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Spatial Model in the European Parliament

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Abstract

Analyses of roll call votes claim that the European Parliament is increasingly becoming a 'normal' parliament in which transnational party groups compete in a low-dimensional ideological space dominated by the classic socio-economic left-right conflict. This paper assesses the validity of this claim by comparing roll-call voting behavior in the European Parliament against preferences of legislators as expressed in the 1996 *Members of European Parliament Survey*. The results corroborate that low-dimensional ideological competition drives the behavior of parliamentarians to a substantial degree. The individual ideological convictions of parliamentarians are an important independent source of their voting behavior. Moreover, there is no evidence that gatekeeping institutions artificially suppress one or more important dimensions of policy contestation. Finally, European party groups are indeed effective in swaying legislators towards their ideal points. Previous research has, however, overstated the importance of socio-economic conflict to the detriment of value-based libertarian-traditional contestation.

Introduction

A series of roll-call vote (RCV) analyses have revealed evidence for the notion that the

European Parliament (EP) is increasingly becoming a 'normal' parliament in which

transnational party groups compete in a low-dimensional ideological space dominated by

the classic socio-economic left-right conflict (Hix 2001, Hix and Kreppel 2003, Hix et al.

2005, Kreppel 2002, 2003, Noury 2002). This finding is important in that it suggests the

feasibility of a European system of democratic political representation (e.g. Hix et al

2005, Thomassen 2002). The low-dimensional ideological space facilitates stable

coalition formation. Left-right conflict reflects an ideological cleavage that is well

understood by voters and has deep roots in the social and political structures of most

European countries. And, the cohesiveness of European party groups suggests that

transnational parties can be effective independent actors in the policy-making process.

There are, however, some concerns with relying too strongly on RCVs in drawing inferences about the nature and dimensionality of political competition.[1] First, most legislatures, the EP included, have various gatekeeping institutions that may keep issues off the agenda. RCVs constitute only one-third of the universe of legislative votes in the EP (Hix et al., 2005). Carrubba et al (2004) argue that party-group leaders strategically select issues suitable for roll calls, thus obscuring contestation over other issues and artificially reducing the dimensionality of the observed policy space. It may be that those issues that fit less comfortably within the traditional party systems of European countries are contested behind closed doors.

Second, it is unclear if and to what extent the observed low-dimensional space is ideological in nature. The EP is an unusual parliament in that it does not hold accountable an executive who unambiguously belongs to a (coalition of) party group(s). Hence, party groups have some liberty to govern the institution. Moreover, they have an incentive to cooperate on European integration issues in an effort to strengthen the Parliament's bargaining position vis-à-vis other European institutions. At least until1999, a "Grand Coalition" of the center-right European People Party (EPP) and the center-left Party of European Socialists (PES) effectively controlled the EP, leading some observers to lament the absence of true policy-based competition (see Kreppel and Hix 2003). It may then be that the predictable patterns of coalition formation found in RCV studies are the product of fairly stable instrumental interests of parties involved in governing the EP rather than ideological cleavages. Indeed, an analysis of expert judgments of Commission, Member States, and EP preferences found that while preference alignments

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[1] These are issues that should sound familiar to scholars of U.S. Congress.

in European Union decision-making are two-dimensional, the conceptual foundations for these dimensions are weak (Thomson, Boerefijn, and Stokman 2004).

Third, the issues raised above call into question whether the apparent increase in the transnationality of party groups genuinely reflects the emergence of functional political parties that engage in ideological competition with each other at the European level. Voting patterns illustrate that European Party Groups (EPGs) have become increasingly cohesive over time (Noury 2002, Hix et al. 2005). Is this because they effectively sway MEPs towards the leadership position in an effort to set policy or because they have been successful in keeping divisive issues off the agenda in an effort to divide the spoils of governing the institution?

The motivations of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in making their RCV choices are uniquely revealing about both the nature and dimensionality of the EU policy space. If gatekeeping artificially reduces the dimensionality of the space uncovered by RCV analyses, we would expect MEP preferences on certain sets of issues to be poorly captured by ideal point estimates from RCV analyses. If competition in the EP were ideological in nature, we would expect that MEPs would at times deviate from their national parties for ideological reasons, rather than purely instrumental ones. If EPGs were effective parties engaged in policy-based competition, we would expect them to be able to sway MEPs away from their stated preferences towards the EPGs' positions.

This paper addresses all three issues by comparing roll-call voting behavior in the European Parliament against preferences of MEPs as expressed in the 1996 *Members of European Parliament Survey*. This survey has various advantages over alternatives in that it used face-to-face rather than mail surveys, it received responses from a very large

number of MEPs (314, 50% of the population), and it asked a large number of policy questions, including questions where MEPs had to place both themselves and their parties on issue scales. This is the first analysis in which these survey responses are merged with roll-call votes.[2] Hix (2002) also directly compares survey responses and RCVs, but does so based on a smaller (N=192) mail-in survey with fewer issue questions.

Unlike Hix, we find strong evidence for an independent effect of MEP ideological preferences on RCV behavior. Moreover, we find that European Party Groups (EPGs) are more successful than national parties in swaying MEPs from their stated ideal points. Finally, there is no evidence for the thesis that RCVs suppress one or more important dimensions of policy contestation. The interpretation of the first dimension of contestation does not, however, correspond unambiguously to classic socio-economic left-right contestation. Rather conflict along a 'libertarian-traditional' or 'new politics' dimension is the strongest predictor for the first dimension MEP ideal points.

Issue Preferences and Ideal Points in the Spatial Model

The spatial theory of parliamentary voting assumes that a legislator's position on the wide array of specific issues that may arise over the course of a legislative session is constrained by the legislator's position on a small number of fundamental dimensions. That the high dimensional issue space in which legislators operate maps in a meaningful way into a lower dimensional ideological or basic space is central to our understanding of stable coalition formation, voter communication, and many other aspects of political competition (e.g. Ordeshook 1976, Enelow and Hinich 1984).

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[2] For which I am very grateful to Bernhard Wessels of the Wissenschaftszentrum in Berlin.

Tests of the empirical implications of spatial models have been advanced considerably by the development of W-NOMINATE and other algorithms that estimate unobserved legislator ideal points in the unobserved low-dimensional ideological space from observed roll-call votes on the wide array of issues on the parliamentary agenda (Poole and Rosenthal 1985, 1991, 1997, Poole 2005). The spatial model has proven to be extremely powerful: A one- or two-dimensional space suffices to account for the overwhelming majority of variation in legislator vote choices in the wide variety of legislatures to which the procedure has been applied (see Poole and Rosenthal 2001).

This also holds in the European Parliament. The first dimension uncovered by W-NOMINATE explains about 90% of all vote choices correctly (Hix 2001, Noury 2002).[3] This first dimension of contestation is generally understood to mean socio-economic left-right conflict, whereas the second dimension is interpreted as ideological competition between pro- and anti-integration forces. Party groups dominate competition on both dimensions. Only on the relatively unimportant third and fourth dimension does nationality come into play as a source of divergence between MEPs (Noury 2002).

This success in explaining variation in RCV behavior has not exempted empirical applications of the spatial model from criticisms (e.g. Koford 1989). The most important critique is that the procedure takes insufficient account of the incentives for strategic behavior that arise from the institutional configuration of a legislature. Empirical applications of the spatial model generally assume that legislators vote their preferences. It is, however, well understood that legislators regularly engage in logrolls or succumb to

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[3] The classification success of the first dimension exaggerates its relative importance somewhat. However, the first dimension is still very dominant over the others even with alternative fit criteria that take into account the improvement of the model over an appropriate null-hypothesis.

party pressures. Moreover, most legislatures assign a role to committees or other gatekeepers that may strategically shape the alternatives on the agenda, thus potentially diminishing the issue space.

These critiques generally stay within the confines of the spatial model. Voting is inherently unstable in a multi-dimensional ideological space unless choice is constrained in some fashion (McKelvey 1976, Schofield 1977, Shepsle 1979).[4] The question is thus not so much whether legislative voting is more than a free expression of the wide range of preferences legislators may have but rather if and how this distorts our substantive inferences from RCV analyses.[5] Below we derive some testable hypotheses in this regard.

Gatekeeping and Dimensionality

An important concern in the European Parliament is that RCVs constitute only one-third of the universe of legislative votes (Hix et al., 2005). Unless a party group or at least thirty-two MEPs request a roll call, vote choices remain unrecorded. In a systematic analysis of unrecorded votes, Carrubba et al. (2004) show that the sample of roll-call votes looks different from the universe of legislative votes in ways that are at least suggestive of potential biases in the results of RCV analyses.

The most important implication is that RCV analyses may understate the dimensionality of ideological conflict. This would imply that certain dimensions of contestation are present among MEPs and parties but do not become manifest in RCVs. Carrubba et al. (1994) single out a specific candidate for a set of policy issues that may be

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[4] Note that ideology may be such a constraint but it is not sufficient to prevent cycling if the dimensionality of the space exceeds a single dimension.
[5] A more positive and perhaps more promising agenda is to explicitly model institutional features of agenda-setting (Clinton and Meirowitz, 2001) or strategic voting.

underrepresented. While RCV analyses generally find at most two dimensions of contestation: left-right and pro-anti European integration, a survey of MEPs found a third factor underlying MEP policy attitudes: a "libertarian-traditional" dimension (Thomassen et al 2004). This domain captures conflict on issues such as crime, immigration, abortion, and decriminalization of marijuana. Similarly, an analysis of data derived from expert surveys finds that variation on these issues among national parties powerfully structures party preferences on issues that arise from European integration (Hooghe et al., 2001).[6]

Carruba et al. (2004) show that votes on at least one issue that falls within this domain, women's rights issues, are systematically left out of the sample of roll call votes in the 1999-2000 EP. Hence, they argue that: "[..] a libertarian-traditional issue domain may indeed characterize legislative policy conflict, but the selection bias in requesting roll-calls would hide it from view" (p. 17).

H1: Variation in MEP attitudes on libertarian-traditional issues does not account for variation in MEP ideal points estimated from a RCV analysis.

National Parties or MEPs as Actors?

Whereas the onus upon scholars of U.S. Congress is to show that parties have an impact on legislative behavior once we control for the preferences of legislators, the burden for scholars of legislative behavior outside the U.S. context is exactly the opposite: What, if any, are the effects of individual legislator preferences? Parties are presumed to be so dominant that national parties, not MEPs, are usually taken as the central actors in the EP. This violates the basic assumption underlying common applications of W-NOMINATE

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[6] Hooghe et al (2001) refer to this as a "new politics" dimension.

and other scaling algorithms that take individual legislators to be the actors that make decisions based on the match between a proposal, the status quo and their own ideal points.[7]

Separating the effects of preferences and party pressures is notoriously difficult.[8] Legislators deliberately select into parties whose programs carry some ideological appeal. Moreover, parties tend to advance members who match the leadership's preferences, especially in the European context where parties frequently have considerable control over candidate lists. Hence, parties may simply be collections of like-minded individuals (e.g. Krehbiel 1993). At the same time, parties are unlikely to be collections of *identically*-minded people. If contestation in the EP is indeed policy-based and MEPs are ideological actors, we would expect that occasions arise over the course of a legislative session in which MEPs depart from their national parties' positions for ideological reasons. If, on the other hand, there is no strong conceptual foundation for the dimensions of contestation, we would expect no relationship between an MEP's individual preferences her RCV-based ideal point after controlling for her national party's ideology.

H2: After controlling for national party ideology, MEP preferences have no effect on RCV-based ideal points.

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[7] One could take parties as the unit of analysis, perhaps best in the non-parametric application of the spatial model (Poole 2000). In fact, analyses of the EU policy space based on expert surveys and party manifestoes perform similar exercise (e.g. Hix and Lord 1997).
[8] [ADD CITES].

The Role of European Party Groups

Parties have considerable means to pressure an MEP to follow the party line if a conflict of interest arises. National parties have control over MEP reelection chances, especially where parties centrally determine candidate lists in proportional representation systems (see Hix 2003). European Party Groups (EPGs) control committee assignments and other goods that enhance the legislative careers of MEPs. If EPGs are indeed acting as 'normal' parties, we would expect them to be at least somewhat successful in using their positions of legislative control to sway MEPs towards their positions. Thus, if the preferences of an MEP and her EPG conflict, we would expect that the MEP's ideal point estimate derived from RCVs is not just a function of the MEPs preferences but also of the EPG's central tendency. This view asserts that while national parties have an important role in selecting legislators, they may be less capable controlling MEPs once elected. Instead, EPGs have the ability to use their legislative powers to assert influence. On the other hand, if national parties also dominate the legislative scene; we would expect the difference between national party preferences and MEP preferences to have an impact on RCV-based ideal point estimates. The hypotheses we seek to reject are then:

H3a: Controlling for MEP preferences, the difference between MEP and EPG preferences has no effect on MEP RCV-based ideal points.

H3b: Controlling for MEP preferences, the difference between MEP and national party preferences has no effect on MEP RCV-based ideal points.

Data

The analysis combines two primary data sources. First, the 1996 Members of European Parliament Survey coordinated by Bernhard Wessels and funded by *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*. INFRATEST BURKE completed the fieldwork between May 20 and June 21 of 1996. A total of 314 face-to-face interviews were conducted, constituting a 50% response rate. The sample is highly representative of the EP's composition in terms of party, gender, age, and nationality (see Schmitt and Thomassen 1999, p. 273).

Second, Hix et al. (2005) have collected roll-call data for the 4th EP. They have also estimated the W-NOMINATE (Poole and Rosenthal 1985, 1991, 1997) estimates for MEPs based on these data. In addition to these estimates, I also used a non-parametric Optimal Classification method (Poole 2000) to estimate MEP ideal points. The latter method may yield more robust results in the presence of near-perfect spatial voting and large party discipline, suggesting that it may be more appropriate for legislatures other than U.S. Congress (Rosenthal and Voeten 2004). The bivariate linear correlations of these sets of ideal point estimates are high, although more so on the first dimension (R=.987) than on the second dimension (R=.841).

The two datasets were kindly merged by Bernard Wessels of the Wissenschafts Zentrum in Berlin, for which many thanks.

Do Ideal Point Estimates Cover Variation in Issue Preferences?

Do ideal point estimates based on RCVs fail to incorporate relevant policy conflict, especially over issues that fall within the libertarian-traditional domain? To evaluate this question, we first replicate the factor analysis from Thomassen et al (2004), which was

performed on the same survey data used in this analysis (details are in appendix 1). We then simultaneously examined the factor scores and ideal point estimates from NOMINATE at the individual MEP-level.

Quite surprisingly, this exercise leads to the exact opposite conclusion: variation in MEP attitudes along libertarian-traditional lines accounts more strongly for variation in ideal point estimates from RCVs than does variation in attitudes on socio-economic issues. The bivariate linear correlations with NOMINATE first dimension estimates are .60 (libertarian-traditional) and .45 (socio-economic). In a multiple regression analysis (see table 1a), the two (uncorrelated) factors both explain significant variation in first dimension ideal point estimates. The substantive impact of libertarian-traditional attitudes, however, is about 1,5 times as large as that of socio-economic attitudes.[9] Similar results hold with Optimal Classification (OC) coordinates as the dependent variable.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

On the one hand, these findings are reassuring for RCV analyses of the EP. There is no evidence that the low-dimensional solution fails to capture libertarian-traditional conflict. This conclusion also holds for the issue for which the evidence suggested a systematic bias: women's rights. Variation in MEP attitudes on abortion rights correlate quite strongly with first dimension NOMINATE scores (R=.58) in comparison to more traditional socio-economic issues such as reducing income inequality (R=.49) or the

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[9] Note that all factors have mean 0 and variance 1, so the regression coefficients are directly comparable.

government's role in the economy (R=.32).[10] Thus, there is no evidence that conflict over issues from the libertarian-traditional domain is strategically suppressed in the agenda-setting process. Moreover, the issue attitudes explain considerable variation in ideal point estimates, especially along the central first dimension.

On the other hand, the findings suggest that we may need to reinterpret the conventional understanding that politics in the EP is dominated by classic socio-economic left-right conflict (e.g. Hix et al 2005). Instead, the results here indicate that libertarian-traditional value conflict underlies the most prominent dimension of contestation. Hooghe et al (2001) have shown how conflict on this traditional-libertarian or 'new politics' dimension shapes national party positions on issues that arise in the European integration process. Perhaps this dimension of contestation deserves more attention in the EP as well.

It is, however, plausible that these results are a consequence of the roll call selection process. Carrubba et al. (2004) find that those committees most likely to deal with socio-economic issues have relatively few RCVs. To further examine these issues, table 1B compares the effects of the factor scores on W-NOMINATE estimates of the 4th parliament (1994-1999) and the first half of the 5th parliament (1999-2002) for those MEPs that remained in the sample with the changing of the parliament. This exercise is useful because Carrubba et al' s analysis is limited to this period and because Kreppel and Hix (2003) have suggested that the 5th parliament represented a shift towards more policy-based competition.

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[10] Questions asked MEPs to put themselves on a 7-point scale from "Agree Strongly" to "Disagree Strongly" on whether "Women should be free to decide on abortion, "There should be greater efforts to decrease income inequality," and "Government should play a greater role in the economy."

The results allow for several interesting observations. First, it is remarkable how well issue attitudes measured in 1996 on somewhat arbitrary issue scales account for variations in MEP ideal points based on RCVs taken 3-6 years later. There is little doubt that legislator ideal points revealed by W-NOMINATE capture real ideological divergence among MEPs. The increasing ideological nature of the EP may be evidenced by the notion that ideological convictions measured during the 4th parliament actually explain more variation along the second dimension coordinates in the 5th than in the 4th parliament. Second, socio-economic conflict is now a similarly strong predictor of first dimension W-NOMINATE scores as is libertarian-traditional conflict. However libertarian-traditional attitudes also load on the second dimension in the 5th parliament and are still a highly significant and substantively important explanatory variable for observed roll-call behavior.

These findings provide little evidence for the thesis that RCVs suppress an important dimension of policy contestation. Rather, they point to the complex ways in which different issue dimensions map into the two-dimensional ideological space. The meaning of left-right contestation in European politics stretches well beyond socio-economic conflict. Even though the three factors are uncorrelated, MEP self-placements on a 10-point left-right scale correlate significantly (at the 1%-level) with the socio-economic factor (R=.62), the libertarian-traditional factor (R=.50), and even with the integration-independence factor (R=.16).[11]

Figures 1A illustrates graphically how the three factors of attitudes are represented in the two-dimensional ideological space. The figure plots the predicted

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[11] Note that left-right self-placement was not included in the factor analysis.

regression scores from linear regressions of each factor on each NOMINATE dimension. A long horizontal line represents libertarian-traditional conflict. This indicates that this factor explains substantial variation in ideal points along the first NOMINATE dimension but none along the second dimension. Conversely, the integration-independence factor almost exclusively explains variation along the second dimension. The line is shorter, indicating that it has a smaller substantive impact on in ideal points (see also table 1).[12] The socio-economic factor is slightly diagonal, indicating that it has the largest substantive impact on first dimension coordinates but is also somewhat related to the second NOMINATE dimension (This latter point is clearer in the OC solution).

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Figure 1B performs the same exercise for a variety of individual issue scales. The left-right and EMU self-placement scales are virtually orthogonal to each other, although both lines are at an angle with respect to the axes. This suggests that we could apply a rotation to the NOMINATE coordinates such that left-right and pro-anti integration would indeed represent the first and second dimension coordinates. On the other hand, the removal of national borders, generally seen as an integration issue, has a different angle than the EMU issue, and the formation of EU-level employment programs, mostly seen as a left-right issue, again maps into the two-dimensional ideological space at a different angle, suggesting it taps aspects of both left-right and pro-anti integration conflict.

The analysis in this section demonstrates that two-dimensional ideal point estimates based on RCVs capture MEP attitudes on a wide variety of issues. In fact, MEP

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[12] Note that if a factor would not explain variation in NOMINATE ideal points, then a point in space would represent it.

attitudes on all 15 issues used in the factor analysis correlate significantly (at p<.001) with MEP ideal points on at least one of the two W-NOMINATE dimensions. This illustrates the applicability of the basic space theory of ideology to the EP. The results do, however, pose problems of interpretation for scholars who wish to use first or second dimension NOMINATE estimates as measures of left-right or pro-anti integration ideology in auxiliary regressions. In the absence of survey data that could motivate a rotation of NOMINATE coordinates, a possible solution is to use informative priors on a select set of roll-call parameters to force the solution to have a particular interpretation. Alternatively, one may restrict the ideal point locations of certain MEPs whose ideological convictions are well understood (Londregan 1999).[13] Dynamic variants of ideal point algorithms should be used in examinations of temporal variation to ensure comparability of interpretation across time.

Do Individual MEP Preferences Matter Beyond Party Selection?

MEPs presumably select into parties at least partly because party platforms carry an ideological appeal. Nevertheless, parties are not collections of identically minded individuals. Hence, if politics in the EP were characterized by ideological competition and MEPs are ideological actors, we would expect the personal ideological convictions of MEPs to matter even after taking into account their national parties' preferences.

To test this claim, we need measures of national party preferences that are not based on RCVs. We measure national party positions on European integration through a seven-point scale derived from an expert survey conducted in 1996 (Ray 1999).[14] A 10-

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[13] "Unfortunately," it is not entirely clear who are the Ted Kennedy's or Jesse Helms' of the EP.
[14] Ranging from 1 "Strongly opposed" to 7 "Strongly in favor."

point scale based on party manifesto data assesses the left-right positions of parties.[15]

Given that MEPs and parties with similar ideologies are attracted to each other, the

bivariate correlations between the measures for national party and MEP ideology are

understandably high.[16] That our various independent variables are not independent from

each other causes problems if we wished to assess the independent effects of party and

MEP ideology on MEP ideal points. Our hypothesis, however, is that MEP ideological

preferences have an impact beyond the selection effect that causes the correspondence

between party and MEP ideology. We therefore first regress the measures for party

ideology on the measures for MEP attitudes. The residuals from this regression constitute

measures for MEP attitudes from which party ideology effects have been removed. We

can then regress these residuals with the measures for party ideology on estimated ideal

points.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Table 2 reports the results of this analysis. It is evident that MEP attitudes on

socio-economic and libertarian traditional issues are significant and substantively

important independent explanatory variables for MEP ideal points along the first (and

dominant) dimension.[17] The finding that MEP preferences have an independent effect on

RCV-based ideal point estimates cannot be explained by the absence of a measure for

party preferences on libertarian-traditional issues. As the results from Model 2 show, the

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[15] Budge et al. 2001. I choose the expert rating on the EU because the party manifesto measure is rather crude, looking only at the number of pro- and anti-EU statements. The composite left-right index from the party manifesto data encompasses a broader array of issues.
[16] The strongest correlations are between national party position on European integration with the integration factor (.80) and between left-right placement and left-right national party position (.78). The other bivariate correlations do not exceed .7.
[17] The standardized regression coefficients are .12, and .22 for the attitude residuals, 83 for national party left-right placement.

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residuals from MEP left-right self-placement are also significant and substantively important. Moreover, attitudes on the European currency have an independent effect on first dimension positioning (see also Figure 1b). There is thus ample evidence that the individual preferences of MEPs matter considerably and that H2 needs to be rejected.

There are no strong independent effects for MEP ideology along the second dimension. As in table 1, our ideological variables are less well able to explain variation in legislator ideal points along this dimension. Clearly this dimension to some extent captures pro-anti integration conflict, but there are other sources of influence as well that are not captured by our ideological variables. Given the location of party groups along this dimension (see figure 1), it may be that Grand Coalition governance is a factor of importance here.

Can European Party Groups Sway MEPs towards Their Positions?

Much of the literature on legislative behavior in the EP is motivated by questions regarding the behavior of MEPs as agents of multiple principals: in particular European Party Groups and national parties.[18] Each principal controls a different set of rewards and punishments for MEPs. European Party Groups manage committee assignments, control the agenda, and speaking time. National parties play an important role in selecting MEPs and may affect their reelection chances.

To what extent is each principal capable of swaying an MEP away from her stated ideal point? In the *European Representation Study*, MEPs were asked to locate themselves as well as their national parties and European party groups on ten-point left-

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[18] Voters may be considered the third principal. However, certainly during the 4th Parliament European elections were still widely considered "second-order" national elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980).

right and single currency scales. This allowed MEPs to identify the extent to which they perceived conflict between their own policy preferences and those of their principals. 59% of MEPs perceive that they are identical on the left-right scale as their national parties but only 45% believe that they share an identical position with their European party groups. On the EMU, 67% of MEPs identifies no conflict with their national parties, 60% is in perceived harmony with their European groups on this issue. Thus, as we would expect, MEPs feel generally closer to their national parties than their European party groups.

To test whether EPGs and national parties are successful in swaying MEPs towards their ideal points, we estimate the following model:

$$X_{MEP} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\theta_{MEP} + \beta_2(\theta_{MEP} - \theta_{NP}) + \beta_3(\theta_{MEP} - \theta_{EP}) + \varepsilon$$

In this model, X_{MEP} is the MEP's RCV-based ideal point estimate. The variables θ_{MEP}, θ_{NP}, and θ_{EP} reflect the perceived preferences of the MEP, national party, and European party group respectively. β_1 essentially is a scale coefficient that maps the MEP's stated preferences into her ideal point. The absolute value of the ratio β_1 / β_2 provides an estimate of the extent to which a perceived difference with a national party translates into an observed difference in the MEP's ideal point. If this ratio equals 1, the full perceived difference translates into RCV behavior.

<center>TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE</center>

Table three presents the results. The models include fixed country effects to control for the possibility that MEPs from particular countries might be more likely to defect from their European party group for reasons of national interests rather than personal

<center>18</center>

preferences. The standard errors are corrected for clustering on European party groups to control for the more heterogeneous nature of some European party groups.

The results clearly demonstrate that perceived difference with European party groups has a substantial impact on estimated ideal points, whereas differences with national parties do not. About one-third of the perceived left-right attitude difference with European party groups carries over into estimated MEP first dimension ideal points. On the second dimension, about one half of the perceived difference on the EMU issue carries over into an actual difference in observed MEP ideal points.

These findings suggest that European party groups have a substantial capacity to sway MEPs towards their preferred ideal point whereas national parties do not. This does not mean that national parties have no influence over the legislative process. It is likely that the impact of national parties mostly registers in the selection of MEPs but that they are not able to effectively control MEPs once elected. This interpretation warrants further testing, however, as the examination in table 3 relies on self-identified differences with parties and may be subject to projection effects. To further explore this, we need an exogenous measure for MEP preferences. Moreover, it may be that national parties have started exerting more control once the EP gained more powers.

Conclusion

Although parties are undoubtedly the most important actors in the EP and European politics more generally, there is still considerable utility to studying the behavior and motivations of individual legislators. This is especially true when legislators have multiple principals, as is the case in the EP. This analysis has demonstrated that there is

ample opportunity for MEPs to voice their own ideologies through RCVs, even when these deviate from their national parties' ideologies.

By and large, the results confirm that contestation in the EP is indeed ideological in nature even during the Fourth Parliament, which was still very much dominated by the "Grand Coalition." This is especially true along the first (and dominant) dimension. Moreover, there is no evidence that gatekeeping suppresses important sources of policy conflict from manifestation in the RCV process. Finally, European Party Groups appear capable of swaying MEPs towards their ideal points, thus exerting some amount of control over the policy-making process. All of this is good news for the thesis that the EP has many of the features of a 'normal' parliament.

On the other hand, the interpretation of the main dimension of contestation warrants reinterpretation. Even if classic socio-economic left-right conflict is an important source of variation along that dimension, the preeminence of 'traditional-libertarian' or 'new politics' value conflict deserves much more attention. Given what the EU does, it is not at all surprising that this dimension comes to the forefront. The EU does not tax incomes and engages in very little redistributive politics that is not geographical in origins. On the other hand, the EU has long been involved in issues of social rights. Many integration issues have important consequences for immigration, crime, and the environment. It should thus not be surprising that MEP attitudes on these issues are such an important source behind their vote choices.

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Table 1: The Relation between MEP Attitudes and Ideal Points Estimated from Roll-Call Votes

1A: Factor scores in the 4th Parliament

	1st Dimension		2nd Dimension	
	NOMINATE	Opt. Class.	NOMINATE	Opt. Class.
Intercept	.089***	.007	.221***	.027***
	(.020)	(.011)	(.035)	.012
Integration/Independence	.017	.005	-.209***	-.105***
	(.020)	(.011)	(.033)	(.012)
Socio-Economic	.199***	.106***	.044	.052***
Left/Right	(.020)	(.011)	(.035)	(.012)
Libertarian/Traditional	.294***	.158***	-.014	.008
	(.020)	(.012)	(.035)	(.012)
R^2_{adj}	.566	.561	.139	.269
S.E. Estimate	.310	.167	.511	.190
N	239	239	239	239

1B: Attitudes (measured in 1996) and W-NOMINATE scores in the 4th and 5th Parliament

	1st Dimension		2nd Dimension	
	4th EP	5th EP	4th EP	5th EP.
Intercept	.056**	-.028	.263***	.144***
	(.028)	(.027)	(.050)	.034
Integration/Independence	.026	-.024	-.277***	-.264***
	(.028)	(.026)	(.048)	(.032)
Socio-Economic Left/Right	.202***	.249***	.095*	-.047
	(.027)	(.026)	(.049)	(.033)
Libertarian/Traditional	.306***	.229***	.029	-.072**
	(.029)	(.028)	(.053)	(.037)
R^2_{adj}	.656	.636	.254	.420
S.E. Estimate	.279	.272	.502	.338
N	102	102	102	102

*p<.1 **p<.05 ***p<.01 (All tests are two-tailed).

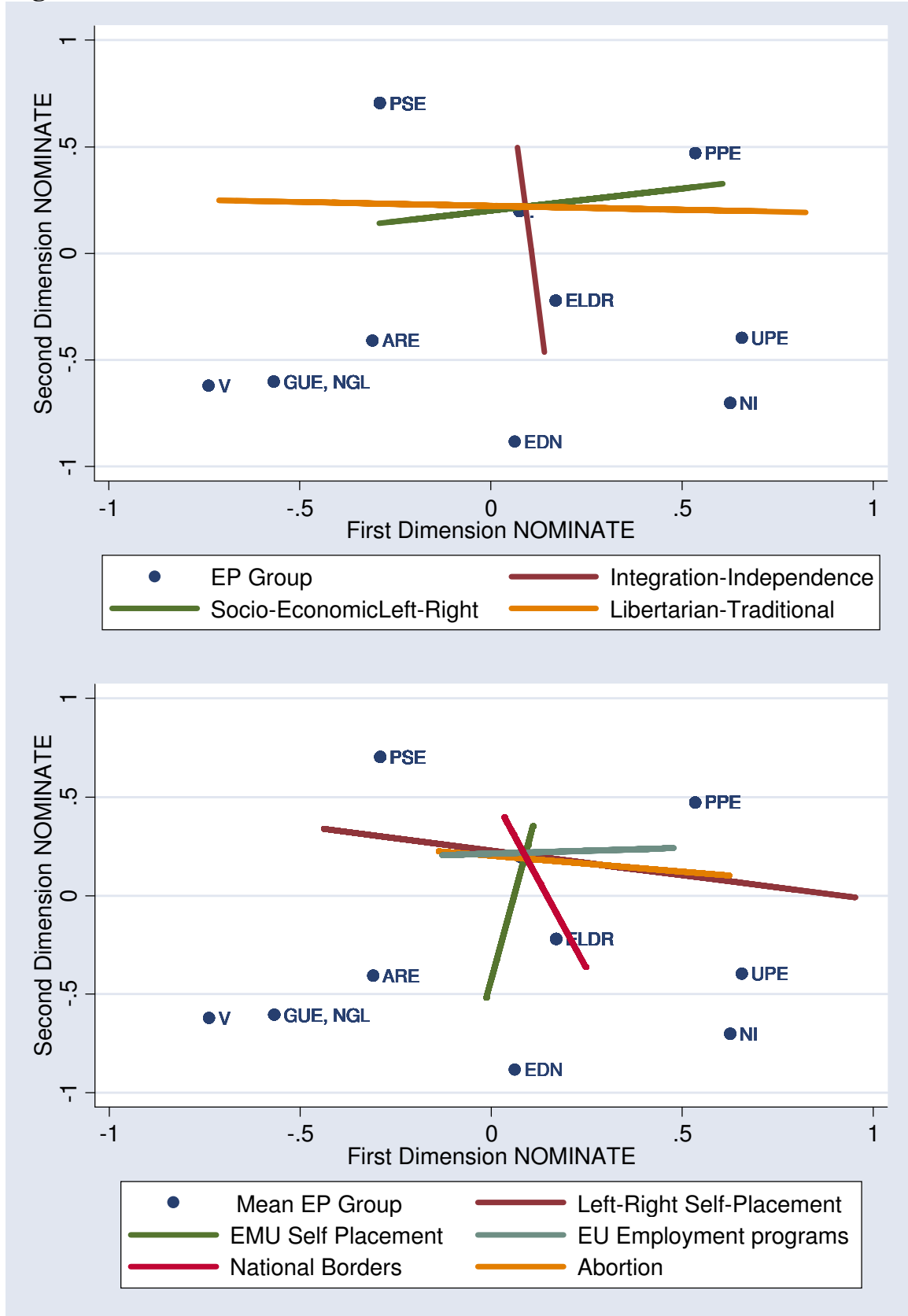**Figures 1A-B:** MEP Attitudes and W-NOMINATE Scores

Table 2: National Party Positions, Legislator Attitudes, and Estimated Ideal Points (dependent variables are W-NOMINATE estimates)

	1st Dimension		2nd Dimension	
	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 1*	*Model 2*
Intercept	-1.188***	-1.243**	-.928***	-.835***
	(.077)	(.039)	(.143)	(.043)
National Party Ideology				
Left-Right position national party	.211***	.202***	-.029*	-.037
	(.009)	(.008)	(.017)	(.007)
European integration position national party	.018	.030***	.219***	.232***
	(.012)	(.010)	(.024)	(.018)
Residual MEP attitudes				
Integration/Independence	-.003	-	-.015	-
	(.019)		(.036)	
Socio-Economic Left/Right	.068***	-	.065*	-
	(.019)		(.036)	
Libertarian/Traditional Factor	.129***	-	.047	-
	(.021)		(.038)	
Left-Right Self-Placement	-	.059***	-	.014
		(.011)		(.006)
European Currency	-	.016**	-	-.002
		(.007)		(.004)
R^2_{adj}	.752	.744	.358	.393
S.E. Estimate	.233	.126	.431	.421
N	212	257	212	257

*p<.1 **p<.05 ***p<.01 (All tests are two-tailed).

Table 3: Effect of perceived differences with national and European parties on Legislator Ideal Points (robust standard errors clustered on European Party Group in parentheses, fixed country-effects omitted from table)

	1st Dimension W-NOMINATE		*2nd Dimension W-NOMINATE*	
	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 1*	*Model 2*
Intercept	-.936***	-.757***	-.538	-.693
	(.175)	.069	(.331)	(.270)
Left-Right Ideology				
MEP position	.181***	.185***	-.031	-
	(.013)	(.017)	(.052)	
Difference with National Party	.018	.038	.021	-
	(.025)	(.030)	(.022)	
Difference with European Party Group	.065***	.058***	.001	-
	(.010)	(.009)	(.022)	
EMU issue				
MEP position	.023	-	.133***	.125***
	(.015)		(.027)	(.026)
Difference with National Party	.015	-	.013	.032
	(.011)		(.025)	(.023)
Difference with European Party Group	.032	-	.073**	.058***
	(.019)		(.027)	(.030)
R^2_{adj}	.722	.703	.499	.461
S.E. Estimate	.251	.260	.410	.423
N	280	287	280	291

*p<.1 **p<.05 ***p<.01 (All tests are two-tailed).

Appendix

Table: Issue Attitudes in the European Parliament (factor loadings >.4 are in bold)

Items	Integration-Independence	Socio-Economic Left-Right	Libertarian-Traditional
Increase range responsibilities EU?	**.88**	.02	.05
Democratic legitimization EU based on EP/NP?	**.87**	-.02	.08
EP power to pass law that directly apply to all members	**.85**	.05	.12
National/European currency	**-.83**	.11	.09
Decisions national/European level***	**-.81**	-.13	.13
Remove national borders/border control	**.76**	-.06	.17
Reduce unemployment/limit inflation	-.09	**.83**	.12
EU employment program/concentration on single market	.11	**.82**	.09
Reduce inequality of incomes	-.03	**.79**	.31
Maintain levels of welfare even if tax raise	.08	**.78**	.24
Government greater role in economy	-.04	**.76**	.01
Tougher action against criminals	.05	-.02	**-.73**
Decriminalize use of marihuana	.28	.11	**.72**
Stronger measures to restrict immigration	.01	-.24	**-.71**
Women free to decide on abortion	.01	.23	**.68**
Eigen values (after VARIMAX rotation)	*4.3*	*3.3*	*2.3*
% of variance explained	*28.5*	*22.3*	*15.1*

*N=245.
**The three factors together explain 66% of variance in the issue positions of MEPs.
 ***A scale from questions v6_1 to v6_17 on the appropriate level of decision making for different policy areas. Cronbach's alpha is .93. It holds for all items that if they are removed from the scale, the reliability of the scale decreases.