

How Electoral Institutions Shape Legislative Behaviour: Explaining Voting- Defection in the European Parliament*

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Abstract

Despite a sophisticated understanding of the impact of electoral institutions on aggregate political behavior, we know little about how these institutions shape legislative behavior at an individual level. I review various existing claims about this relationship, and develop a simple model to predict how specific electoral institutions determine whether Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) should be beholden to their national parties or their European party groups. The European Parliament is a good laboratory for investigating this issue, because different institutions are used in European Parliament elections in each European Union member state. The model is then tested on 400,000 individual MEP vote decisions. The results show that candidate-centered voting systems (such as open-list proportional representation) and decentralized candidate-selection procedures produce legislators who respond primarily to their parliamentary parties, whereas party-centered voting system (such as closed-list proportional representation) and centralized candidate-selection procedures produce legislators who respond primarily to their local party leaders.

1. Introduction: Designing an Electoral System for the European Parliament

When the European Heads of Government decided in December 1974 to hold European-wide ‘direct’ elections for the European Parliament (EP), they originally envisaged that a single electoral system would be used in all European Union (EU) member states. Five EP elections, and almost thirty years, later, there is no single electoral system. Each member state is free to choose its own rules. But, with the prospect of yet another round of reforms of the EU Treaties (in the 2004 Intergovernmental Conference)¹, and with the issue of how to increase the democratic accountability of the EU institutions a key item on the reform agenda, the topic of a ‘uniform electoral system’ for the EP has resurfaced.

For many EU scholars, media commentators, national politicians and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), direct elections to the EP have failed to live up to the optimistic expectations of the mid-1970s: that EP elections would usher in a new democratic identity for the European Community, European-wide political parties, and a new connection between voters’ choices and European level policy outcomes (e.g. Marquand 1979). There has been a steady decline in voter turnout: from 63 percent in 1979 to 49 percent in 1999. These contests have not been fought by pan-European parties, with pan-European manifestos and candidates. Instead, throughout the EU, EP elections have been ‘second-order national contests’ – fought by *national* parties, on the performance of *national* governments, and about *national* issues (esp. Reif and Schmitt 1980; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Marsh 1998). As with all second-order (or mid-term) contests, governing parties perform badly in EP elections, while opposition, protest and minor parties do well.

A widely-held view is that a single electoral system would help overcome this second-order ‘problem’ (e.g. Corbett et al. 2000, 10-25). For example, with different electoral

¹ An Intergovernmental Conference is a conference of the EU governments, which meets to reform the EU Treaty. Reform of the Treaty requires a unanimous agreement of the governments and ratification of the Treaty amendments in every member state.

systems for European and national elections, voters would be more aware of how and why these elections are different (e.g. Lodge and Hermann 1982). And, with a single electoral system, a genuine ‘transnational party system’ would be more likely to emerge (Pridham and Pridham 1981; Andeweg 1995).

However, these arguments are not completely convincing. The national political arena will remain the dominant focus for politicians, parties, voters and the media for quite some time. Hence, regardless of the design of a single electoral system, EP elections will still be second-order contests: dominated by national parties and national issues, with some European issues and high-profile candidates playing a limited role.

Furthermore, why should we be so concerned about the second-order ‘problem’? As Mark Franklin (2001) has shown, controlling for whether the election is the first EP election in a member state, whether voting is compulsory, and the distance of an EP election to the next national election, turnout in EP elections has remained remarkable stable. Also, the decision by a citizen about whether or not to vote in these contests is more a consequence of how interested they are in the particular election than whether they support or oppose the EP or the EU (Franklin et al. 1996; Blondel et al. 1997). And, the product of the second-order nature of EP elections – ‘divided government’ in the EU (where the EU Council is composed of governing parties and the EP majority is composed of opposition parties) – may in fact be the modal preference of EU voters, because all policy outcomes have to be supported by a broad spectrum of political opinion (cf. Elgie 2001).

A more fundamental issue for the design of a single electoral system for the EP (or for any parliament, for that matter) is how the electoral rules will shape the relationship between voters’ choices and political outcomes. For example, the proportionality of an electoral system determines the ‘effective’ number of parties in a political system (e.g. Rae 1971; Lijphart 1994; Cox 1997). Consequently, when the ruling elites of Europe designed the first

democratic electoral systems at the beginning of the 20th century, they were careful to choose electoral institutions that limited the electoral success of the emerging socialist movements (Boix 1999).

In the context of the EP, then, a key concern should be how different designs shape the connection between voters' choices and political behavior at the European level. Because different electoral rules are currently used in different EU member states, rather than simply theorizing the impact of different choices on legislative behavior in the EP, we can also analyze the impact of the different electoral rules at an empirical level. As others have observed, the EP is an excellent laboratory for investigating the general relationship between electoral rules and legislative behavior (e.g. Bowler and Farrell 1993). Nevertheless, systematic analyses of the impact of the varying electoral rules on EP behavior are few and far between.

So, this paper proceeds as follows. Section two briefly reviews the choices of electoral rules available to EP electoral system designers, and discuss how these choices might shape the relationship between voters, party leaders and MEPs. Section three proposes a formal model of MEP behavior – to predict under what conditions an MEP will vote with (or defect from) his/her EP party group or his/her national party. Section four discusses how MEP defection can be measured at an empirical level – through a statistical (logit) model of MEP voting, and by using data on almost 400,000 individual vote decisions in the EP between July 1999 and June 2000.² In section five the statistical results are presented. And, finally, in section six the conclusions are summarized.

² This data were collected as part of a larger project on 'How MEPs Vote', where we (Abdul Noury at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and myself) are collecting the total population of roll-call votes in the EP between 1979 and 2004 (approximately 14,000 votes and 2,000 MEPs). For more information about this project see the web-site of the European Parliament Research Group: http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/eprg/research-projects.htm#How_MEP's_vote.

2. Choices of Electoral Institutions: The Issue of Candidate Independence

In designing electoral systems, two key issues shape the relationship between voters, party leaders and elected politicians: (1) whether the vote-counting system is candidate- or party-centered; and (2) whether the candidate-selection system is centralized or decentralized (e.g. Katz 1980; Carey and Shugart 1995; Farrell 1997; Samuels 1999; Mitchell 2000; Pennings and Hazan 2001).

(1) Different vote-counting rules produce different incentives for candidates. In systems where votes for individual candidates have a high impact on the electoral success of each candidate, legislators have an incentive to cultivate personal support amongst the electorate, to increase their chances of re-election. In contrast, in systems where voters cannot exercise preferences for individual candidates, legislators are dependent upon the general level of support for the policies and personalities of their party leadership for re-election.

At one extreme, list-based proportional representation (PR) systems are the most *party-centric*. In ‘closed’ list-PR systems, parties present preordained lists of candidates, and voters cannot influence the order of the candidates on this list. In ‘open’ list-PR systems, in contrast, citizens can vote for individual candidates. Closed-list systems consequently allow party leaders to exercise a high degree of control over their legislators. Without the opportunity to appeal directly to the electorate, there are no incentives for candidates to break from the line of the party leadership. In fact, there are positive benefits for individual candidates to go along with the party line – by enabling the party to be a cohesive force, the electoral chances of the individual candidate are increased.

In the middle are electoral systems which promote a mixture of partisan and candidate appeals: single-member-simple-plurality (SMSP) (or ‘first-past-the-post’), and single-member alternative-vote or double-ballot system. In these systems voters choose individual candidates

rather than lists of candidates from each party. This choice encourages candidates to develop personal recognition in their district. These systems also allow voters to punish legislators, by voting them out if they fail to represent their district's interests effectively. However, these systems do not allow candidates to make direct appeals against rival candidates from their own party. In a sense, candidates in single-member districts are the 'face of the party' to the electorate. Few voters are aware of the specific policy differences between the candidates in their constituency and their respective party leaderships. As a consequence, the general level of support for the policies and personalities of the party leaderships has a significant impact on the electoral fortunes of the candidates in each constituency – even for incumbent legislators. So, even in these systems, there are incentives for candidates to support their parties' positions, to increase the overall electoral competitiveness of their party.

At the other extreme, the fully-open list-PR systems and single-transferable-vote (STV) systems are the most *candidate-centric*. Under fully-open list-PR the list of candidates for each party is presented in no particular order – for example, the candidates are listed alphabetically. The final order of candidates for the allocation of seats is then determined by the number of personal votes each candidate receives. Similarly, under STV, voters exercise ordinal preferences for the candidates in multi-member constituencies. Candidates are required to secure a quota of votes to be elected. If not enough candidates meet this threshold, 'second preferences' are taken into account, and so on. In both systems, then, there are significant incentives for candidates to cultivate personal identification and allegiance amongst the electorate and to compete with candidates from their own party in addition to candidates from other parties. The general level of support for the policies and personalities of a party's leadership will have an impact on the number of votes cast for all the candidates from that particular party. And, incumbent legislators may have a higher level of recognition amongst the voters than their rivals. But, in contrast to the party-centric and intermediate

systems, there are positive incentives for candidates from the same party to differentiate themselves from other candidates from the same party and, if their constituents desire it, to show their independence from their party leadership.

One other electoral institution has an impact on the incentives for individual candidates to seek personal votes against their party leaderships: the district magnitude (the number of seats in each district). As the size of the district increases, the threat by a party leadership of moving a candidate down the list declines. This is because popular incumbents who fall out with their party leaders have a greater chance of standing as an independent candidate, and winning re-election, than in small districts. Hence, in small districts, candidates are more vulnerable to pressure from their party leaders than in large multi-member districts (Carey and Shugart 1995).

(2) The other key institutional factor shaping the relationship between elected politicians and their party leaders is how candidates are selected and deselected (Gallagher 1988a, 1988b; Norris 1997; Bille 2001; Katz 2001; Rahat and Hazan 2001). As Shattschneider famously pointed out: ‘he who controls the nomination owns the party’ (Shattschneider 1942, 1).

The main factor determining the ability of party leaders to deliver incentives/sanctions to their elected representatives through the candidate-selection process is how far candidate selection is centralized or decentralized. Under any electoral system, the decision over whether a candidate can stand under a particular party label can be made at the party center, by the national party executive or a national party congress, or at a lower political level, by a regional or local party caucus or congress. The more centralized the candidate selection process, the greater the ability of the party leadership to influence the behavior of its legislators.

This degree of centralization of candidate-selection usually depends on the number of electoral districts, as candidate selection tends to be at the same level as the level of the electoral district. For example, where there is only one electoral district for the whole system, candidate selection is usually centralized. In contrast, where there are multiple electoral districts, for example in an SMSP, STV, or a multiple-district list-PR system, candidate selection is usually decentralized. Nevertheless, even where there are several local districts and candidates are chosen by local parties, the central party leadership may still exercise a high level of control over local party decisions, by threatening to sanction the local party if it fails to respect the wishes of the party leadership. Hence, even in multiple district systems, candidate selection may be highly centralized for some parties.

The impact is strongest in closed-ballot list-PR systems, where the party decides whether a candidate is on the list, and then where on the list his/her name will appear. On the one hand, the party can offer the ‘carrot’ of a higher position on the list, and hence a greater chance of being elected or remaining in power. On the other hand, there is the ‘stick’ of being placed lower down the list or being removed altogether. These institutions provide a high level of control by party principals over their legislative agents.

In SMSP, fully-open list-PR, and STV systems, if the candidate-selection system is centralized, the party leadership can threaten to remove a candidate from the ballot or prevent a candidate from standing under the name of the party if he/she does not toe the party line. However, in these more candidate-centric systems, a candidate rejected by a party can threaten to stand as an independent. This threat is particularly potent for incumbents as they tend to have higher recognition amongst their voters than the prospective alternative candidate of the party. In a certain sense, then, in these systems, candidate selection/deselection is decided by the voters as well as by the parties.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The European Parliament is a good laboratory for investigating how these claims about the relationship between electoral institutions and how far parties can control their elected representatives works at an empirical level. As Table 1 shows, there is significant variation in the types of electoral institutions used in EP elections since 1979. These systems can be broadly divided into three groups. In the first group are systems with vote-counting and candidate-selection rules where national parties are likely to have a high degree of control over their MEPs. In the second group are systems where MEPs are likely to have a limited amount of autonomy – either as a consequence of semi-open list-PR (despite centralized candidate selection), large district magnitude, or decentralized candidate-selection for some parties. In the third group are systems where MEPs are likely to be highly autonomous – either because of fully-preferential voting systems (STV or full-open list-PR) or because of decentralized candidate-selection systems.

3. A Model of MEP Voting Behavior Under Different Electoral Rules

We can analyze the relationship between electoral rules and MEP behavior more explicitly with the aid of a simple model – see Figure 1. In this model each separate ‘vote decision’ (Yes, No or Abstain) is conceptualized as a game between three players: the EP group of the MEP (EPG), the national party of the MEP (NP), and the MEP.

There are several assumptions behind the game. MEPs have two main goals: re-election and pursuit of their policy-agenda *within* the EP. The MEPs will try to maximize these goals. However, the national party of the MEP is more influential than the EP group on

the ability of the MEP to secure re-election. But, the EP group – through the process of allocation of committee assignments and *rapporteurships*, and controlling the parliamentary agenda – has more influence than the national party on the ability of the MEP to secure policy goals.

There are also two key parameters in the game: (1) the level of conflict, c , between the EPG and NP on the vote on question (which is exogenously determined by ‘nature’); and (2) the probability, p , of the NP punishing the MEP if he/she does not follow the instructions of the NP on the vote in question, which is exogenously determined by the rules under which the MEP is (s)elected. Whereas c is unknown at the start of the game (and is observed only after the first move by the EPG), the MEP makes an separate assessment of the value of p .

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The game begins with a decision by ‘nature’ (N) about the level of conflict between the EPG and NP on the vote. The EPG majority then decides whether the position of the group will be to vote ‘Yes’, ‘No’ or ‘Abstain’ when the item comes before the full plenary session. The EPG’s ‘whips’ then send this information as a ‘voting instruction’ to each MEP in the group. At this stage the EPG is aware that there may be a conflict between the group position and the position of some of the national delegations in the group (i.e. the value of c for some of the MEPs). But the group knows that if enough national delegations felt differently about the issue, then the position of the EPG as a whole would have been different. So the EPG assumes that there will be a conflict for only a minority of their MEPs.

Next, the NP observes the level of c on the issue and decides its position. If $c=0$, the majority in the NP will agree with the EPG majority. Where this occurs, the NP does not bother issuing a separate voting instruction to its MEPs. When this happens, the MEP

assumes that the two principals are in agreement, and hence decides to go along with the majority EPG position, as this will maximize both re-election and policy goals. The game then comes to an end, at *Outcome A*, with the EPG, NP and MEP all voting the same way in the vote, with payoffs for the actors of E_A , N_A and M_A , respectively.

But, if $c=1$, the NP takes a different position from the EPG. Where this occurs, the NP instructs the MEP to toe-the-national-party-line against the position of the EPG. The MEP then decides whether to vote with the NP or the EPG. If the MEPs votes with the NP against the EPG, the game stops at *Outcome B*, with payoffs for the EPG, NP and MEP of E_B , N_B and M_B , respectively.³

But, if the MEP votes with his/her EPG against the NP, the game moves on. The NP must now decide whether or not to punish the MEP for defecting from the national party position – for example, by removing the MEP from the party list in the next election. If the national party does not punish the MEP, the result is *Outcome C*, with payoffs for the EPG, NP and MEP of E_C , N_C and M_C , respectively. If the national party does punish the MEP, the result is *Outcome D*, with payoffs for the EPG, NP and MEP of E_D , N_D and M_D , respectively.

Each of the players has a different preference-ranking of the four outcomes. The EPG is indifferent between E_A , E_C and E_D , since in all these outcomes the MEP votes with the EP group majority. Also, these outcomes are all preferred to E_B , as this outcome involves the MEP voting against the EPG and undermining the level of cohesion of the group and the likelihood that the position of the group will command a majority on the floor of the EP.

The NP, on the other hand, is indifferent between N_A and N_B , as in either of these outcomes the MEP votes with the NP majority. These outcomes are both preferred to N_D , where the MEP is punished for defecting from the national party position. And N_D is preferred to N_C , since the MEP defects from the national party position without the NP being

³ In reality there is another stage in the game here, where the EPG decides whether or not to punish the MEP from defecting from the group majority. I have left this stage out of the game, however, as it does not change any of the equilibria.

able to punish the MEP, and so undermines the ability of the NP to enforce its position in the next conflict.

The ideal outcome for the MEP is M_A , since it allows the MEP to keep the EPG happy without antagonizing the NP – and so maximizes the likelihood of achieving both re-election and internal EP policy goals. Next down the MEP's preference-ordering is M_C , where the MEP votes with the EPG against the NP but is not punished by the national party, and so are still able to secure re-election and internal EP policy goals. Below this outcome is M_B , where the MEP votes with the NP against the EPG, and risks some kind of sanction from the EPG for voting against the group majority. But any sanction by the EPG, such as removal from a particular committee assignment, is not as severe a punishment as prevention from standing in the next EP election. Hence, at the bottom of the MEPs preference-ordering is M_D , where the NP punishes the MEP for voting against its instructions, for example by deselecting the MEP as a candidate in the next election.

With this preference structure different values of c and p produce different equilibria. The levels of conflict and the probability of punishment by a national party are continuous variables. But, because the preference-rankings are ordinal rather than cardinal, we cannot calculate an equilibrium function for all values of p and c . Nevertheless, we can work out the equilibria (by backward induction) for the extreme values of c and p , as Figure 2 shows. If $c = 0$ (no conflict between the EPG and NP), the equilibrium is *Outcome A* regardless of the value of p (no national party instruction, and the MEP voting with the EPG majority). If $c = 1$ (conflict between the EPG and NP) and $p = 1$ (a definite prospect of punishment by the national party), the equilibrium is *Outcome B* (the MEP will expect to be punished and so will chose at stage three of the game to vote with the NP and defect from the EPG). However, if $c = 1$ (conflict) and $p = 0$ (no prospect of punishment), the equilibrium is *Outcome C*; at stage three of the game the MEP knows that the NP will not punish them for defecting, and so will

vote with the EPG position against the NP, in the hope of some kind of reward from the EPG for good behavior (such as a more important committee position or *rapporteurship*).

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Although this game is simple, it is not entirely unrealistic. For example, whereas the EP groups issue voting instructions on all items on the agenda, most national delegations issue instructions only on items where they disagreed with the EP group majority.⁴ And the game produces several predictions that can be tested against the empirical reality:

1. When there is no conflict in the positions of their EP group and national party, MEPs will vote with the position of their EP group.
2. When there is a conflict in the positions of their EP group and national party, MEPs are unlikely to vote against their EP group unless they are elected under institutions that enable the national party to punish them for defying the national party line.
3. National parties which have electoral institutions that enable them to punish their MEPs should never have to use this sanction, as their MEPs should be able to predict their national party's reaction to a defection decision.

On this third prediction, there are several well-known anecdotes about how national parties have demoted particular MEPs who have defied national party instructions. For example, in the 1994 EP elections, Jean Pierre-Cot MEP, who was the leader of the Socialist Group in the 1989-1994 EP, was placed low down on the French Socialist party list in the 1994 elections as punishment for continually refusing to follow instructions from Paris.

⁴ This behaviour by national parties was confirmed in interviews with *inter alia* Richard Corbett MEP (British Labour Party), Michiel van Hulthen MEP (Dutch Labour Party), Heidi Hautala MEP (Finnish Green Party) and Klaus Welle, the secretary-general of the Group of the European People's Party-European Democrats.

Similarly, in the 1999 EP elections, Carole Tongue MEP, who was a high-profile and popular British MEP and *rapporteur* on several pieces of legislation on the regulation of media ownership, was placed at position five on the British Labour Party list in the London region, allegedly as punishment for refusing to tone-down her criticism of Rupert Murdoch – the media mogul and new ally of Tony Blair. Labour had four MEPs elected in London in 1999, and hence Ms. Tongue was not re-elected. But, these anecdotes are just that. Most MEPs know whether their national parties can punish defection, and hence do not find themselves in the positions of Mr. Cot and Ms. Tongue.

But, to test this and the other predictions in a more systematic way, one should look beyond anecdotes, at a large number of individual MEP vote decisions.

4. Operationalization

4.1. The Data and the Dependent Variables: MEP Vote Decisions, 1999-2000

To test the theory, we have collected the decisions of all of the MEPs in all of the roll-call votes in the first year of the 1999-2004 parliament. There were 1,031 roll-call votes between July 1999 and June 2000. Hence, with 626 MEPs, there were 645,406 separate vote decisions. However, some of these decisions are uninteresting: either an MEP was not a member of a party group, or the MEP's national delegation was too small to determine which way the majority of the national party voted (i.e. fewer than three MEPs); or an MEP did not participate in the vote (either the MEP was absent that day or the MEP signed the attendance register but did not exercise a yes, no or abstention vote). Once these decisions are deleted, there are 396,167 vote decisions remaining; by 526 MEPs (82 percent of all MEPs in that

period), from 55 different national parties and 14 member states (no parties from Luxembourg have at least three MEPs).

These basic vote decisions (yes, no or abstain) were then recoded into two separate dependent variables: (1) whether an MEP's vote decision was the same as or different from the decision of the majority of the EP group; and (2) whether an MEP's vote decision was the same as or different from the decision of the majority of the MEP's national party. The relationship between these two variables is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

As predicted, in most cases (85.6 percent of decisions), MEPs vote the same way as the majorities in their EP group and national party (*Outcome A* in the model). Also, MEPs are more likely to defect from their EP group than their national party (13.4 percent compared to 4.1 percent). There were more cases of 'double-defection' (from both EP group and national party) than cases where MEPs voted against their national party but with their EP group. But, only 7,504 of these double-defection decisions (less than 2 percent of all MEP vote decisions in this period) were MEPs expressing a positive view against both their party principals, by either voting 'yes' or 'no' against the majorities of both their EP groups and their national parties. The other 4,746 of double-defection decisions were MEPs voting to 'abstain' either when their two party principals were on the same side (voting 'yes' or 'no' together) or when their two principals were on opposing sides (with one voting 'yes' and the other voting 'no'). This result is partly explained by the propensity of some MEPs to 'abstain' when their EP group and national party take opposite positions.

4.2. Logit Models of MEP Defection, and the Independent Variables

So, when do MEPs vote against their EP group and/or their national party? According to the theory, the decision to defect depends on the electoral rules, controlling for the level of conflict between the EP group and the national party. We can formalize this argument in two separate logit models:

$$(1) \quad Z_1 = \ln\left(\frac{\Pr(Y_1=1)}{1-\Pr(Y_1=1)}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \dots + \beta_{18} X_{18} + \varepsilon_1$$

$$(2) \quad Z_2 = \ln\left(\frac{\Pr(Y_2=1)}{1-\Pr(Y_2=1)}\right) = \beta_{20} + \beta_{21} X_1 + \dots + \beta_{38} X_{18} + \varepsilon_2$$

In these equations, Y_1 and Y_2 are the dependent variables, about whether an MEP defects from (1) or votes with (0) his/her EP group (Y_1) and his/her national party (Y_2). X_1 to X_{18} are the independent variables. β_0 and β_{20} are constants. β_1 to β_{18} and β_{21} to β_{38} are regression coefficients, of the effect of the independent variables X_1 to X_{18} on Z_1 to Z_2 , respectively. ε_1 and ε_2 are error terms.

The Appendix contains full details of the collection and coding of the variables. In brief, there are five categories of independent variables. First, X_1 to X_3 investigate the impact of three basic choices of electoral institutions on MEP defection. X_1 is a dummy variable measuring whether an MEP was elected under candidate-centered or party-centered voting rules. X_2 is a continuous variable measuring the magnitude of a candidate's electoral district. X_3 is a dummy variable measuring whether an MEP was elected under centralized or decentralized candidate-selection rules.

Second, X_4 and X_5 investigate the likely level of policy conflict between an MEP's national party and his/her EP group on the two main dimensions of EU politics. X_4 measures the distance between an MEP's national party and his/her EP Group on the left-right dimension. X_5 measures the distance between an MEP's national party and his/her EP group

on the EU-integration dimension. Given the relevance of both these dimensions to most issues on the EP agenda, these measures should give a good indication of the likely policy conflict between the national parties and EP groups (Hix 2001; Noury 2002).

Third, X_6 is a continuous control variable, measuring the ‘seniority’ of an MEP in the EP. Seniority is operationalized as the length of time an MEP has been a member of the EP. The assumption here is that the more senior an MEP is, the less likely he or she is to be susceptible to pressures from his/her EP group or national party to toe-the-party line. Put another way, the length of time an MEP has been in the EP is assumed to be a good indicator of the influence the MEP has on the leadership of their party group and national delegation, and hence on setting the policy position of the party group/national delegation on items on the EP agenda.

Fourth, X_7 and X_8 are dummy control variables investigating the effect of membership of the two largest party groups on MEP defection. X_7 relates to membership of the European People’s Party-European Democrats (EPP-ED), and X_8 relates to membership of the Party of European Socialists (PES).

Fifth, X_9 to X_{18} are dummy control variables investigating the effect of membership of the ten largest national party delegations on MEP defection – on the center-right and center-left of the five largest EU member states. X_9 relates to membership of the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU). X_{10} relates to membership of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). X_{11} relates to membership of the British Conservative Party. X_{12} relates to membership of the British Labour Party. X_{13} relates to membership of the main French Gaullist party (RPR). X_{14} relates to membership of the French Socialist Party (PS). X_{15} relates to membership of the main center-right party in Italy (Forza Italia-FI). X_{16} relates to membership of the Italian Left Democrats (DS). X_{17} relates to membership of the Spanish

Popular Party (PP). X_{18} relates to membership of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE).

5. Statistical Analysis

5.1. Direction of Beta Coefficients

The theoretical model produces predictions about the direction of the effect of some of these independent variables on the dependent variable, as follows:

Model 1 – EP group defection

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3 < 0$ - the *weaker* the control an MEP's national party has under the electoral rules (X_1 or X_2 or $X_3 = 1$), the *less* likely the MEP will vote against his/her EP group.

$\beta_4, \beta_5 > 0$ - the *greater* the policy distance between an MEP's national party and his/her EP group (as X_4 or X_5 increases), the *more* likely the MEP will vote against his/her EP group.

Model 2 – national party defection

$\beta_{21}, \beta_{22}, \beta_{23} > 0$ - the *weaker* the control an MEP's national party has under the electoral rules (X_1 or X_2 or $X_3 = 1$), the *more* likely the MEP will vote against his/her national party.

$\beta_{24}, \beta_{25} > 0$ - the *greater* the policy distance between an MEP's national party and his/her EP group (as X_4 or X_5 increases), the *more* likely the MEP will vote against his/her national party.

The model does not have any specific predictions about the direction of the other beta coefficients relating to the other independent variables.

Table 3 shows the results of the two logit models. With these dummy variables, the beta coefficients compare the effects of the independent variables against a base-line group of MEPs. This base-line group are the MEPs who are not members of either of the two largest party groups (all ten national party delegations included in the analysis are either members of the EPP group or the PES group).

Taking the model of MEP defection from the EP groups first, an immediate point is that the effect of most of the independent variables is highly significant. This result is primarily a consequence of the extremely large sample. More importantly for the theory, the direction of the beta coefficients are exactly as predicted. The less control a national party has on its MEPs as a result of the electoral institutions – if there is a candidate-centered voting system, if there is a large district magnitude, and if candidate selection is decentralized – the MEPs from this national party are less likely to vote against the majority position of their EP group. Moreover, this finding is confirmed when controlling for policy conflict between national parties and the EP group. The further an MEP's national party is from his/her EP group (on either the left-right or the EU integration dimension), the more likely the MEP will vote against the EP group.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Similarly, in the model of MEP defection from national parties, the direction of the beta coefficients are exactly as predicted. If an MEP is elected under candidate-centered voting rules, or in a district with a large magnitude, or where candidate-selection is decentralized, the MEP is more likely to vote against his/her national party. In addition, the further an MEP's national party is from his/her EP group, the more likely the MEP will be torn between the position of the EP group and national party, and hence vote against the

national party. However, in this second model, the effect of ideological distance on the EU integration dimension is not significant.

Regarding the other variables, the longer an MEP has been in the EP, the less likely the MEP is to vote against from his/her EP group, but the more likely the MEP is to vote against his/her national party. This suggests that if an MEP remains in the EP for a long time, he or she is likely to take up a position of authority in the EP group, but is not necessarily likely to take up a position of authority in a national party delegation.

On the effect of EP group membership on MEP voting behavior, MEPs in the center-right European People's Party-European Democrats are less likely to vote against their EP group (compared to MEPs who are not members of either of the two largest groups) than MEPs in the center-left Party of European Socialists. However, MEPs in the Party of European Socialists are more likely to vote against the national parties.

Looking at the effects of national party membership that are significant, MEPs from the main British and Italian center-right parties (the Conservative Party and Forza Italia, respectively) are more likely to vote against their EP group compared to the base-line group of MEPs, whereas MEPs from the main German, British, French and Spanish center-left parties (the Christian Democratic Union, Labour Party, Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party, respectively) are less likely to vote against their EP group. British and Italian MEPs on the center-right are also more likely to vote against their national parties, whereas the members of all the other main national party delegations in the EP are less likely to vote against their national parties than the base-line group of MEPs.

5.2. Predicted Probabilities of Defecting

These results consequently confirm that electoral rules have an impact on how MEP's behave vis-à-vis their EP groups and national parties. But, to investigate this impact in more detail

we need to look beyond the direction of the effects, to a substantive interpretation of the strength of these effects (e.g. Long 1997). In logit analysis this requires calculating the conditional probability of MEPs voting against their EP groups/national parties for different values of the independent variables, as follows:

$$\text{Probability (Pr}(Y = 1)) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-Z}}$$

Where: e = the natural logarithmic base = 2.7214,

$Y = Y_1$ from equation (1) or Y_2 from equation (2), above, and

$Z = Z_1$ from equation (1) or Z_2 from equation (2), above.

Table 4 shows the effects of the independent variables on the probability that an MEP will vote against his/her EP group or national party. Focusing on the key claims of the theory, the individual effects of each of the three types of electoral institutions might seem rather small. However, the cumulative effects are large. An MEP elected via institutions that give a high level of control to the national party is approximately 8 percent more likely to vote against his/her EP group and approximately 6 percent less likely to vote against his/her national party, than an MEP elected under the alternative set of institutions.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The interaction between the cumulative institutional effects on MEP voting behavior and the level of policy conflict between an MEP's principals is illustrated Figure 3 – keeping all other independent variables constant (at their mean).

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

As Figure 3a shows, as policy conflict increases, the incentive for national parties to put pressure on their MEPs also increases. As a result, the gap between the likelihood that an MEP voting will vote against his/her EP group under the two sets of electoral institutions increases. Where there is no policy conflict between the two parties, MEPs elected under institutions that enable ‘strong’ national party control are approximately 5 percent more likely to vote against their EP group than MEPs elected under institutions that enable ‘weak’ national party control (12 percent compared to 7 percent). And, where there is a high level of policy conflict between the two parties (represented by a distance of 3 on the left-right scale), MEPs elected under institutions that enable strong national party control are approximately 10 percent more likely to vote against their EP group than MEPs elected under institutions that enable ‘weak’ national party control (25 percent compared to 15 percent).

The effect is reversed with defection from national party positions – as Figure 3b shows. If a national party has strong control over its MEPs, these MEPs are less likely to vote against their national party, regardless of the level of conflict between the national party and the EP group. Where there is no policy conflict between the two parties, MEPs elected under institutions that allow strong national party control are approximately 3 percent less likely to vote against their national party than MEPs elected under institutions that prevent strong party control (5 percent compared to 2 percent). And, if there is a high level of policy conflict, which increases the incentives for national parties to pressure their MEPs to vote the ‘right’ way, MEPs elected under institutions that allow strong national party control are approximately 4 percent less likely to vote against their national party than MEPs elected under institutions that prevent strong party control (7 percent compared to 3 percent).

6. Conclusion

One of the most widely-known propositions of political science in the public sphere is that ‘electoral institutions matter’ for political outcomes. Since the initial propositions of Maurice Duverger in the 1950s, the effect of electoral rules on such phenomena as the proportionality of representation in a parliament, the number of parties in a party system, or the stability of cabinets in parliamentary systems has been thoroughly theorized and investigated. However, there has been less theoretical or empirical research on how electoral institutions shape legislative behavior at an individual level. By changing the incentives for elected political agents and their party principals, electoral rules should determine, *inter alia*, the cohesiveness of parliamentary parties, how responsive elected politicians are to their electors, and how responsive they are to their ‘selectors’. With a variety of electoral and candidate selection rules used to elect MEPs, the European Parliament is an ideal laboratory for investigating these hypotheses.

The proposed theoretical model of ‘how MEPs vote’ predicted that when there is a policy conflict between MEPs’ two party principals – their national party and EP group – the MEPs are more likely to vote against their EP group and with their national party if their national party has electoral institutions that enable the party leadership to ‘punish’ its MEPs.

This prediction was confirmed in statistical analysis of almost 400,000 vote decisions in the current EP. In these votes, national parties were more able to enforce their wishes on their MEPs if the MEP was elected under institutions which provided national parties with ‘strong’ controls over their MEPs – specifically, ‘closed’ list-proportional representation, or small district magnitude, or centralized candidate selection. Furthermore, the effects of these three types of electoral institutions were cumulative. A closed list-PR system with centralized

candidate-selection gives more power to national party leaders than a closed list-PR system with decentralized candidate-selection.

The theoretical model and these empirical findings consequently has important implications for the design of a single electoral system for the EP. If a system is chosen which gives control to national parties – through closed party lists, small districts, and centralized candidate-selection systems – party cohesion in the EP will break down. But, if electoral institutions are chosen which limit the ability of national parties to control their MEPs, MEPs will be more likely to respond to voting instructions from their European party principals, and so party cohesion in the EP will be high.

However, it is a separate question whether cohesive transnational parties in the EP is a good or bad thing for the democratic accountability of the EU. A case could be made either way. On the one hand, with cohesive parties, there should be an efficient connection between transnational party electoral promises and political action at the European level, and parties should be able to rally their troops to oppose or support candidates for the Commission President. But, the cost of cohesive parties in the EP might be a weaker connection between MEPs and national parties – which will remain the main political actors in the EU, and the main targets of voters' support and aspirations in the EU polity as long as EP elections remain 'second-order national contests'.

Appendix. Coding of the Variables

Dependent Variables

Y_1 = Whether the MEP voted the same way or against the majority of his/her EP group in a particular vote – a dummy variable, coded 1 if the MEP defected from the majority, 0 otherwise. Mean = .134. Standard deviation = .341.

Y_1 = Whether the MEP voted the same way or against the majority of his/her national party delegation in the EP in a particular vote – a dummy variable, coded 1 if the MEP defected from the majority, 0 otherwise. Mean = .041. Standard deviation = .199.

These data were collected from the roll-call voting records in the Minutes of the EP Plenary Sessions, which are published in the Official Journal of the European Communities. These data are part of the ‘How MEPs Vote’ project, which is collecting and analyzing the total population of roll-call votes in the EP, from 1979 to 2004. Details of the project can be found on the web-site of the European Parliament Research Project:

http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/eprg/research-projects.htm#How_MEP's_vote.

Independent Variables 1: Electoral Institutions

X_1 = Whether the MEP was elected in the 1999 EP elections via a candidate-centered or party-centered voting system – a dummy variable, coded 1 if elected under a fully-open list-PR system or STV, 0 otherwise. Mean = .063. Standard deviation = .243.

X_2 = The magnitude of the district in which the MEP was elected in the 1999 EP elections – a continuous variable, ranging from 3 to 99. Mean = 49.8. Standard deviation = 36.5.

X_3 = Whether the candidate-selection procedure for choosing the MEP in the 1999 EP elections was centralized or decentralized – a dummy variable, coded 1 if centralized candidate-selection, 0 otherwise. Mean = .298. Standard deviation = .457.

The data for variables X_1 and X_2 were collected from EP documents on the electoral rules used in each member state in the June 1999 EP elections (European Parliament 1999). The data for variable X_3 were based on a survey of MEPs and national party officials by Tapio Raunio on relations between national parties and MEPs (Raunio 2000). One of the survey questions on

how candidates are selected for EP elections: by national party organs (such as the national executive committee of the party); or by sub-national party organs (such as meetings of regional or local party officials or party members).

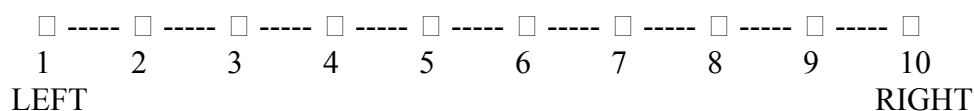
Independent Variables 2: Policy Conflict Between the National Parties and EP Groups

X_4 = The absolute distance on the left-right dimension between the mean self-placement of the members of an MEP's national delegation and the mean position of the members of the MEP's EP party group – a continuous variable between 0 and 2.4. Mean = .669. Standard deviation = .504.

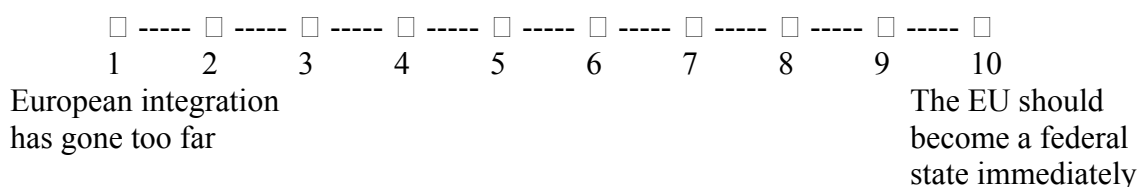
X_5 = The absolute distance on the EU integration dimension between the mean self-placement of the members of an MEP's national delegation and the mean position of the members of the MEP's EP party group – a continuous variable between .005 and 3.54. Mean = 1.078. Standard deviation = .801.

The data for variables X_4 and X_5 were collected from a survey of MEPs in September 1999, conducted by European Parliament Research Group (EPRG):

Question 17. Where would you place yourself on the Left-Right spectrum?



Question 19. Where would you place yourself on the question of European integration?



The survey was completed by 195 MEPs (31 percent of the 626 members), and these returns constitute a good sample of the total population of MEPs. See Hix (forthcoming).

Control Variables: Seniority, EP Group Membership, National Party Membership

X_6 = The number of years from when the MEP was first elected to the EP to 2001 – a continuous variable between 0 and 21. Mean = 4.79. Standard deviation = 5.37.

- X_7 = If the MEP is a member of the European People's Party-European Democrats (EPP-ED) – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the EPP-ED group, 0 otherwise. Mean = .411. Standard deviation = .492.
- X_8 = If the MEP is a member of the Party of European Socialists (PES) – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the PES group, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.
- X_9 = If the MEP is a member of the German CDU – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the CDU, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.
- X_{10} = If the MEP is a member of the German SPD – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the SPD, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.
- X_{11} = If the MEP is a member of the British Conservative Party – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the Conservative Party, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.
- X_{12} = If the MEP is a member of the British Labour Party – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the Labour Party, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.
- X_{13} = If the MEP is a member of the French RPR – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the RPR, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.
- X_{14} = If the MEP is a member of the French PS – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the PS, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.
- X_{15} = If the MEP is a member of Forza Italia (FI) – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of FI, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.
- X_{16} = If the MEP is a member of the Italian DS – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the DS, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.

X_{17} = If the MEP is a member of the Spanish PP – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the PP, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.

X_{18} = If the MEP is a member of the Spanish PSOE – a dummy variable, coded 1 if a member of the PSOE, 0 otherwise. Mean = .342. Standard deviation = .474.

The data for these variables were collected from the ‘gray lists’ of the individual characteristics of the members of the EP, which are published approximately every six months by the EP.

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Table 1. Electoral Institutions Used in European Parliament Elections

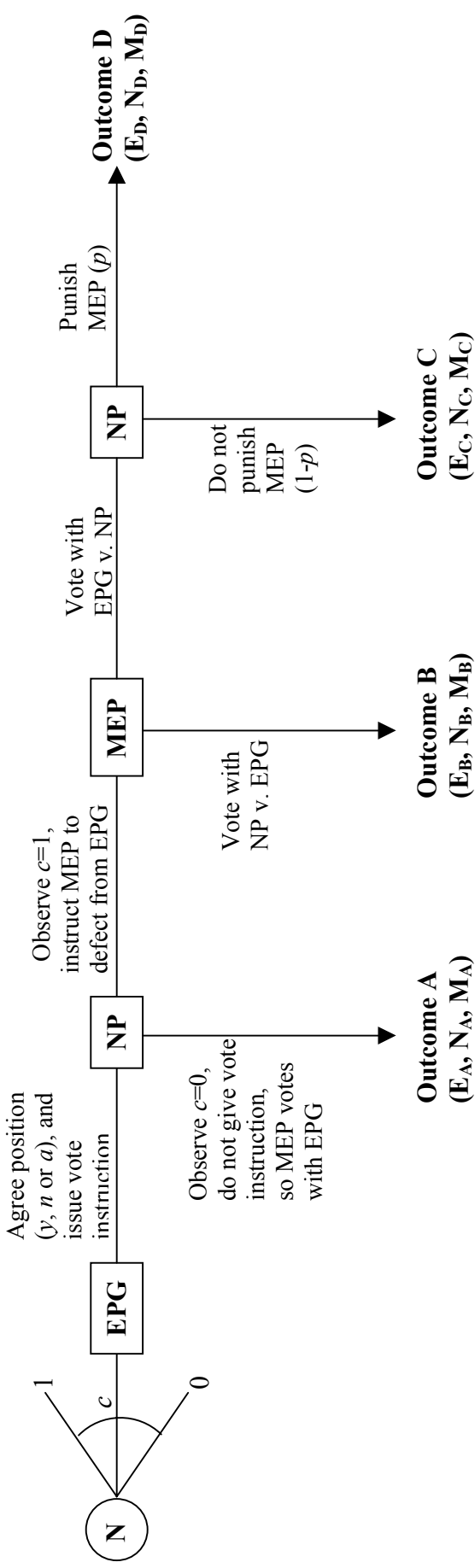
<i>Member state (election)</i>	<i>No. of MEPs¹</i>	<i>Electoral System²</i>	<i>Ballot Type</i>	<i>No. of constituencies</i>	<i>Mean district magnitude¹</i>	<i>Threshold (nationally)</i>	<i>Candidates selection³</i>
Most party leadership control							
Den.-Greenland (79-84)	1	SMSP	-	1	1	-	Centralized
UK-N.Ireland (1979-99)	3	STV	-	1	3	-	Centralized
Austria (1996-99)	21	PR (d'Hondt)	Closed	1	21	4%	Centralized
Greece (1981-99)	24/25	PR (Hagenbach)	Closed	1	24/25	3%	Centralized
Portugal (1987-99)	24/25	PR (d'Hondt)	Closed	1	24/25	-	Centralized
Spain (1987-99)	60/64	PR (d'Hondt)	Closed	1	60/64	-	Centralized
France (1979-99)	81/87	PR (d'Hondt/Hare)	Closed	1	81/87	5%	Centralized
Luxembourg (1979-99)	6	PR (Hagenbach)	Semi	1	6	-	Centralized
Belgium (1989-99)	24/25	PR (d'Hondt)	Semi	3	8	-	Centralized
Belgium (1979-84)	24	PR (d'Hondt)	Semi	2	12	-	Centralized
Sweden (1995-99)	22	PR (St. Laguë)	Semi	1	22	4%	Centralized
Netherlands (1979-99)	25/31	PR (d'Hondt)	Semi	1	25/31	-	Centralized
UK-Britain (1999)	84	PR (d'Hondt)	Closed	11	8	-	Central./Decentralized
Germany (1979-99)	81/99	PR (Hare)	Closed	1	81/99	5%	Central./Decentralized
Den.-mainland (89-99)	15/16	PR (d'Hondt)	Fully	1	15/16	-	Centralized
Finland (1996-99)	16	PR (d'Hondt)	Fully	1	16	-	Central./Decentralized
UK-Britain (1979-89)	78/84	SMSP	-	78/84	1	-	Decentralized
Ireland (1979-99)	15	STV	-	4	4	-	Decentralized
Italy (1979-84)	81	PR (Hare)	Semi	5	16	-	Decentralized
Italy (1999)	87	PR (Hare)	Semi	1	87	-	Decentralized
Most candidate independence							

Notes: 1. The number of MEPs per member state was changed in 1994.

2. PR = list-based proportional representation, STV = single-transferable-vote, SMSP = single-member-simple-plurality (i.e. FPTP)

3. Central./Decentralized = some parties have centralized candidate-selection while other have decentralized candidate-selection.

Figure 1. The MEP Vote Decision Game



Key: EPG = EP group (with payoffs $E_{A,B,C,D}$)
NP = national party (with payoffs $N_{A,B,C,D}$)
MEP = Member of the European Parliament (with payoffs $M_{A,B,C,D}$)
 c = level of conflict between national party and EP group
 p = probability of NP punishing MEP

Preferences:

$E_A = E_C = E_D > E_B$
 $N_A = N_B > N_D > N_C$
 $M_A > M_C > M_B > M_D$

Figure 2. Equilibria with Varying Conflict (c) and Probability of Punishment (p)

		Probability of punishment by national party (p)	
		Punishment ($p = 1$)	No punishment ($p = 0$)
Issue conflict between national party and EP group (c)	Conflict ($c = 1$)	Outcome B (MEP votes with NP v. EPG)	Outcome C (MEP votes with EPG v. NP)
	No conflict ($c = 0$)	Outcome A (no national party instruction, MEP votes with EPG)	Outcome A (no national party instruction, MEP votes with EPG)

Table 2. Analyzed MEP Vote Decisions, July 1999-June 2000

		Decision in relation to national party		
		Vote with national party majority	Defect from national party majority	Total
Decision in relation to EP group	Vote with EP group majority	338,997 (85.6%)	4,036 (1.0%)	343,033 (86.6%)
	Defect from EP group majority	40,884 (10.3%)	12,250 (3.1%)	53,134 (13.4%)
	Total	379,881 (95.9%)	16,286 (4.1%)	396,167 (100.0%)

Table 3. Logit Estimates of EP Group and National Party Defection

	<u>Model 1</u>		<u>Model 2</u>	
	DV = defection from EP group (1=defect)		DV = defection from national party (1=defect)	
	Coef.	t-stat.	Coef.	t-stat.
Constant	-2.0042***	-89.10	-3.7478***	-96.59
<i>Electoral institutions</i>				
Voting system (1=candidate-centered)	-.1351***	-5.88	.2250***	5.73
District magnitude	-.0016***	-6.10	.0100***	23.21
Candidate selection (1=decentralized)	-.4273***	-17.87	.2947***	7.60
<i>Policy conflict between NP and EP group</i>				
Left-right distance of NP from EP group	.2950***	24.08	.1041***	5.31
EU integration distance of NP from EP group	.1064***	13.11	-.0299	-1.94
<i>Seniority</i>				
Length of time in the EP	-.0057***	-6.02	.0163***	10.92
<i>EP group membership</i>				
European People's Party-European Democrats	-.6179***	-34.50	-.0212	-0.79
Party of European Socialists	.6169***	32.80	.1592***	4.28
<i>National party membership</i>				
CDU-Germany	.0872*	2.04	-.7647***	-12.60
SPD-Germany	-.5288***	-16.20	-.9038***	-15.44
Conservatives-United Kingdom	1.5367***	52.49	.2454***	4.93
Labour-United Kingdom	-.3940***	-17.32	-.3670***	-7.05
RPR-France	.0852	1.48	-.6122***	-6.75
PS-France	-.6466***	-20.37	-.5772***	-10.36
FI-Italy	.6296***	14.67	.7983***	14.76
DS-Italy	-.0833*	-2.10	-.0977	-1.41
PP-Spain	-.0834*	-2.54	-.4817***	-9.85
PSOE-Spain	-.7782***	-26.11	-.6043***	-10.93
N (no. of vote decisions)	396,167		396,167	
Log likelihood	-149615.83		-67107.65	

Note: In a two-tailed test, $\Pr(t > 1.960) = .05$ (*), $\Pr(t > 2.576) = .01$ (**), $\Pr(t > 3.090) = .001$ (***)

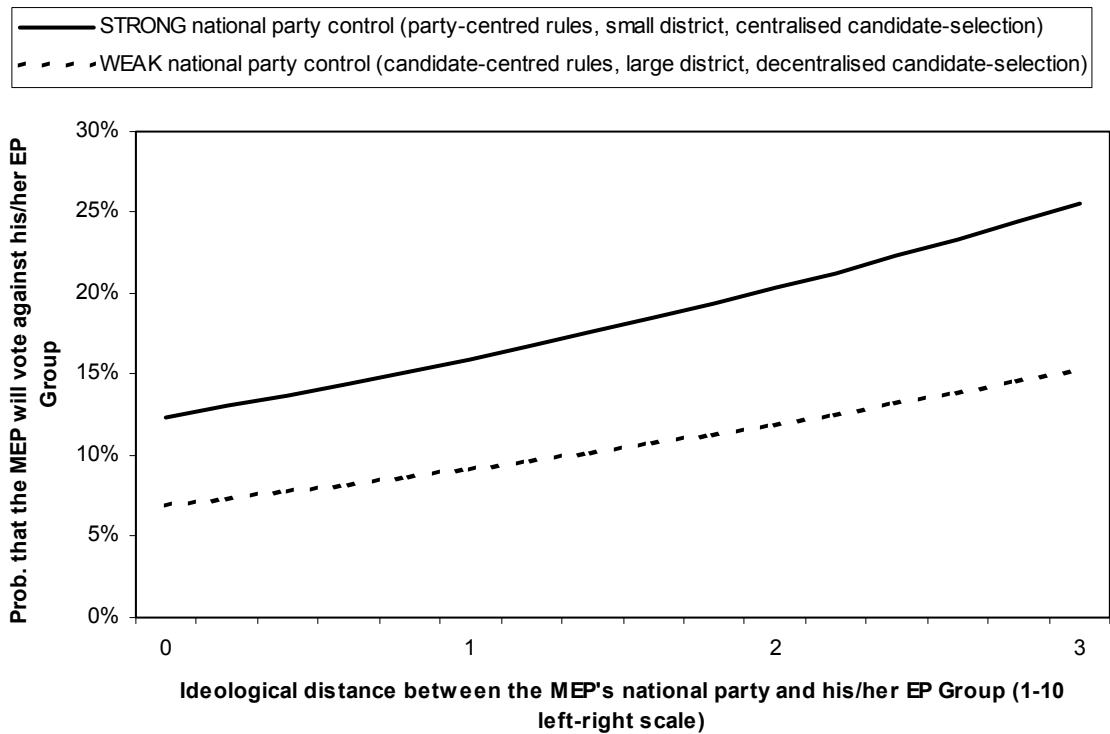
Table 4. Predicted Probabilities of MEP Defection

	Effect of the variable on the probability that an MEP will defect from his/her ...	
	EP Group	National Party
<i>Electoral institutions</i>		
Voting system (1=candidate-centered)	-1.39 %	0.93 %
District magnitude	-1.67 %	3.76 %
Candidate selection (1=decentralized)	-4.31 %	1.18 %
<i>Policy conflict between NP and EP group</i>		
Left-right distance of NP from EP group	8.58 %	1.00 %
EU integration distance of NP from EP group	4.28 %	-0.39 %
<i>Seniority</i>		
Length of time in the EP	-1.25 %	1.41 %
<i>EP group membership</i>		
European People's Party-European Democrats	-6.40 %	-0.08 %
Party of European Socialists	7.16 %	0.62 %
<i>National party membership</i>		
CDU-Germany	0.96 %	-2.21 %
SPD-Germany	-4.78 %	-2.44 %
Conservatives-United Kingdom	25.61 %	1.02 %
Labour-United Kingdom	-3.71 %	-1.20 %
RPR-France	0.94 %	-1.77 %
PS-France	-5.55 %	-1.73 %
FI-Italy	8.42 %	4.33 %
DS-Italy	-0.87 %	-0.35 %
PP-Spain	-0.87 %	-1.50 %
PSOE-Spain	-6.39 %	-1.79 %

Note: These data are the difference between the probability of defecting at the lowest value of the independent variable and the highest value of the independent variable. See Long (1997), p. 66.

Figure 3. Probability of Defection, Varying Electoral Rules and Ideological Conflict

a. Defection from EP Group



b. Defection from National Party

