

Bicameralism, nationality and party cohesion in the European Parliament

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Party cohesion in legislatures is a topic of longstanding concern to political scientists because cohesion facilitates democratic representation. We examine the cohesion of transnational party groups in the European Parliament, which is part of the EU's bicameral system, and study the oftentimes competing pressures to which MEPs are subject from their EP party groups and national governments. Our explanation focuses on the conditions under which MEPs take policy positions that differ from those of their party groups. We propose that national governments lobby their national MEPs more intensely on issues of high national salience and on which they are in a weak bargaining position in the Council. The analyses offer a unique approach to the study of party cohesion that is based on the policy positions taken by each national delegation of MEPs in each of the three main party groups and national governments on specific controversial issues.

Key words: Party cohesion; European Parliament; EP party groups; bicameralism; nationality.

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Introduction

Cohesive political parties facilitate democratic representation for a number of reasons. Decision-making in legislatures with cohesive parties is more structured and less prone to voting cycles (Aldrich 1995: chapter 2). Cohesive parties also structure electoral choice for voters and provide a mechanism through which citizens' preferences are transformed into public policy (Thomassen 1994). Political parties can be cohesive either because there is internal agreement or because the party enforces discipline. Internal agreement is arguably more important, as 'below some minimal level of coherence, it is impossible, at least within the confines of democratic politics, to impose discipline' (Bowler et al. 1999: 5). Both paths to party cohesion have been studied extensively (e.g. Norpoth 1976; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Bowler et al. 1999; Cameron 2000).

Territorial or regional divisions are a significant source of disunity within political parties. Parties in federal systems are often organised at the level of subnational units, and internal divisions can surface within parties along these lines (Carey 2007: 94-5). For example, state-level party organisations play a key role in terms of candidate selection and campaigning in Brazil, reducing cohesion in parties at the federal level both in the upper house, which is designed to represent state interests, and in the lower house (Desposato 2004: 271-2). Cooperative federalism, where state governments are represented in the upper house, may exacerbate internal party divisions, since 'the two levels of party organisation come into direct competition in the central legislative process' (Hix 1998: 30).

Such territorial divisions present a significant potential obstacle to the cohesion of party groups in the European Parliament (EP). Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) serve both national parties and transnational party groups to some extent, since each has a prominent role in their political careers. EP party groups are amalgamations of national parties, which remain the primary organisational units at elections. National parties select candidates for EP elections, provide campaign support, and are the primary object of vote choice for voters. National parties are also relevant to MEPs'

careers after they leave the EP, because MEPs frequently return to national politics after leaving the EP. National governments are also at the centre of the EU's legislative process, which gives them the possibility of monitoring and pressuring MEPs. Nearly all EU legislation must be approved by both the EP and the Council of Ministers, the latter of which consists of representatives of member-state governments. The EU legislative system is therefore bicameral, with a structure that is in some ways comparable to cooperative federalist systems such as Germany (Börzel and Hosli 2003).

The cohesion of transnational party groups in the EP has been studied using two main approaches. The first is roll-call votes (e.g. Attinà 1990; Kreppel and Tsebelis 1999; Kreppel 2002; Hix et al. 2007). Approximately one-third of all votes taken in the EP are roll-call votes, which means that the voting behaviour of each MEP is recorded. The headline finding from the analysis of roll-call votes is that cohesion is relatively high. On the whole, MEPs vote similarly to MEPs in the same party group. To the extent that party groups differ from each other, they differ on the socioeconomic Left-Right dimension. Moreover, party group loyalty appears to be stronger than national loyalty, in that MEPs vote more similarly to MEPs from the same party group than to MEPs from the same member state. This is a remarkable finding given the diversity of national parties that make up each party group, and the enduring relevance of national parties in MEPs' political careers.

The second approach to the study of party cohesion in the EP has relied on survey data to examine the positions of party groups on broad ideological dimensions and issue domains. McElroy and Benoit examine the ideological cohesion of national parties in EP party groups based on expert judgements of those parties' ideological positions (McElroy and Benoit 2010; 2012). Thomassen and Schmitt (1999; see also Thomassen et al. 2004) use data from surveys of MEPs to determine how cohesive and distinctive party groups are in relation to a set of broad policy questions. A key finding from this line of research is that EP party groups are cohesive in terms of their positions on the main general ideological dimensions that define modern politics, such as the general left-right dimension, the deregulation dimension and the social-liberalism dimension.

Our approach departs from previous research both theoretically and empirically. Our theoretical expectations incorporate the competing pressures to which MEPs are subject from their national governments and fellow MEPs in the EU's bicameral system. We consider how what goes on in the Council, where national governments are represented, affects the cohesion of party groups in the EP. Our empirical approach matches this theoretical concern by considering evidence on the policy positions of three types of actors on a range of specific controversial issues: first, each national delegation of MEPs from each of the three main party groups; second, each of the three main party groups; and, third, each national government in the Council. This allows us to examine the conditions under which national delegations of MEPs disagree with their EP party groups, and to draw inferences on the influence of MEPs' national governments in this respect. Our data on actors' policy positions on specific controversial issues is distinct from and complements existing studies based on roll-call voting and positions on general ideological dimensions.

National divisions in EP party groups

In the present study we conceive of party-group cohesion as agreement among the national delegations of MEPs within a transnational party group in terms of their policy positions on specific controversial issues. The dependent variable and unit of analysis in our study refers to the policy position of a national delegation of MEPs in a transnational party group in relation to a specific controversial issue. We examine the likelihood that each national delegation of MEPs takes a policy position that differs from that of their transnational party group. Specific issues are policy questions concerning aspects of a legislative proposal that involve choices between alternatives. The issues depend on the legislative proposal in question. For example, a proposed regulation to limit EU subsidies for sugar production raised the issue of the percentage by which the intervention price should be cut (CNS/2005/118). A proposed directive on data retention, which will be discussed in more detail below, raised the issue of the range of crimes that the retained data could be used to combat (COD/2005/182). Actors' policy

positions on such specific issues refer to the policy alternatives they favour. Our focus is therefore distinct from that of previous studies that have examined party group cohesion: roll-call votes and positions on ideological dimensions. Roll-call votes might not detect national divisions if national delegations are coerced into voting in line with their party groups. Similarly, agreement on general ideological principles might not translate into agreement on specific issues when strong national interests are at stake.

Given that studies of roll-call voting and ideological congruence have revealed a high degree of cohesion within EP party groups, it is worth recalling why national divisions are likely to remain relevant. On many occasions issues arise that are of great importance to national actors, such as interest groups, government ministries, or national parties. When this happens, MEPs may be subject to pressure from these national actors from their home member states to adopt positions that differ from their EP party groups' positions. Pressure from MEPs' home member states often occurs when legislative proposals raise issues on which clear national interests cross party political lines. For instance, the abovementioned proposal to cut subsidies for sugar production affected MEPs from sugar-processing states. Indeed, national governments attempt to influence their MEPs, regardless of those MEPs' party affiliations. These attempts include regular high-level meetings with their MEPs and written briefings on current issues (Corbett et al. 2003: 280).

MEPs have clear incentives to be receptive to pressure from their home member states, particularly when it is channelled through their national political parties. Most MEPs are elected in state-wide national constituencies and have strong electoral incentives to pursue the national interest where one exists. National parties control the selection of candidates for election to the EP, and provide campaign support. This means that MEPs depend on their national parties for re-election. Moreover, a substantial proportion of MEPs return to national politics after their service in the EP, where they again depend on the support of their national political parties. National parties' influence on MEPs is also exerted partly through their residual role in organising EP business. For instance, while committee report allocation is controlled by party groups, once a group has secured a report through the

bidding process, national delegations within the groups have a say in determining which committee member gets the report (Kreppel 2002: 202-5; Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003).

We argue that the main determinants of disagreement within EP party groups lies not in the EP, but in the Council, the main arena in which national interests are expressed. The likelihood that MEPs take a distinct position from their party group depends on the policy position favoured by their member state in the Council. Naturally, a member state government will not put pressure on MEPs to take a distinct position within their party group when the member state agrees with the position of the party group. Member state governments only have incentives to lobby their MEPs when the relevant party group adopt positions with which they disagree. We therefore examine the following hypothesis:

H1: MEPs in a national delegation are more likely to disagree with their party group when their member state in the Council also disagrees with the party group.

The first hypothesis concerns whether or not member states have an incentive to lobby their MEPs. Support for this hypothesis would be consistent with the argument that national governments influence MEP behaviour. However, it would also be consistent with the argument that MEPs simply have similar preferences to the governments of their member states. We therefore also consider the conditions under which national governments expend resources on lobbying MEPs given that their policy positions differ from those of the EP party group concerned.

Governments' incentives to influence their country's MEPs depend on how important the issue is to the member state and on the distribution of policy positions within the Council. The level of salience that an actor attaches to an issue indicates the value it places on realizing the decision outcome it favours, as well as the disutility it receives from outcomes that deviate from those it favours (Bueno de Mesquita 1994: 79-82). Consequently, the salience of an issue to a member state's government is reflected in the amount of effort it will invest in lobbying other actors, including its MEPs. We expect MEPs to

experience more national pressure on an issue if they are from member states that attach high levels of importance to that issue. These MEPs are therefore, other things being equal, more likely to take positions that differ from the positions of their transnational party groups.

H2: MEPs in a national delegation are more likely to disagree with their party group when their member state in the Council attaches a higher level of salience to the issue.

A related but distinct argument is that actors select the venue in which they concentrate their influence attempts based on their perceived likelihood of success. The Council is the main arena in which national interests are expressed, and any given member state will find itself more isolated on some issues than on others. A commonly cited norm of decision-making in the Council is that member states attempt to meet each other's concerns, even when some of the member states in question form minorities that could be outvoted. This is often referred to as the culture of consensus (Heisenberg 2005; Lewis 2008). Nonetheless, decision outcomes are generally compromises that are best reflected as weighted averages of member states' policy positions (Achen 2006). This means that the more isolated a member state is on an issue, the more distant it generally is from the decision outcome if the issue is visualized as a policy scale. We expect that when a member state is more isolated in the Council, national interest groups, as well as the national government, will direct more attention to lobbying their national MEPs in the EP.

H3: MEPs in a national delegation are more likely to disagree with their party group when their member state is more isolated in the Council.

We also expect that MEPs from national parties that are in government are more likely to be influenced by pressure from their member state government than MEPs from national parties that are in opposition.¹ A substantial amount of national lobbying of MEPs is conducted by national governments (Corbett et al. 2003: 280), and these national governments have direct lines to the

national parties whose support is crucial for MEPs' careers. Therefore, while we expect that all MEPs are more likely to take a distinct position from their party group when the issue is salient to their member state government and when the member state government is isolated, we expect this to be particularly true for national delegations of MEPs who are affiliated with national parties in government.

H4: The effects of national salience (H2) and national isolation in the Council (H3) are greater for MEPs who are affiliated with national parties that are in government.

Research design

A total of 16 legislative proposals, which were introduced between 2004 and 2005 and decided under the consultation and codecision procedures, were selected for analysis. Only high-profile proposals that generated a degree of controversy were selected (evidence for this was based on coverage in the newspaper *European Voice*). Most of these proposals gave rise to several separate points of controversy; expert informants identified a total of 39 controversial issues associated with these proposals.²

For each proposal, informants close to the negotiations were interviewed. In total, 115 separate interviews were carried out: 60 interviews with officials from member states' permanent representations; 40 interviews with informants from the EP; and 15 interviews with officials from the Commission. The individuals in the Commission were usually the officials responsible for drafting the legislative proposals and following the legislative process on behalf of the Commission. The officials from member states' representations were desk officers responsible for representing their states in the Council discussions. Informants from the EP included the rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs, their assistants, committee officials and party group officials. The interviews took place between July 2006 and October 2007, and lasted on average just over one hour. Where possible, the information gathered from the interviews was checked using documentary sources from the websites of the EU institutions.

The semi-structured interviews were part of an iterative data-collection process, in which a stylized depiction was gradually formulated of each controversy and the policy positions of the relevant actors. The estimates are not averages of expert opinions, but single judgements based on qualitative accounts. The first interviews in relation to each legislative proposal focused more heavily on identifying the controversial issues, which were then represented as one-dimensional issue scales on which the actors' positions could be located. In order to facilitate comparison, we gave the extreme points on each issue the numeric values of 0 and 100, and the experts placed the various other alternatives discussed during the negotiations at specific points on the scale between these endpoints. Once the issue scales were specified, informants were asked to give their assessments of the policy alternative favoured by each relevant actor. Over the course of negotiations, actors may moderate their position in pursuit of an agreement. For this study, informants were asked about the *initial* positions of actors, when the proposal was first introduced. They were also asked to justify the information they provided. Interviewees based their judgements on the opinions and arguments put forward by these actors during the negotiations. Key informants were also asked to estimate the level of importance (salience) each member state attached to the issue, on a scale of 0-100.

Informants from the EP provided estimates of the positions taken by the various EP party groups, along with the positions of national delegations within each of the three largest EP parties: the European Peoples Party (EPP); the Party of European Socialists (PES – since renamed as the Socialists and Democrats); and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). We focused on the three largest groups as it was not feasible to gather information on the positions of national groupings in the smaller groups. These three party groups accounted for over three-quarters of all MEPs during the period of study (the 6th parliamentary term, 2004-2009). This proportion fell slightly in the subsequent term, primarily due to the creation of a new party group, the European Conservatives and Reformists.

Some national groupings within the same party group consist of more than one national party. For instance, the Swedish MEPs in the EPP came from both the Moderate Party and the Christian Democrats. However, the key

informants chose not to distinguish between different national parties, but rather identified the position of, for example, the Swedish grouping within the EPP. There are 67 national groupings in the dataset in total (25 from EPP, 23 from PES and 19 from ALDE). Given the large number of EP national groupings under analysis, the expert informants were asked to recall a considerable amount of information. It is possible that the accuracy of the information varies depending on the size of the national grouping in question. We return to this issue below where we report on tests to determine whether or not this is the case.

An issue from the Data Retention Directive (COD/2005/182) will be used to illustrate the data (Figure 1). This directive sought to harmonize states' national laws regarding the retention of electronic data (from telephones, internet etc.), for use in law enforcement. One of the controversial issues from this directive concerned the types of crimes that authorities would be able to prosecute using this electronic information. Actors concerned primarily with civil liberties sought to limit the use of these data to the prosecution of very serious crimes (or not use these data at all), while those more concerned with law enforcement argued that it should be possible to use this information in relation to a broad range of serious crimes.

Figure 1 shows the initial positions taken on this issue by political actors in the Council (shown above the line) and EP (below the line). At one extreme, two left-wing party groups in the EP (the Greens and United European Left (GUE)) did not want data to be retained for law enforcement purposes, regardless of the crime. This is represented as Position 0 on the issue scale. At the other extreme, a large number of member state governments and some EP actors were in favour of using electronic information to prosecute all serious crimes. This is represented as Position 100. A number of intermediate positions were also taken: a small group of member states wanted this type of data to be used only in relation to terrorism and organised crime (Position 30 on the issue scale); ALDE (along with some MEPs from the EPP) wanted it to apply to a relatively small list of specified crimes (Position 60); while PES were in favour of a slightly larger list of crimes (i.e. those covered by the European Arrest Warrant; Position 70). The political groups were not entirely cohesive, as some national groups of MEPs took distinct positions. Within the

EPP, delegates from Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands stood apart; in all three cases these MEPs moved towards the position of their home member state in the Council. Within ALDE, delegates from France and Italy disagreed with the position of the rest of their party group and supported the position of their home member states.

<FIGURE 1>

This example provides evidence in support of some of our hypotheses. In line with the first hypothesis, all five cases of disagreement within party groups on this issue occur in situations where there are differences between the relevant member state and party group's positions. The group of six member states at Position 30 were relatively isolated in the Council, and we therefore expect them to place greater emphasis on lobbying 'their' MEPs (H3). In line with this, three of the five national delegations of MEPs who disagreed with their party groups are among MEPs from these member states. However, this case does not unequivocally support all of the hypotheses. Contrary to H2, the home member states of the MEPs that disagreed with their party group did not attach a higher level of salience to this issue compared to other member states (salience scores are omitted from Figure 1).

Measurement and analysis

The unit of analysis refers to each national delegation within each of the three main EP party groups in relation to each controversial issue. The 67 national groupings give a total number of 2,613 observations across the 39 controversial issues. Not all of the relevant actors took positions on each issue. Excluding these cases leaves 2,143 observations available for analysis.

The dependent variable 'Disagreement' is a dichotomous indicator of whether or not a national delegation of MEPs disagreed with their party group's position. The distribution of this variable across the three party groups is shown in Table 1. The EPP group has the highest disagreement rate at 19%, followed by ALDE at 16% and PES at 13%.

<TABLE 1>

To what extent does this measure of disagreement, based on positional data, correspond to defection as observed in related roll-call votes? To investigate this, we examined the EP voting records in relation to these 39 issues.³ Roll-call votes were recorded for the relevant EP amendments on only 18 of these issues. For these votes, we identified whether the plurality of MEPs in each national delegation voted in line with the position of their party group or against it. Table 2 compares this measure of voting defection with our measure of national group disagreement prior to the vote, and reveals a moderately strong relationship between them. Of the 188 cases where national delegations did not vote in line with their party group, the national delegations also took distinct policy positions from their party group in 108 cases (57%). By comparison, of the 904 cases in which national delegations voted in line with their party group, the national delegations took distinct positions in only 89 cases (10%). Furthermore, the overall occurrence of voting defection and policy disagreement is similar: there are 188 instances of national delegations voting against their party group, and 197 instances of national delegations taking distinct policy positions from their party group. These figures therefore do not lend any support to the argument that roll-call data significantly overestimates the level of party group cohesion in the EP (Carrubba et al. 2006: 701).

<TABLE 2>

One set of cases in Table 2 requires further explanation. There are the 80 instances where no disagreement was recorded between the national delegation of MEPs and party group, yet the roll-calls indicate that the national group went on to vote against the party group. While this may suggest some measurement error in the positional data, much of the discrepancy is explained by the fact the positional data relates to the initial positions taken by actors at the start of the negotiations, whereas the roll-call data refers to the final positions at the time of the vote. Occasionally, party groups change their

positions during the negotiations, and not all national delegations of MEPs agree with this. For instance, the PES group changed its position ahead of the vote on the issues relating to the Data Retention directive, and in doing so lost the support of some national delegations (see Ripoll Servent 2013: 977). Almost half of these 80 cases relate to this directive. When we exclude this directive from the analysis, the correlation between the positional data and roll-call data is noticeably stronger.

The comparison with roll-call data also enables us to test whether there are biases in the positional data depending on the size of the national group. As mentioned, it is possible that expert informants were more accurate in their estimates of the positions of large delegations of MEPs. There are 67 groups included in the dataset, with a median size of five MEPs. We repeated the analysis above, this time splitting the sample into two: cases with more than five MEPs, and cases with five or fewer MEPs. The association between the positional data and the roll-call data is almost identical for these two groups.

Turning to our hypotheses, we first examine whether national delegations of MEPs are more likely to disagree with their party group when the relevant member state adopts a different position from the party group. Table 3 presents a cross tabulation of the variables 'Disagreement' and a dichotomous indicator of whether or not the home member state and party group took the same position. The relationship between the two variables is, as expected, very strong. Of the 469 cases where the relevant member state and party group agreed, the national group took a distinct position from the party group in only 13 instances (3%). In contrast, national delegations took distinct positions from their party group on 20% of cases in which the relevant member state and party group disagreed. In line with H1, MEPs are much more likely to stand apart from their party group when their member state government disagrees with the party group's position.

<TABLE 3>

Hypotheses 2-4 are relevant only to those cases where the relevant party group in the EP and member state government in the Council adopt different

positions. The subsequent analyses therefore focuses on the 1,691 cases where this is the case.

To test our other hypotheses, we constructed the following variables. The variable 'Member state salience' gives the salience score of the national group's home member state on a scale of 0-100 (Hypothesis 2). 'Member state isolation' measures the absolute distance between the position of the national delegation's home member state and the weighted average position of all member states⁴ (Hypothesis 3). Hypothesis 4 posits that the effects of member state salience and isolation depend on whether the national group is affiliated with a governing national party. 'Government' is a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not members of the national grouping were affiliated with national political parties that were in government at the time of the EP first reading. As mentioned above, occasionally a national grouping consists of more than one national party; if any of these parties was in government nationally then this variable was coded as 1; otherwise it is coded as 0. This variable is interacted with the variables 'Member state salience' and 'Member state isolation' to test Hypothesis 4.

We also include a number of control variables. The decision-making context in the EP may influence whether a national delegation responds to pressure from national sources. If a national delegation of MEPs is aware that there is overwhelming support for a particular position within the EP, then disagreeing openly with the party group may appear futile. In this situation, taking a distinct position would have no effect on the outcome, but would still entail reputational costs within their party group. The variable 'EP unity' records the size of the biggest coalition of MEPs on each issue (expressed as a percentage), excluding the MEPs referred to in the case. For example, if 65% of all other MEPs (apart from those referred to in the case) take a particular position, then 'EP unity' has a value of 65.

Certain types of issues may be associated with particularly high levels of lobbying of MEPs by national actors. For instance, issues that relate to the distribution of financial resources are likely to generate greater levels of attention domestically, and hence greater pressure on MEPs to pursue national interests. While there are an insufficient number of issues (39 in total) to examine such patterns thoroughly, it is important that we control for these

potential differences in the analysis. Two dummy variables ('Financial subsidy issues' and 'Regulation issues') are included in the analysis; the reference category consists of issues that focused on the level of harmonization required by the legislation and issues that did not fit into any of the other categories.

Table 4 presents the results of two logistic regression analyses. Model 1 examines the effect of member state salience (H2) and isolation (H3), while Model 2 examines the conditional hypothesis that these effects will be greater for government MEPs (H4). The data contain multiple observations for each issue, and these observations are not necessarily independent of one another. We therefore use robust standard errors clustered at the issue level. In addition, the data contains multiple observations on each national delegation. It is possible that certain national delegations are more or less prone to disagree with their party group for reasons not captured by our model, such as their ideological fit within the party group. We therefore also ran each model including fixed effects for national delegations, removing any systematic differences between them. However, the direction and significance of our variables of interest were not changed by the inclusion of fixed effects, so these results are not reported here.

<TABLE 4>

Turning first to Model 1, the variable 'Member state salience' is positive and significant. In line with H2, this implies that a national delegation of MEPs is more likely to disagree with its party group when its home member state considers the issue to be salient. The variable 'Member state isolation' is also positive and significant (in line with H3), indicating that a national delegation is more likely to disagree with its party group when its home state is isolated in the Council. The overall fit of the model is reasonably good, as indicated by the pseudo- R^2 of 0.42 and the percentage of correct predictions generated by the model (89%, against a baseline of 79% for the null model with no predictors).

Model 1 also reveals some noteworthy findings regarding the control variables. The negative and significant coefficient for the variable 'EP unity'

indicates that when other MEPs are more united in favour of a particular position, a national delegation is less likely to take a distinct position from their group. As we might expect, disagreement is more likely to occur on issues concerning the level of financial subsidies to be provided by the EU. This is broadly in line with evidence from roll-call data, which shows that EP party group cohesion is lowest on distributive policies such as agriculture. Disagreement is also more likely on issues concerning the level of regulation than on other issues.

Turning to Model 2, we find only limited support for our conditional hypothesis regarding the government affiliations of national delegations of MEPs. The interaction variable 'Salience X Government' is positive and significant, implying that effect of member state salience is significantly higher for national delegations that are affiliated with national parties in government. However, there is no evidence that the effect of member state isolation is greater for national delegations affiliated with national parties that govern, as there is a non-significant coefficient for the variable Isolation X Government. Furthermore, the overall model fit does not improve with the introduction of these interaction variables⁵.

A number of additional analyses were performed in relation to the results presented in Table 4. Firstly, the effects of some variables may differ depending on the size of the national delegations. For instance, a large national group of MEPs may be more likely to be lobbied by national actors than a small group. However, we found no support for this. The key independent variables in Model 1 (Member state salience and Member state isolation) were interacted with a variable measuring the number of MEPs in the national group⁶; but neither of these interactions was significant. Second, we introduced a control for the type of legislative procedure involved (codecision or consultation). As the vast majority of the issues included in the analysis (36 out of 39) fall under the codecision procedure, it is not possible to reliably compare the effects of the main independent variables under different legislative procedures here. Instead, the variable was introduced simply as a control, and did not alter the results.

The coefficients in Table 4 indicate the direction and statistical significance of the independent variables, but provide little insight into the size of these

effects. Figure 2 plots the marginal effect of increases in both member state salience and member state isolation on the predicted probability of disagreement. The estimates are based on the coefficients in Model 1, with other variables in the model held constant. When an issue is of low salience to a national delegation's member state and when the national government is not isolated in the Council, the likelihood that the national delegation disagrees with its party group is close to zero. When an issue is highly salient to a national delegation's member state and when the national government is very isolated in the Council, the likelihood that the national delegation stands apart from its party group is much higher (a probability of over 0.40 when salience and isolation are both at their maximum values).

<FIGURE 2>

Conclusions

We find high levels of cohesion in the three main party groups in the EP. The majority of national delegations of MEPs take the same policy positions as their party group, even when their home member states' policy positions differ from their party groups' positions. National delegations of MEPs take the same policy position as their EP party groups in 84% of our 2,143 observations. This is relevant to the potential for democratic representation at the European level, since strong party group cohesion is necessary if European citizens are to exert meaningful control over EU policies via EP elections.

This finding accords with previous research on party cohesion based on roll-call voting in the EP (e.g. Hix et al. 2007) and on ideological congruence (McElroy and Benoit 2010; 2012). However, the similarity in our research findings was not a foregone conclusion. The EP, like many other legislatures, records votes by roll call in only a minority of cases, which could lead to biased results (Carrubba et al. 2006). Since 2009 the EP has required that all final legislative votes are roll-call votes, but many votes on amendments are still not held by roll call. Parliamentary parties may call roll-call votes for reasons associated with party cohesion, to reveal division in other parties, or

to display or manufacture cohesion in their own party. Moreover, agreement among parliamentarians at the voting stage may conceal disagreement in earlier position taking, as is certainly the case for member states' representatives in the Council of Ministers. Our findings suggest that research based on roll-call votes did not find high levels of party cohesion solely due to the peculiarities of roll-call voting. Our findings also support previous research, which shows that EP party groups are cohesive in terms of constituent national parties' positions on general ideological dimensions. Ideological cohesion refers to agreement on general principles, and does not necessarily mean that parties are cohesive when it comes to specific controversies, particularly on controversies that raise national divisions in the Council.

Notwithstanding the overall cohesion of EP party groups, our research highlights the importance of national divisions under certain circumstances. In this sense, our findings support the argument that territorial divisions can weaken party cohesion in federal systems, particularly when state governments are represented in the federal legislature. MEPs have loyalties not only to their transnational party groups and the parliament as a whole, but also to their home member states. When salient national interests are at stake, national groups of MEPs are significantly more likely to deviate from their party group's policy position and come out in support of their member state's position.

The persistent relevance of national politics is unsurprising given the importance of national politics and parties in MEPs' political careers. As long as EP elections are fought on national issues and national parties select and support candidates for EP elections, MEPs are bound to attend to their national constituencies. Nationality also still plays an important residual role in the management of EP business (Raunio 2000; Kreppel, 2002: 202-5; Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003; Whitaker 2005), and national governments and domestic interest groups still attempt to influence 'their' MEPs (Corbett et al. 2003: 280). Despite the importance of party cohesion for democratic performance, national disagreement within EP party groups is not particularly problematic for the EP's popular legitimacy. This occurs only in a notable minority of cases. Moreover, most voters would probably approve of their

national MEPs taking a national line on issues to which their national governments place great importance, and on which there are limited opportunities to influence decision outcomes in the Council.

We formulated and tested several theoretical expectations regarding disagreement between national delegations of MEPs and their party groups. Our hypotheses imply that disagreement occurs because of lobbying by national actors. An alternative explanation is that disagreement occurs because of congruence between the interests of national groups of MEPs and their member states' representatives, without domestic actors' influencing MEPs. This seems possible and could account for the evidence we find in support of some of our hypothesis. However, the finding that MEPs are more likely to disagree with their party group when their member state government is isolated in the Council implies that what happens inside the EP depends partly on what happens inside the Council.

Most existing comparative research on the EP studies its politics in isolation. The same is true of most comparative research on the Council, which does not consider politics inside the EP at all. Integrating the analysis of decision-making in the Council and EP is hard to do, and most of the existing research approaches are of limited use. The problem lies in identifying a common political space to reflect the differences among the policy preferences of actors in the EP and Council. Comparing voting behaviour in the EP and Council seems like a dead end for the integrated analysis of this bicameral system. The Council still rarely holds formal votes, and when it does these refer to the legislative proposal as a whole, which are usually adopted with few dissenting member states. Research based on political parties' positions on general ideological dimensions is also problematic. There is little evidence that national governments' policy positions on specific issues are influenced by their partisan composition (Nugent 1999: 474; Heyes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006: 250; Thomson 2011: chapter 3).

Our research focused on a relatively small number of proposals that were negotiated prior to the Eurozone crisis that began in 2009. It is possible that national divisions have become more important in the intervening period, given the increased salience of the EU for national electorates (e.g. Braun and Tausendpfund 2014). Future research should re-examine the influence

of national political actors on MEP behaviour in light of these changes. Future research should seek to identify specific controversies or policy dimensions that divide actors within both the Council and EP, as we have done here for a modest number of legislative proposals. This research approach might also be extended to incorporate other qualitative methods that examine the reasons MEPs themselves give for their behaviour.

Notes

¹ For example, when the Irish government was faced with a challenging negotiation on legislation for new tobacco controls in 2013, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and Health Minister sent letters to all Irish MEPs from their party urging them to support the government position (RTE 2013)

² This study was part of a larger study on decision-making in the EU (Thomson et al. 2012). The larger study did not examine the positions of actors within the EP as we do here.

³ We used the website www.votewatch.eu for this information.

⁴ Weights are salience and voting power, measured using the Banzhaf index. This is the 'compromise model' which has been found to provide a relatively accurate approximation of decision outcomes in the Council (Achen, 2006).

⁵ This non-finding may be due to the fact that national delegations in each of the party groups were treated as unitary actors. It is possible that a more fine-grained measure, which identified the positions of individual national parties, would find a stronger effect.

⁶ We examined this using the absolute number of MEPs in each national group, and also using the number of MEPs in each as a percentage of the total number of MEPs from that member state.

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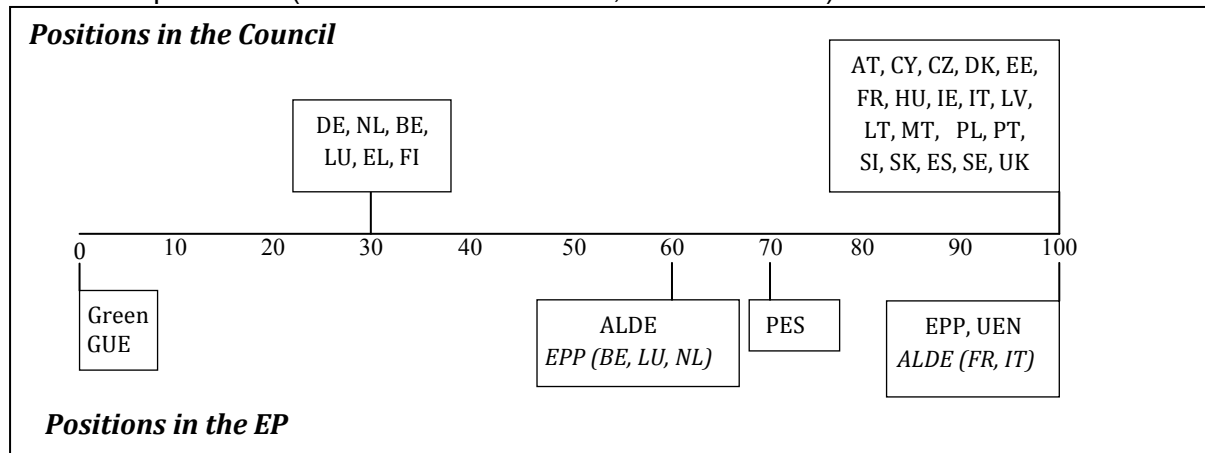
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Tables and Figures

Figure 1. Positions of actors concerning the types of crimes that retained data can be used to prosecute (Data Retention directive, COD/2005/182).



Notes: Positions of national groupings that take a different position from their EP political group shown in italics.

Position 0: Leave to national legislation.

Position 30: Terrorism and organized crime.

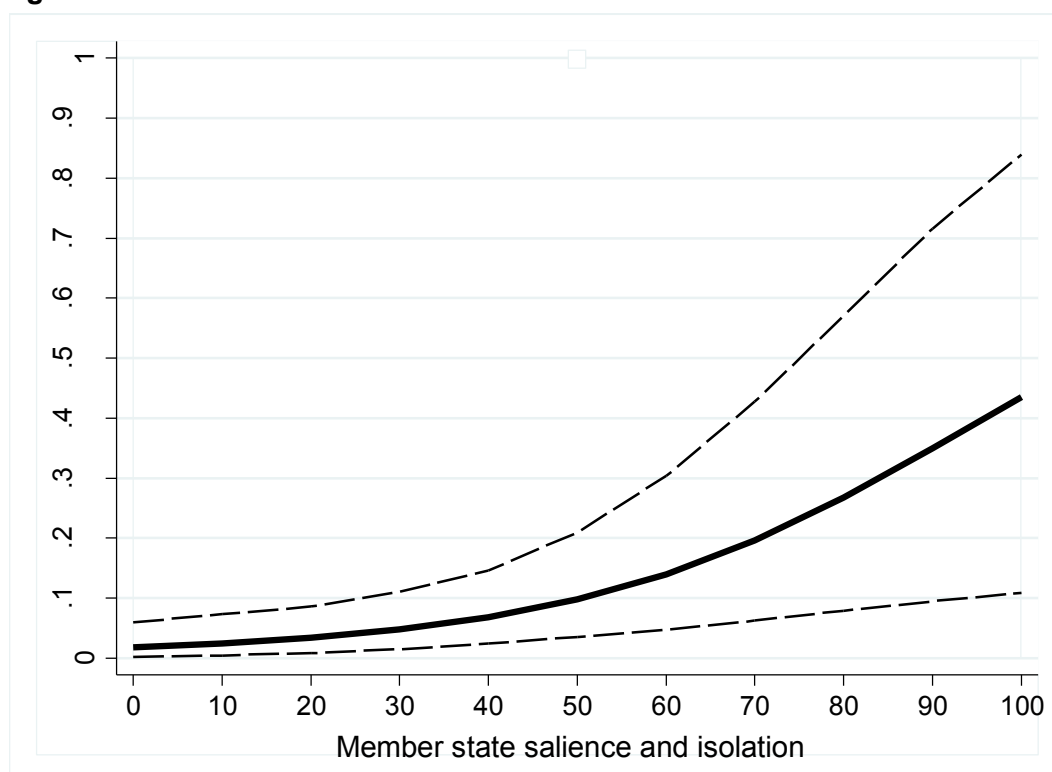
Position 60: Shortlist of crimes.

Position 70: Crimes covered by the European Arrest Warrant.

Position 100: All serious crimes.

AT: Austria; BE: Belgium; CY: Cyprus; CZ: Czech Republic; DE: Germany; DK: Denmark; EE: Estonia; EL: Greece; ES: Spain; FI: Finland; FR: France; HU: Hungary; IE: Ireland; IT: Italy; LT: Lithuania; LU: Luxembourg; LV: Latvia; MT: Malta; NL: the Netherlands; PL: Poland; PT: Portugal; SE: Sweden; SI: Slovenia; SK: Slovakia; UK: United Kingdom; ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; EPP: European People's Party; GUE: United European Left; PES: Party of European Socialists; UEN: Union for a Europe of Nations.

Figure 2: Joint effect of member state salience and isolation



Note: Solid line represents the probability of a national delegation of MEPs disagreeing with its party group as the values of member state salience and member state isolation increase from 0 to 100. Dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Based on coefficients from Table 4, Model 1. All other variables in the model are held constant at their mean value (for scale variables) or median value (for dichotomous variables).

Table 1. Disagreement by party group

	EPP	PES	ALDE	Total
National delegation's position agrees with party group	650 (81%)	651 (87%)	497 (84%)	1,798 (84%)
National delegation's position disagrees with EP party group	156 (19%)	96 (13%)	93 (16%)	345 (16%)
Total	806 (100%)	747 (100%)	590 (100%)	2,143 (100%)

Table 2. Disagreement by voting defection (absolute numbers; percentages)

	National delegation votes in line with party group	National delegation votes against party group	Total
National delegation's position agrees with party group	815 (91%)	80 (43%)	895 (82%)
National delegation's position disagrees with EP party group	89 (10%)	108 (57%)	197 (18%)
Total	904 (100%)	188 (100%)	1,092 (100%)

Pearson Chi-square=238.51; p<0.00

Table 3. Disagreement by agreement between home member state and EP party group (absolute numbers; percentages)

	Home member state and party group agree	Home member state and party group disagree	Total
National delegation's position agrees with party group	456 (97%)	1,342 (80%)	1,798 (84%)
National delegation's position disagrees with EP party group	13 (3%)	332 (20%)	345 (16%)
Total	469 (100%)	1,674 (100%)	2,143 (100%)

Pearson Chi-square=78.95; p<0.00

Table 4. Factors affecting the likelihood that national delegations of MEPs disagree with their party group

	Model 1			Model 2		
	b	se	p	b	se	p
Member state salience	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.12
Member state isolation	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.10
Government	0.04	0.12	0.71	-0.56	0.39	0.14
EP unity	-0.05	0.01	0.00	-0.05	0.01	0.00
Type of issue (reference category is harmonization and 'other issues')						
Financial subsidy issues	2.53	0.72	0.00	2.54	0.01	0.00
Regulation issues	1.21	0.50	0.02	1.20	0.50	0.00
Member state salience X Government				0.01	0.00	0.01
Member state isolation X Government				-0.00	0.01	0.86
Constant	-0.81	1.39	0.56	-0.48	1.39	0.73
Number of observations		1,691			1,691	
Number of clusters		39			39	
Model χ^2		86.34 (p.<.00)			122.87 (p.<.00)	
Log pseudo- likelihood		-503.60			-502.53	
McFadden's Pseudo-R ²		0.42			0.42	
% cases correctly predicted		89.11			88.94	

Note: Logistic regression analysis; standard errors clustered at the issue level. Dependent variable is Disagreement. Only cases where the relevant member state and party group took different positions are included in the analysis.