentials, although showing that internal cultures and informal rules of some parties are generally more positive on outside employment than others, suggest that there are individual-level factors that shape the propensity of MPs to engage in outside work.

Second, TV talk shows in the form of roundtable discussions are very popular and important arenas for political debate in Germany (Kessler and Lachenmaier, 2017; Myrczik et al., 2022). For instance, the most popular TV show "Anne Will" is regularly watched by up to 4 million individuals (Das Erste, 2020). Putting these numbers into perspective, around 4,57 million individuals watched the soccer game between the German national team against Ukraine on June 12, 2023 (Der Tagesspiegel, 2023). Attendance at these talk shows is particularly relevant for politicians, as newspapers regularly publish recaps of the shows almost as if they were relevant parliamentary meetings. About half of the guests at these shows are politicians, which is why the shows are often called to be an "alternate parliament" (e.g., Fröhlich and Hillje, 2020). No one is too high-ranked for these shows, which are attended occasionally even by federal ministers, prime ministers of German states, or the German chancellor. Given their importance, politicians in Germany have an incentive to appear in these shows to increase popularity.

3 Data

3.1 Beauty scores

We measure MPs' physical attractiveness on a beauty score ranging from 1 to 10. Our main explanatory variable for the 17th legislative period (2009–2013) is measured by the data from Potrafke et al. (2020) and complemented by scores compiled for the 18th legislative period in Germany (2013–2017).

Pictures of MPs and rating procedure: Potrafke et al. (2020) used the MPs' pictures published in "Kürschners Volkshandbuch", an official handbook that is published every legislative period. It includes comparable head-and-shoulder portraits of the MPs. An advantage of these data is that the pictures of the MPs included in the handbook do not differ in pose or gesture, minimizing the probability that beauty scores are driven by confounding influences such as posture or clothing.

Figure 1 EXAMPLE OF OUR CLASSIFICATION APPROACH, MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WITH LOW AND HIGH RATINGS


(a) Low rating (2.5)   (b) High rating (7.9)

Notes: The figure shows two pictures of MPs (from the same party) published in "Kürschners Volkshandbuch". The MP one the left received one of the lowest ratings (2.5), the MP on the right received one of the highest ratings (7.9).

A total of 372 raters were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk service and were asked to assess the physical attractiveness of the individual MPs. The raters are recruited from the United States of America—not from Germany—to make sure that they are very unlikely to know any individual politician. This way, we rule out that the raters' assessment is confounded by their political preferences or their attitudes towards specific MPs.

The raters assessed the attractiveness of MPs on a scale from 1 (least attractive) to 10 (most attractive). Each rater assessed between 28 and 37 MPs to minimize biases from exhaustion (the average number of ratings conducted by raters was about 32). The attractiveness of every MP was assessed by 14 raters to reduce biases from personal taste. We use the average of the 14 ratings to measure the physical attractiveness of each MP. There may still be classical measurement error in the final beauty score due to sampling variation in raters, but with 14 raters, this type of error should become reasonably small. Our final beauty scores assume values between 1.7 (least attractive

Figure 2 DISTRIBUTION OF BEAUTY SCORES
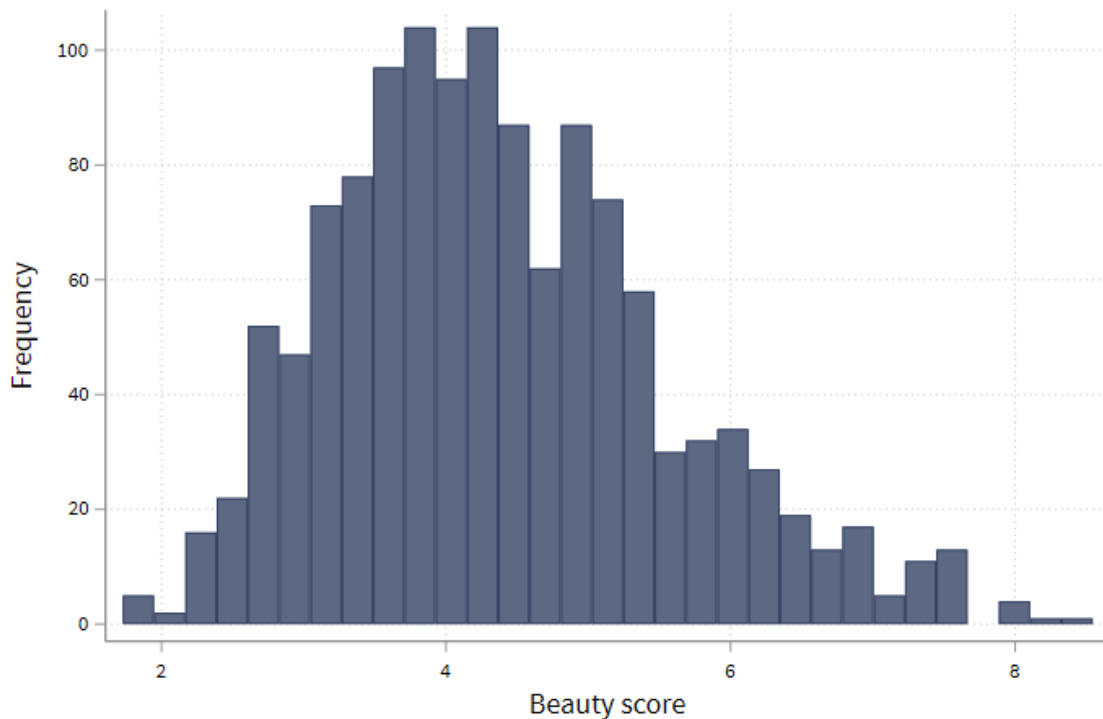
Notes: The histogram shows the distribution of beauty scores of the members of the German Bundestag over the 17th and 18th legislative periods, 2009–2017. Scores are coded by human raters from the United States of America.

MP in our sample) and 8.55 (most attractive MP in our sample).

Examples: In Figure (1), we exemplify the classification outcome of our rating approach. The figure depicts two members from the center-right party CDU/CSU. The MP shown in Panel (a) was among the members of parliament who received one of the lowest beauty scores of the distribution (2.5), Panel (b) depicts a member from the same party receiving a top score of 7.9.

Distribution of attractiveness: Figure (2) shows the entire distribution of beauty scores for the German MPs who have been in office in the 17th and 18th legislative periods (2009–2017). The data show that the distribution of attractiveness is skewed to the right, emphasizing that more MPs are located at the lower end of the distribution. This creates a substantial beauty premium for the MPs who rank on top of the

distribution.

Party differentials in attractiveness: Our data also reveal party differentials in attractiveness. On average, our scores show that members of the market-oriented FDP and the Greens are perceived to be most attractive (mean scores of 4.7), followed by MPs from the left-wing party DIE LINKE (4.4). The members of the two parties forming the government coalition in the 18th legislative period—the center-right CDU and the center-left SPD— received the lowest mean scores in attractiveness (4.3). Using t-tests, we find that the differences in attractiveness between the lowest-rated parties (CDU and SPD) and the highest-rated parties (FDP and Greens) are statistically significant at the 1% level.
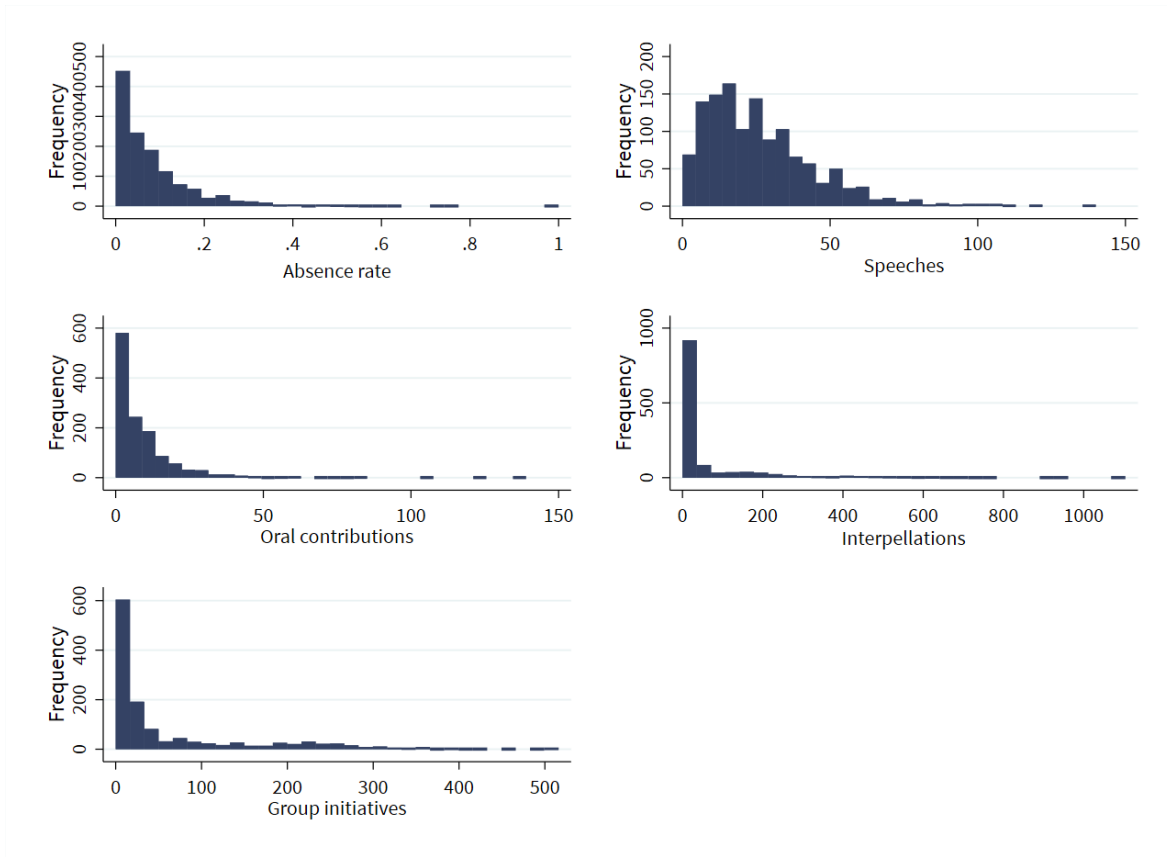
3.2   Parliamentary activities

For each MP, we collect information regarding their absence from roll-call votes and their engagement in parliamentary activities. Data on activity in parliament are not readily available and were manually collected. Data for the 17th legislative period are taken from Arnold et al. (2014). We complement these available data by collecting new information for the 18th legislative period in a large-scale data collection project on German MPs (Gründler et al., 2023). Data concerning roll-call votes are obtained from the "Open Data" Service provided by the German Bundestag, while data on MPs' activities are sourced from the data and information system of the German Bundestag.

In addition to the absence rate, we collect four types of parliamentary activities for each MP. We collect data on the number of given speeches in parliament, the number of interpellations, the number of group initiatives (including different types of applications, and reporting), and the number of oral contributions during parliamentary sessions.

Figure (3) shows the distribution of parliamentary activity over MPs in the 17th and 18th legislative periods. As the figure suggests, the distributions are highly skewed, with few MPs having high absence rates and the bulk of MPs being present in most of the parliamentary sessions. The distribution is even more skewed regarding interpellations, which are typically written by a handful of MPs. Distributions are also highly skewed regarding oral contributions and group initiatives and—to a lesser extent— regarding speeches.

Figure 3 DISTRIBUTION OF PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES

Notes: The histograms show the distribution of parliamentary activities during the 17th and 18th legislative periods of the German Bundestag. Data on parliamentary activity are manually collected and coded.

3.3 Outside earnings

A major advantage of the German case is that outside earnings are subject to declaration. MPs' outside earnings were unobserved by voters until the year 2007, when a major reform forced German MPs to report their outside earnings. Since then, German MPs have been forced to report their outside earnings in brackets. These data are freely accessible online by voters but are not readily available for research, requiring manual collection and coding. We self-compile the declared outside earnings of all MPs who have been in the German parliament between 2009 and 2017. We then convert the numbers recorded in brackets into values that are coded in Euros. Due to the top-coding of the highest category, our levels reflect lower bounds.

The declaration scheme has become more detailed in the 18th legislative period,

Figure 4 DISTRIBUTION OF OUTSIDE EARNINGS ACROSS PARTIES
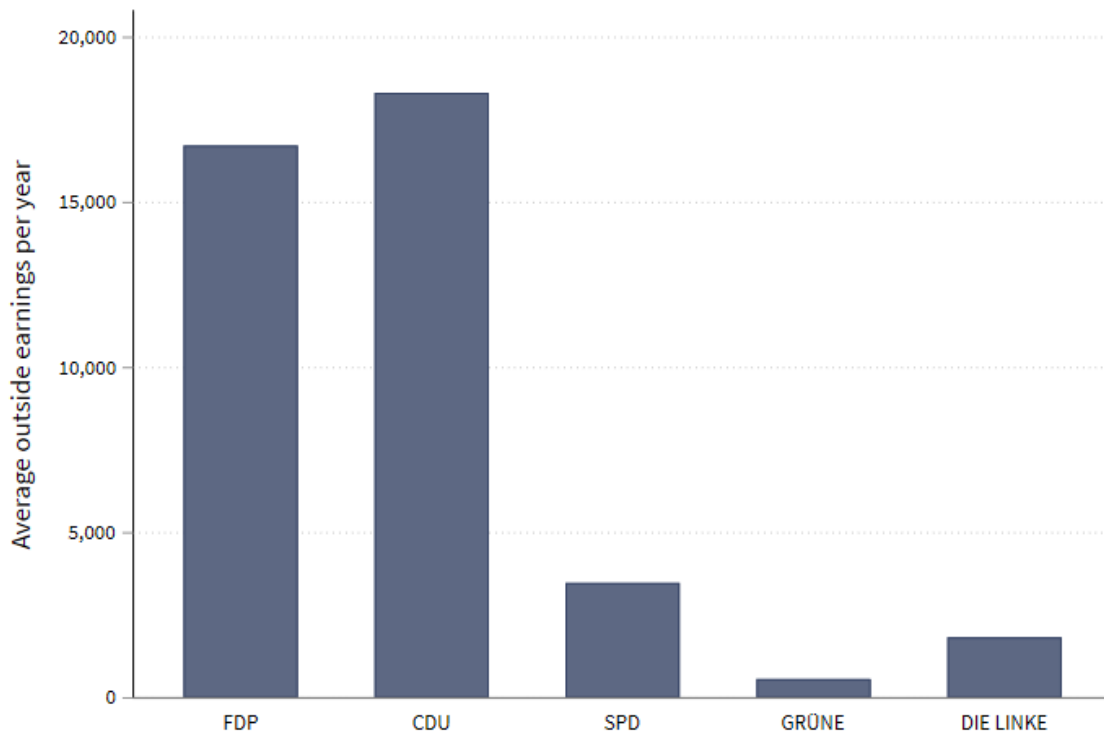
Notes: The figure shows the average level of outside earnings per year across all parties in the German Bundestag during the 17th and 18th legislative periods, 2009–2017. Data on outside earnings are manually collected and converted into Euro values.

providing more precise estimates of the amount of outside earnings. To account for differences in precision, our empirical strategy includes fixed effects for the legislative periods.

Figure (4) shows the outcome of our coding scheme, plotting the distribution of collected data on outside earnings per year across parties in the German parliament. The data reveal startling differences in outside earnings per year across parties. On average, MPs from the center-right CDU/CSU and the market-oriented FDP have earned more than 15,000 Euros per year via outside activity over our period of observation. For the center-left SPD, average outside earnings are below 5,000 Euros per year and even lower for members of the Green party and the left-wing party DIE LINKE. Importantly, however, the variation within parties is even larger than the between-party variation, implying that there should be individual-specific factors that explain differentials in outside earnings.

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3.4 Media Data

Appearances in TV talk shows: We manually collected data on the appearances of politicians in all major television talk shows in Germany that usually invite politicians. We compile this dataset for all years of the 17th and 18th legislative periods. To this end, we collaborated with the respective TV stations, which provided access to their archives. Our data include the most popular political TV shows in Germany ("Markus Lanz", "Günther Jauch", "Anne Will", "Maybritt Illner", "Menschen bei Maischberger", "Hart aber Fair", "Faktist", "NDRTalkshow", and "nach9").[1] The final media database covers a total of 2,923 TV shows with a broadcasting time of approximately 212,350 minutes of material (roughly 150 full days).

Newspaper mentions: For the 17th legislative period, we also compile data on MPs' mentions in newspaper articles. Our collection includes the largest and most popular German newspapers, including "Die taz", "Der Tagesspiegel", "Frankfurter Rundschau", and "Die Welt" (taken from Van der Pas, 2022), and augmented the data by self-collected newspaper mentions in the two flagship newspapers "Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)" and "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)". Our final dataset includes more than 7,250 printed newspaper editions and all online content released between 2009 and 2013. For each MP, we collect the number of mentions per year in all of these newspapers.

4 Empirical model

4.1 Hypotheses

The fundamental building block underlying our analysis is that attractiveness increases opportunities. Consider the trade-off in MPs' allocation of disposable time T^d

$$T^d = \alpha P + (1 - \alpha)O, \tag{1}$$

where a fraction of α is allocated to parliamentary work P, and the rest of the disposable time is used for activities outside of parliamentary duties O (e.g., engaging

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[1]Only one station, the special interest channel "phoenix", was not willing to cooperate. Phoenix hosts two TV talk shows that regularly invite politicians ("Unter den Linden" and "phoenix Runde"). Compared to the other shows, however, the audience of phoenix' shows is small.

in outside employment or conducting media activities). Optimal levels of α and $(1 - \alpha)$ may depend on a number of factors, including MPs' preferences and ability, but *opportunities* to attract outside work possibilities are key requirements to re-allocate time from parliamentary work to outside earnings or media appearances.

Our key argument is that attractiveness shapes the parameter α, and hence MPs with higher beauty have more options to engage in a series of activities outside parliament compared to other MPs. Outside activities, however, mechanically distract MPs from their parliamentary duties. Hence, our key hypothesis is that other things equal, more attractive MPs are more likely to engage in outside activity than others.

4.2 Empirical specification

The goal of our analysis is to examine whether the attractiveness of MPs is related to their activity in parliament. To that end, we estimate variants of the model

$$\text{Activity}_{ijt} = \alpha_j \text{Beauty}_i + \mathbf{X}_{it}\boldsymbol{\beta}_j + \zeta_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} \tag{2}$$

where Activity_{ijt} describes the parliamentary activity measure $j = 1, ..., 5$ for MP $i = 1, ..., 866$ in the legislative period $t = 1, 2$. In our benchmark model, we examine the relation between beauty and presence or absence from parliament. In complementary analyses, we also explore other activities, including the number of speeches, group initiatives, or interpellations.

We combine observations from the 17th and 18th legislative periods into a pooled panel, leaving us with 1,270 MP-level observations. Both the governing coalition and the party composition of the German Bundestag changed between the 17th and the 18th legislative periods, providing us with rich variation that we can exploit for estimation. Period-fixed effects ζ_t control for systematic differences between the 17th and 18th legislative periods.

Our analysis of the mechanisms underlying a potential relationship between beauty and parliamentary activity follows the same logic as the specification of equation (2). Here we relate outside earnings and appearances in TV talk shows to beauty scores and the covariates included in the models for parliamentary activity.

Identification: The parameter α estimates the relationship between beauty and parliamentary activity. Unlike other research designs in which MPs' activities are examined, the threat to identification from reverse causality is negligible in our setting

because beauty is largely predetermined. However, a challenge in isolating the impact of beauty is that there may be confounding factors that correlate simultaneously with parliamentary activity and the attractiveness of MPs. To the extent that we can account for such factors with observational data, we include them in the matrix $\mathbf{X}_{it}$. For instance, we observe MPs' party affiliation, which has been shown to correlate with beauty (Berggren et al., 2010, 2017; Potrafke et al., 2020), and which is also related to activities in parliament. The center-right CDU has been in the government coalition through all the years covered in our analysis. MPs of governing parties are typically present more often in parliament because they need to ensure a sufficient majority in the vote. Parliamentary activity also mechanically correlates with leading positions within parties or the parliament, which we can account for by including a variable that reflects political leadership positions (e.g., the position of a group chairman, a committee chair, a state secretary, or holding cabinet positions). We further take into account whether MPs were directly elected and also include the age of MPs, which impacts the attendance of roll-call votes and strongly correlates with our beauty scores. Finally, we code two dummy variables accounting for MPs' gender and regional origin (Eastern versus Western Germany). Descriptive statistics on all variables are reported in Table (A1) in the appendix.

To the extent that there are remaining and unobserved variables that correlate with beauty and absence, our results cannot identify a causal effect of attractiveness. Such variables include social capital, health, or pre-parliamentary income. We also do not monitor MPs' beliefs and values or their attitudes towards work ethic. Some of the MPs have been in parliament in both the 17th and the 18th legislative periods. For those, we could in principle account for unobserved cross-MP heterogeneity by including MP-level fixed effects. As attractiveness over shorter periods is time-invariant, however, the beauty scores are almost perfectly correlated with the individual fixed effect. To examine the degree of confounding initiated by unobserved variables that is necessary to explain away our results, we employ the test developed by Oster (2019). As we will show below, the unobserved factors must have an implausible large predictive power in order to nullify our findings.

5 Results

5.1 Beauty and presence in parliament

Table (1) shows our baseline results on the relation between beauty and MPs' presence in parliament. Column (I) reports results from a parsimonious model that relates absence rates to the beauty scores of MPs. Columns (II)–(III) gradually include covariates that may confound the association between parliamentary activity and beauty, including MP controls (Column II) and party controls (Column III).

Across the board, we find that attractive MPs are absent more from parliament than less attractive MPs. Once we account for MP-level controls, the relation between beauty and parliamentary activity is statistically significant at the 1% level ($t = 3.69$). In column (III), our preferred specification, we additionally account for party-fixed effects. The parameter estimated in this model suggests that a one-standard-deviation change in the attractiveness of MPs increases absence rates by 1.29 percentage points (0.13 of a standard deviation) on a mean of 8.49 percent.

Robustness: We run three robustness checks to assess the sensitivity of our main results. First, we address potential measurement errors produced by our rating scheme, i.e. initiated by sampling variation in raters. Regardless of the sample of raters, our data show that the deviation of ratings at the lower and the upper end of the spectrum is (very) low. Therefore, we examine the effects of "extreme" attractiveness, exploring the effects separately for the top-10% and the bottom-10% of the beauty distribution. The results, which are presented in Figure (B1), are larger in size but otherwise qualitatively identical to our baseline estimates. This result gives us confidence that the main findings are not driven by measurement error.

Second, some of the control variables in Table (1) are potentially "bad controls", i.e. outcomes of attractiveness. When re-estimating the baseline table using only predetermined characteristics, we obtain very similar parameter estimates, implying that the scope for bias caused by a bad control problem is low.

Third, we estimate the magnitude of omitted variables bias necessary to overturn the results, employing the bounding approach developed by Oster (2019). We find that in order to nullify the estimated effect, the unobserved confounders must have 5.3 times the size of the relationship with beauty than the size of the relationship between beauty and the covariates included in our model. Given the comprehensive set of controls in

Table 1 MPS' BEAUTY AND ABSENCE FROM PARLIAMENT—REGRESSION-RESULTS (N=1,270)

Dependent variable: MPs' absence rate from parliament

	(I) Parsimonious	(II) + MP controls	(III) + Party dummies
Beauty score	0.004	0.010***	0.011***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age		0.001***	0.001***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Male		-0.017***	-0.009
		(0.006)	(0.006)
Direct mandate		-0.017***	0.009
		(0.006)	(0.007)
Political Leader		0.072***	0.076***
		(0.012)	(0.012)
East		0.002	-0.012*
		(0.006)	(0.006)
Left Party			0.100***
			(0.014)
Greens			0.028***
			(0.010)
SPD			0.033***
			(0.010)
CDU			-0.003
			(0.010)
LP (1 == 18 LP)	0.001	-0.003	-0.003
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Constant	0.067***	-0.023	-0.060**
	(0.012)	(0.024)	(0.026)
R-Squared	0.002	0.092	0.173
Legislative Periods Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Biographic Characteristics of MPs	No	Yes	Yes
Party Dummies	No	No	Yes

Notes: The table shows the baseline results on the relationship between beauty and presence or absence from parliament. Column (I) reports the results from a parsimonious model specification that relates absence from parliament to MPs' attractiveness controlling only for legislative periods fixed effects. Columns (II) and (III) augment the parsimonious model by including MP-level controls (Column II) and party-level controls (Column III). Robust standard errors (adjusted for arbitrary heteroskedasticity) are reported in parentheses.

***	Significant at the 1 percent level
**	Significant at the 5 percent level
*	Significant at the 10 percent level

our model, it is difficult to imagine unobserved confounders with such a large predictive power.

5.2   Beauty and types of parliamentary activity

Having established that more attractive MPs tend to be absent more than other MPs, we next examine what *types* of activity are eclipsed by MPs' absence. In Table (2), we relate the attractiveness of MPs to specific types of activity in parliament, including speeches (Panel A), oral contributions (Panel B), group initiatives (Panel C), and interpellations (Panel D). For all activities, we replicate the model specifications of Table (1), presenting results from a parsimonious model (Column I) that is gradually augmented by MP-level (Column II) and party-level (Column III) controls.

The main result regarding types of activities is that beauty does not crowd out visible parliamentary activities, such as speeches or oral contributions. For other activities, particularly for labor-intensive background activities such as interpellations ($t = 1.77$) and group initiatives ($t = 1.51$), we find negative and sizable parameter estimates. Taken together, the results show that visible activity is not reduced by more attractive MPs, possibly because the effect of more favorable outside options is offset by a "store window" effect initiated by parties that seek to systematically exploit the attractiveness of MPs for visible activities. We do not find such effects for activities that are less visible to voters, which is consistent with MPs substituting against those activities with the lowest political cost.

5.3   Heterogeneity

We next examine whether there is heterogeneity in the effect of beauty on the types of parliamentary activities by interacting our beauty scores with MPs' characteristics

$$\text{Activity}_{ijt} = \alpha_j \text{Beauty}_i + \delta_j \big[\text{Beauty}_i \times \mathbf{x}_{it}^k\big] + \mathbf{X}_{it}\boldsymbol{\beta}_j + \zeta_t + \varepsilon_{ijt}, \tag{3}$$

where $\mathbf{x}_{it}^k$ are observable individual-level characteristics of MPs, which are elements of the matrix $\mathbf{X}_{it} = \big[\mathbf{x}_{it}^1, \mathbf{x}_{it}^2, \ldots, \mathbf{x}_{it}^K\big], k = 1, \ldots, K.$

Table (3) reports results when we interact the beauty scores with age (Panel A), gender (Panel B), and ideology (Panel C) for our five indicators of parliamentary activity. The results show that the relation between beauty on the absence rate from parliament is stronger for younger, female, and left-wing MPs. We also find that higher

Table 2 MPS' BEAUTY AND PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES — RESULTS BY TYPES OF ACTIVITY (N=1,270)

	(I)	(II)	(III)
	Parsimonious	+ MP controls	+ Party dummies
Panel A: Speeches			
Beauty score	1.340***	-0.211	-0.451
	(0.454)	(0.475)	(0.465)
R-Squared	0.043	0.118	0.211
Panel B: Oral contributions			
Beauty score	0.267	0.045	-0.025
	(0.249)	(0.286)	(0.250)
R-Squared	0.004	0.267	0.276
Panel C: Group initiatives			
Beauty score	3.772*	-1.568	-1.721
	(2.189)	(2.155)	(1.136)
R-Squared	0.037	0.732	0.738
Panel D: Interpellations			
Beauty score	2.787	-3.656	-3.910*
	(3.026)	(3.142)	(2.217)
R-Squared	0.001	0.535	0.538

Notes: The table shows the baseline results on the relationship between the beauty of MPs and types of activities in parliament. Column (I) reports the results from a parsimonious model specification that relates the parliamentary activity to MPs' attractiveness controlling only for legislative periods fixed effects. Columns (II) and (III) augment the parsimonious model by including MP-level controls (Column II) and party-level controls (Column III). Robust standard errors (adjusted for arbitrary heteroskedasticity) are reported in parentheses.

attractiveness increases speeches for male MPs and for members of center-rightwing or market-oriented parties.

6   Channels

Our main estimates show that (i) MPs are absent more from parliament in general and (ii) tend to be less active in a series of parliamentary activities. Our hypothesis regarding the reason underlying these empirical patterns is that MPs make use of their attractiveness by exploiting outside options rather than engaging in parliamentary

Table 3 MPS' BEAUTY AND PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES—HETEROGENEITY ACROSS MP CHARACTERISTICS (N=1,270)

	(I) Absence	(II) Speeches	(III) Oral contributions	(IV) Group initiatives	(V) Interpellations
Panel A: Age					
Beauty score	0.056***	2.336	-0.272	-3.714	-5.070
	(0.011)	(1.974)	(1.179)	(4.948)	(9.374)
Age × Beauty score	-0.001***	-0.058	0.005	0.042	0.024
	(0.000)	(0.039)	(0.024)	(0.100)	(0.187)
Panel B: Gender					
Beauty score	0.020***	-1.253**	-0.402	-3.414**	-8.245**
	(0.004)	(0.577)	(0.320)	(1.654)	(3.546)
Male × Beauty score	-0.018***	1.545*	0.726*	3.262	8.353**
	(0.005)	(0.837)	(0.425)	(2.048)	(4.068)
Panel C: Ideology					
Beauty score	0.015***	-1.364**	-0.431	-2.138	-5.106
	(0.004)	(0.571)	(0.433)	(2.052)	(4.214)
Right × Beauty score	-0.008	1.755**	0.781	0.801	2.300
	(0.005)	(0.824)	(0.488)	(2.145)	(4.200)

Notes: The table shows the heterogeneity results on the relationship between the beauty of MPs and types of activities in parliament. Panel A reports results for interacting the beauty scores with age, Panel B reports results for interacting the beauty scores with gender, and Panel C reports results for interacting the beauty scores with a dummy for MPs' ideology (equaling one for members of center-right or market-oriented parties, zero otherwise). In Columns (I)-(V), we use the indicators for parliamentary activity as dependent variables, respectively. All specifications include legislative periods fixed effects, MP controls, and party fixed effects. Robust standard errors (adjusted for arbitrary heteroskedasticity) are reported in parentheses.

work. In the next step, we examine this hypothesis, empirically exploring two channels: outside employment and media appearances.

6.1 Outside employment

To quantify the extent of outside employment of MPs, we examine earnings acquired through outside activities that are subject to declaration (see Section 3). In Table (4), we relate MPs' attractiveness to their outside earnings, re-estimating the empirical model specifications used to explore the link between beauty and parliamentary activity. Previous work has shown that there are systematic party differences in outside activities, with center-right and market-oriented MPs earning more outside earnings than MPs from other parties (Arnold et al., 2014; Wochner, 2022). To address these differences, we additionally augment our model specification via

$$\text{Activity}_{ijt} = \alpha_j \text{Beauty}_i + \mathbf{X}_{it}\boldsymbol{\beta}_j + \zeta_t + \rho\big[\text{Beauty}_i \times \text{Right}_{it}\big] + \varepsilon_{ijt}, \qquad (4)$$

where $\text{Beauty}_i \times \text{Right}_{it}$ denotes the interaction term between attractiveness and MPs' party affiliation, and Right_{it} is a dummy variable that is one if an MP is from the center-right or market-oriented party.[2]

We find a positive association between MPs' attractiveness and outside earnings in the comprehensive specifications that account for MP-level heterogeneity ($t = 1.58$). This relationship turns statistically significant at the 5% level once we address the fundamental differences in outside activity between parties. The results in Column (IV) show that other things equal, more attractive MPs from left parties are significantly more likely to engage in outside activity than other MPs. In numerical terms, the parameter estimate suggests that a one-standard-deviation change in the attractiveness of MPs increases outside earnings of MPs from left parties by roughly 6,600 Euros (0.04 of a standard deviation) on a mean of 48,000 Euros.

Taken together, the results are consistent with more attractive MPs substituting parliamentary activity with outside activities because of greater opportunities to engage in such activities.

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[2]The independent effect of center-right and market-oriented parties is included in the set of party-level controls.

Table 4 MPS' BEAUTY AND OUTSIDE EARNINGS (N=1,270)

Dependent variable: MPs' outside earnings (in 1,000 Euros)

	(I) Parsimonious	(II) + MP controls	(III) + Party dummies	(IV) + Ideology Interaction
Beauty score	-3.061	5.650	5.227	5.621**
	(2.927)	(3.574)	(3.566)	(2.553)
Right (1 = CDU/FDP)				51.311*
				(29.492)
Right x Beauty score				-0.758
				(5.120)
R-Squared	0.002	0.083	0.103	0.103

Notes: The table shows the baseline results on the relationship between beauty and MPs' outside earnings. Column (I) reports the results from a parsimonious model specification that relates MPs' outside earnings to MPs' attractiveness controlling only for legislative periods fixed effects. Columns (II) and (III) augment the parsimonious model by including MP-level controls (Column II) and party-level controls (Column III). Column (IV) interacts MPs' attractiveness with party ideology of the MPs. Robust standard errors (adjusted for arbitrary heteroskedasticity) are reported in parentheses.

6.2 Media appearances

As a second channel, we explore whether MPs' attractiveness also impacts media activity of MPs. Crowding out of parliamentary work through increased media appearances is most likely for (i) time-consuming activities and (ii) types of media activities where the beauty of MPs matters. Appearances in television talk shows fulfill both requirements. MPs also have strong incentives to appear in talk shows, as such shows are a key tool to increase political popularity in Germany.

In Table (5), we estimate the relation between beauty and media appearances, replicating the specifications used for outside earnings. We find a positive and statistically significant parameter estimate of our beauty scores on media appearances once we include MP-level controls, suggesting that part of the absence effect from parliament may materialize through media activity. A one-standard-deviation change in the attractiveness of MPs increases talk show appearances by 0.23 visits (0.06 of a standard deviation) on a mean of 1.13 visits.

For completeness and consistency, we also include the specification using the interaction term with MPs' ideology (Column IV). Regarding media appearances, we would however not expect significant differential effects across parties, as the television

Table 5 MPS' BEAUTY AND TALK SHOW APPEARANCES—REGRESSION-RESULTS (N=1,270)

Dependent variable: MPs' talk show appearances				
	(I) Parsimonious	(II) + MP controls	(III) + Party dummies	(IV) + Ideology Interaction
Beauty score	0.152	0.217*	0.199*	0.183
	(0.111)	(0.116)	(0.118)	(0.176)
Right (1 = CDU/FDP)				0.566
				(1.082)
Right x Beauty score				0.030
				(0.221)
R-Squared	0.002	0.139	0.156	0.156

Notes: The table shows the results on the relationship between the beauty and MPs' talk show appearances. Column (I) reports the results from a parsimonious model specification that relates absence from parliament to MPs' attractiveness controlling only for legislative periods fixed effects. Columns (II) and (III) augment the parsimonious model by including MP-level controls (Column II) and party-level controls (Column III). Column (IV) interacts MPs' attractiveness with party ideology of the MPs. Robust standard errors (adjusted for arbitrary heteroskedasticity) are reported in parentheses.

shows are broadcasted by state-owned media ("öffentlich-rechtliche Sender"), which is financed via a mandatory fee that each household in Germany has to pay. Therefore, the stations carefully adhere to a "fair" party representation in their talk shows. This is also reflected in our results, where we do not detect differential effects across party ideologies.

Falsification: Newspaper mentions. A potential problem might be that invitations to talk shows reflect the initial popularity of MPs rather than their attractiveness. To rule out that our results are driven by popularity, we provide complementary evidence from a falsification test in which we explore mentions of MPs in newspaper articles. Newspaper articles also account for the effects of scandals or any other specific event that may make the appearance of a particular politician in a TV show more likely. Reassuringly, re-estimating our media specifications using newspaper data, we find no effect of beauty on mentions of MPs in newspaper articles (see Table A2).

7   Conclusion

Being attractive opens up a variety of opportunities in life. Attractive people have better job opportunities, are more successful in business, and enjoy more trust than less attractive people. We show that beauty also pays in politics. Our paper provides the first empirical evidence showing that more attractive MPs are absent more from parliament and are less active in labor-intensive parliamentary activities than other MPs. Relating beauty scores to MPs' outside activity, we find evidence that is consistent with the hypothesis that more attractive MPs exploit their increased opportunities by engaging more in outside employment and media activity.

At the societal level, the beauty premium in politics can be problematic if attractive elected politicians are less willing to fulfill their parliamentary obligations due to the additional opportunities. While politicians, in principle, may have to worry about their re-election when they shift too much of their time to outside activities, a re-allocation from parliamentary activity to media appearances might also boost their popularity and electoral prospects.

Even political parties might, however, gain from having attractive MPs, when those MPs are more productive at certain interpersonal tasks (e.g., in creating a larger network or attracting funding). Such comparative advantages created by beauty can lead to a better division of work, ultimately increasing intra-party efficiency.

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Appendix A: Supplementary Tables

Table A1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS (N=1,270)

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Beauty score	4.388	1.175	1.727	8.545
Absence rate	0.085	0.098	0	1
Speeches	26.629	19.022	0	140
Oral contributions	8.924	11.615	0	139
Group initiatives	65.012	93.321	0	516
Interpellations	60.093	130.398	0	1,104
Age	51.908	9.994	25	80.5
Male	0.654			
Direct mandate	0.468			
Political Leader	0.120			
East	0.203			
Left Party	0.110			
Greens	0.106			
SPD	0.274			
CDU	0.437			

*Notes*: The table shows descriptive statistics of the variables used in our empirical analysis.

Table A2 MPS' BEAUTY AND NEWSPAPER MENTIONS—REGRESSION-RESULTS (N=637)

Dependent variable: MPs' newspaper mentions				
	(I) Parsimonious	(II) + MP controls	(III) + Party dummies	(IV) + Ideology Interaction
Beauty score	-70.233 (97.470)	12.202 (98.162)	15.089 (99.337)	33.841 (44.624)
Right (1 = CDU/FDP)				-222.666 (717.544)
Right x Beauty score				-34.927 (151.609)
R-Squared	0.001	0.164	0.168	0.168

Notes: The table shows the results on the relationship between the beauty and MPs' newspaper mentions. Column (I) reports the results from a parsimonious model specification that relates absence from parliament to MPs' attractiveness controlling only for legislative periods fixed effects. Columns (II) and (III) augment the parsimonious model by including MP-level controls (Column II) and party-level controls (Column III). Column (IV) interacts MPs' attractiveness with party ideology of the MPs. Robust standard errors (adjusted for arbitrary heteroskedasticity) are reported in parentheses.

Appendix B: Supplementary Figures

Figure B1 MPS' BEAUTY AND ABSENCE FROM PARLIAMENT—EXTREME LEVELS
OF ATTRACTIVENESS
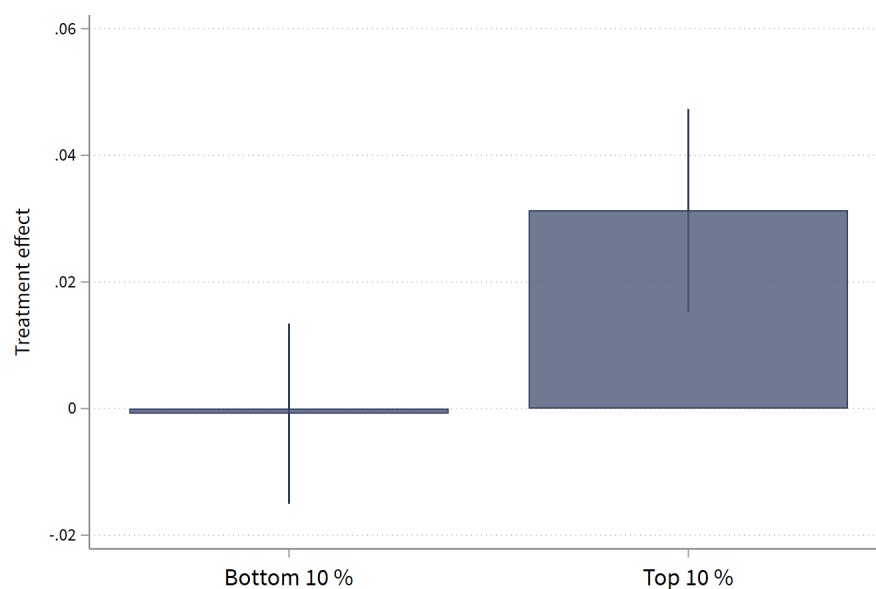
Notes: The figure shows the results on the relation between the attractiveness of MPs and parliamentary activity when we consider extreme levels of attractiveness, re-estimating the baseline model using dummy variables for the top 10% and the bottom 10% of the beauty distribution of MPs. Data refers to the German Bundestag during the 17th and 18th legislative periods, 2009–2017.