



# **Roll-Call Votes and Party Discipline in the European Parliament: Reconsidering MEP Voting Behavior**

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\*EPRG was founded in March 1998 and brings together some of the leading scholars of the European Parliament from Europe and North America. EPRG aims to improve our understanding of all aspects of political behavior and institutions in the European Parliament, and to raise the profile and sophistication of research on the European Parliament.

Over the past ten years, possibly the most dramatic institutional development in the European Union (EU) has been the augmentation of the legislative powers of the European Parliament (EP). Until 1987 the EU legislative process required only that the EP be consulted before the Council of Ministers decided EU legislation. Since then the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty, and the Amsterdam Treaty have created and gradually expanded a more powerful legislative role for the EP. Indeed, for a broad range of policy areas, the EP can now exercise a legislative veto. Consequently, understanding the decisions of the EP on legislative proposals is becoming increasingly important for explaining legislative outcomes in the EU.

The traditional solution is to examine roll-call votes (RCVs) and try to identify determinants of why legislators vary in their voting behavior. This empirical tool is more than adequate for settings like modern-day Congress, where almost all votes are by roll call. However, the EP, like many other legislative chambers, uses RCVs much less than universally. In fact, only about fifteen percent of all votes in the EP are made by roll call.

If these votes are a random sample of the universe of votes, generalizing from such a sample is not a problem. Again, however, like many other legislative chambers, this requirement is not met. Rather, there is evidence that RCVs are strategic choices made for the purpose of furthering the goals of the actor or actors choosing to call the RCV. As a result, it is crucial to understand the process by which RCV requests are made and take that into account when trying to analyze legislative voting behavior. If we do not, we risk: 1) finding relationships that only exist in the sub-sample and falsely generalizing them to the universe of votes; and 2) finding non-relationships in the sub-sample that actually do exist if this selection bias is taken into account. For example, Brzinski, et. al. (1998) finds no evidence national-delegation membership influences how a MEP votes when looking at roll call data. However, if the preferences of the various national-delegations influences the

decision of chamber leaders to call RCVs, then there would be an effect that could not be observed by looking at RCVs in isolation. Thus, controlling for the decision to call a RCV is crucial for understanding MEP voting behavior.

There are two predominant arguments made for why RCVs are requested in the EP: to position-take and to discipline votes. The position-taking explanations involve Party Group and/or national delegation leaders calling votes so that they can demonstrate to a third party, generally the public, the position of their group or delegation and/or the position of an opposing group or delegation on some issue (Corbett, Jacobs, and Shackleton, 1995: 160; Tsebelis and Kreppel, forthcoming). The disciplining explanation again focuses upon Party Group and/or national delegation leaders calling recorded votes, but this time so that they can ensure that their constituent membership votes the way the leader wants (Corbett, et. al., 1995: 160; Tsebelis and Kreppel, forthcoming; Raiuno, 1996: 117).

The purpose of this paper is to make an initial cut at understanding: 1) to what degree these motivations lead to a potential selection-bias problem when looking at RCVs; and 2) to what degree there is preliminary evidence indicating that selection-bias is occurring. While both existing explanations for the use of RCVs are interesting and important, this study focuses much more upon the disciplining argument for three reasons. First, it is a relatively simple exercise to demonstrate how position taking will lead to significant selection bias compared to that of vote disciplining. Thus, much more of the theoretical analysis is spent on the disciplining argument. Second, Tsebelis and Kreppel (forthcoming) already provide much stronger initial evidence in support of the position-taking hypothesis than we could reasonably do here. Thus, the empirical section focuses solely upon the disciplining argument.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the use of RCVs to discipline Party Group or national delegation membership by the respective leaders is, or should be, much more

controversial. Leaders do not have to wield power to use RCVs to position take. If a group or delegation has a position that a leader wants to make public, the RCV is requested and the position becomes public by definition. However, if a group or delegation leader wants to discipline his/her constituent membership by calling a RCV, that leader has to be able to exert some influence over the members that would have voted against the leader's position without a RCV. That is, there must be some cost that the leader can impose upon a member to get them to swing a vote. But, the degree to which chamber leaders, particularly Party Group leaders, can impose costs is unclear. Recall that Brzinski, et. al. (1998) found no evidence of national delegation membership mattering in RCVs. Thus, not only will this study allow us to assess in what way, and to what degree, we need to be concerned about selection bias problems when looking at RCVs, but it also provides a tool to assess whether Party Group and/or national delegation leaders can influence individual MEPs.

In the first section of the paper we review the literature on roll-call votes in the European Parliament, paying particular attention to explanations for requesting a RCV. In the second section, we develop a formal model of how RCVs can be used to discipline MEPs. Based on this model, we generate predictions identifying the conditions under which Party Groups and national delegations will request a roll-call vote. These predictions allow us to assess: 1) whether and when RCVs should diverge from typical votes in terms of party group cohesion; and 2) how calling RCVs affects policy outcomes. In the third section of the paper we discuss several empirical implications of this model. Here we also return to the role of position taking, and present a brief discussion of how using RCVs to position-take can lead to selection bias. In the fourth section, we perform several preliminary tests of hypotheses derived from the disciplining model. And, in the fifth we conclude.

## **Section I : The Decision to Call a Roll-Call Vote**

Most of the literature on MEP voting behavior consists of empirical studies of RCVs. Using roll-call votes as the unit of analysis, these studies have demonstrated systematic patterns in MEP voting and turnout based on Party Group affiliation, the legislative procedure, and the type of legislation (Tsebelis and Kreppel forthcoming; Kreppel 1998a; Brzinski, et. al. 1998; Scully 1997; Raunio 1996; Brzinski 1996; Attina 1990). Further, certain of the studies, e.g. Brzinski, et. al. (1998), find no evidence that nationality influences MEP voting behavior. Thus, RCV studies provide evidence that when MEPs vote, they tend to vote largely with their own parties and, when they do not, it is not because national influences pull MEPs away from the Party Group position.

From this evidence it is tempting to inductively conclude that Party Groups matter more than national parties. Once this conclusion is made, several others follow by implication. First, it suggests that the left/right political dimension that dominates national politics can be reasonably applied to European Union politics. After all, Party Groups generally can be ordered by the left/right dimension. Second, as Kreppel (1998a: 218) claims, if MEPs vote according to Party Group, it is then reasonable to use Party Group policy positions as proxies for constituent MEP policy positions. And finally, if Party Groups, and not national parties, structure MEP voting behavior, then it speaks well of the possibility that the EP really is acting as a direct representative of the European public, rather than as yet another conduit for national politics (see Carrubba and Gabel, 1998).

While it is tempting to make these claims, it is premature. All that can really be said is that, *conditional on a RCV being requested*, Party Group membership is a better predictor of MEP voting behavior than nationality. This claim is limiting in two ways. First, as stated previously, RCVs are not the *modus operandi* of the EP. While it only a RCV only requires either one Party Group or 29 MEPs to submitting a written request, only about 15% of total votes in the EP are by roll call. Of course, this narrow sampling is not a problem if RCVs are

a random sample of the universe of votes. However, Party Groups call the vast majority of RCVs, and they may use them strategically. For example, if national-delegation influence is correlated with what goes to RCV and what remains unrecorded, say because Party Groups do not want national influences to be in the public record, we might never observe national delegation preferences mattering, even though those preferences are decisive determinants of MEP voting behavior across the vast majority of votes. Thus, without a theory of RCV requests, we can make no general claims about the role of Party Groups or nationality in MEP voting behavior.

Second, we cannot even claim that Party Groups influence MEP voting behavior on RCVs. All we have is an observed correlation in RCV voting behavior among MEPs of the same Party Group. This correlation could arise because Party Groups somehow structure MEP voting behavior (i.e. Party Groups influence constituent MEPs), or because members of the same Party Group have similar preferences.

Having recognized these limitations, we then have to limit the other implications from the RCV data correspondingly. For example, Kreppel's claim is correct as long as it is narrowly applied. If MEPs vote according to Party Group *on RCVs*, it is reasonable to use Party Group policy positions as proxies for constituent MEP policy positions *on RCVs*.<sup>1</sup> Of course, if there is an underlying factor that dictates whether Party Group or national delegation influences are better determinants of MEP voting behavior in RCVs, and it just happens that Party Group influence traditionally has been stronger, then Kreppel's approach will mis-characterize MEP preferences on RCVs if the underlying determinant ever changes. The same narrowing has to be done to the claim that the left/right dimension is proven to characterize EU politics as well. The most we can say is that the traditional domestic

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<sup>1</sup> This is in fact her position, although it is not necessarily recognized as such broadly.

left/right dimension seems to characterize RCVs, and it will be shown that even this conclusion is hard to draw.

## **II. A Theory of Roll-Call Vote Requests**

So, why do Party Groups request RCVs? Broadly, scholars identify two types of reasons: position-taking and outcome-influencing. Corbett, Jacobs, and Shackleton (1995: 160) contend that Party Groups use RCVs to register their position publicly and to embarrass other groups by publicly revealing their position. Similarly, Tsebelis and Kreppel (forthcoming) claim that Party Groups use roll-calls to differentiate themselves from other groups. All three of these explanations are basically applications of Mayhew's (1974) position-taking argument and the depiction by Cox and McCubbins (1993) of "branding" (i.e. as a product of position-taking). Rather than caring about actual policy outcomes, legislators want to go on record with politically popular positions and, by extension, get their opponents on record with politically unpopular positions.

Scholars have also argued that RCVs are requested to influence the outcomes of votes. Corbett, et. al., (1995: 160), Tsebelis and Kreppel (forthcoming), and Raiuno (1996: 117) all claim that Party Group leaders use RCVs to control MEPs. By calling a RCV, Party Group leaders can observe MEP behavior and enforce party discipline.

While suggestive, these accounts of roll-call votes lack sufficient detail to generate predictions about the conditions under which Party Groups will request RCVs. And, without a fully-specified causal theory, we cannot identify clear predictions about when or whether the different reasons for requesting a RCV will be relevant. Consequently, we will develop a causal model based upon the second argument: that RCVs are used to influence policy outcomes. The discussion of the position-taking explanation, for the reasons previously

stated, will be discussed more in subsequent sections. In deriving results, we focus on empirically observable predictions, such as levels of cohesion and who will win the RCVs.

The fundamental issue underlying our model is whether Party Groups and/or national delegation leaders use RCVs strategically as a tool to influence policy outcomes. Of course, for leaders to influence outcomes by calling RCVs, they must have some credible powers to sanction and/or reward. Thus, below we define a model that characterizes RCV requests assuming leaders can discipline votes, using it to predict the conditions under which RCV requests will be made and how representative RCVs should be of the universe of votes when used for this purpose.

Note that we are agnostic on the question of to what degree Party Group and national delegation leaders can discipline votes. Rather, this model provides the framework to test the theory that RCVs are used to discipline votes, and thereby the underlying assumption that these actors *can* discipline votes.

In the empirical section we return to the question of when RCVs would be used for other purposes, and what that tells us about the representativeness of RCVs overall. Looking ahead, RCV representativeness turns out to be quite complicated and depends upon a number of previously unmeasured and uncontrolled for factors. However, the data necessary to determine representativeness is collectable.

#### *a. Actors and Goals:*

The *Roll-call Vote Game* involves three actors: MEPs, Party Group leaders, and national delegation leaders. National delegation leaders are simply the heads of each Party Group's national delegations. Within the European Socialist Party Group, for example, there are national delegations from the French Socialist Party and the German Social Democratic Party. The Party Group leadership consists of MEPs elected by the Party Group as a whole.



We assume there is a finite number of MEPs (that is greater than one) and that each MEP can only belong to one Party Group and one national delegation. We impose no further restrictions on the number of MEPs, Party Groups or national delegations. Our model is therefore applicable to an EP with varying numbers of Party Groups, national delegations, and MEPs.

We assume these actors seek to influence policy. Specifically, they have preferences over a single spatial policy dimension.<sup>2</sup> Each actor is represented on this dimension by her ideal point and we assume she has Euclidean preferences on this policy dimension--i.e., an MEP's utility from a policy decreases with the distance between her ideal point and the proposed policy.

We assume that each national delegation leader represents the median voter of her national party delegation. This assumption rests on the expectation that MEPs, when nominating a national delegation leader, are unsure of exactly how the legislative process will play out over the next year. As such, it is unlikely there would be strategic voting in the nomination process. Without any incentive to vote strategically, majority rule would yield the national delegation's median preference.

The Party Group leadership is more difficult to define. In one sense, the Party Group leadership consists of national delegation leaders. However, in another sense, the Party Group leadership is independent, elected by the Party Group as a whole. Thus, we assume, similar to the national delegation leaders, that the Party Group leaders represent the median voter in their Party Groups.

We assume that MEPs, Party Group leaders, and national party delegation leaders all care about influencing policy. The most obvious way to do that on a legislative vote is through their individual votes. However, MEPs can also influence policy through their

position on influential committees and other leadership positions within their Party Groups.<sup>3</sup> These positions are distributed by the Party Groups, but national delegation leaders often have a strong influence on the final distribution (Kreppel 1998b). Thus, MEPs care not only about the intrinsic value of the policy (i.e., how far the policy adopted by the EP diverges from the MEP's ideal point) but how the leadership will view that vote (Carrubba and Gabel 1998; Gabel and Hix 1998). That is, the vote choice is instrumentally valuable to the MEP, as it may prove costly or beneficial to her pursuit of policy influence more generally.<sup>4</sup> The utility function that characterizes these preferences is stated below:

$$U_j = f(x, I_j) + C_{pg} + C_{nd}$$

where  $x$  is the policy under consideration,  $I_j$  is the MEP's ideal point,  $C_{pg}$  is the reward or punishment imposed by the Party Group of which the MEP is a member and  $C_{nd}$  is the reward or punishment imposed by the national delegation of which the MEP is a member. Note that each leader is free to threaten sanctions of any value from some maximal punishment to some maximal reward, where there is no assumption over what those values are ( $C_i \in [\underline{C}, \bar{C}]$ ). For example, if  $\underline{C} = \bar{C} = 0$ , the leader has no ability to discipline votes. The more negative  $\underline{C}$  and/or the more positive  $\bar{C}$ , the greater the leader's capacity to discipline votes. A MEP's utility is assumed to be decreasing in the distance between the MEP's ideal policy and the actual policy passed and additively decreasing in the costs that can be imposed by the MEP's Party Group leader and by the MEP's national delegation leader.

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, the model can be generalized to an n-dimensional space, but for ease of exposition we focus on the one-dimensional case.

<sup>3</sup> For example, having committee positions can influence what proposals and amendments are reported to the floor for consideration. We do not endogenize bill proposal in our model, rather it is simply assumed that members value committee positions.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, committee assignments are not the only ways leadership can reward or punish MEPs. Some national delegation leaders, for example, also can influence if and/or where an MEP is placed on future party lists whether that be for EP or national elections. Rather than trying to create an exhaustive list, we are simply demonstrating some of the tools that leadership can use to try to influence MEP voting.

Similar to the MEPs, we assume leaders of Party Groups and national party delegations care about policy and some set of additional costs. However, here the costs are not of being sanctioned, the leaders already are the power brokers, but rather of wielding that power. First, we assume that there is some--albeit very small--cost involved in making a RCV request. This cost may involve identifying and organizing the twenty-nine supporters, the time lost in making the request, and/or the disgruntlement that those MEPs who find themselves beholden to travel to the EP to cast a vote will express. Second, the leaders also must pay a cost to sanction their members. Any "carrot"--a promised promotion or perk--is finite and its use precludes offering it to someone else or at a later stage. Any "stick"--such as removing an MEP from a committee assignment--involves costs in implementation (such as replacement). Thus, the utility function is as follows:

$$U_l = f(x, I_l) + C_{rcv} + \sum_{i=1}^N C_{sanction,i}$$

where  $x$  is the policy under consideration,  $I_l$  is the leader's ideal point,  $C_{rcv}$  is the cost of requesting a roll-call, and  $\sum_{i=1}^N C_{sanction,i}$  is the total cost of imposing sanctions on Party Group members, summed across MEPs.

Again, note that we are not assuming all leaders have positive sanctioning power. In fact, we believe national delegation leaders, rather than party group leaders, carry most of the influence. This model will allow us to test our hypothesis, because it generates predictions conditional on a leader's ability to influence MEPs.

*b. The Game Form:*

The sequence of the *RCV Game* is depicted in Figure 1. First, nature places a pair of exogenously specified alternatives on the docket. This pair of alternatives can be anything, two possible amendments to a bill that are going head-to-head, an amended version of a Commission proposal versus an unamended version, or a final version of a Commission proposal that is to be voted up or down (i.e. versus the status quo).

Once the docket is set, the EP leadership can try to “whip” their constituent MEPs.<sup>5</sup> Formally, “whip” means telling MEPs to vote for the legislative alternative that the leader prefers. A sanction ( $C$  in the MEP utility function) for non-compliance is implicitly or explicitly attached to this request.<sup>6</sup> For example, Socialist Party Group or national delegation leaders can threaten sanctions against “back-bench” Socialist MEPs that vote contrary to a whipped position. These sanctions could entail anything from a threat of not getting or keeping a valuable committee position (Kreppel 1998b), to having future ballot access denied (Corbett, et. al. 1995: 92), to the expectation that the defecting MEP will not get future desired legislation passed.<sup>7</sup> Discriminating among these alternatives will be important for testing this theory, but for modeling purposes all we need is a parameter  $C$  that jointly represents the set of feasible punishments and/or rewards. Note that while we are not explicitly modeling this game in a repeated setting, we assume that reputation makes these threats and promises credible.

Of course, different leaders have different resources through which to sanction MEP behavior. For example, the Socialists will have more and better committee chairs to assign than the Greens. To allow for this possibility, the cost a MEP pays for ignoring the whip is an indexed term  $C_i$ , where  $i$  indicates the Party Group or national delegation within each Party Group that is threatening the sanction.

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<sup>5</sup> See Corbett, et. al. (1995: 92) for discussion of “whipping” in the EP.

<sup>6</sup> Or, equivalently, a reward is attached for voting the way the leader desires.

At this stage in the game, a roll-call vote may be requested. A request requires the formal support of at least twenty-nine MEPs, or a Party Group. In the absence of a request, the vote is made by electronic means, a show of hands, or some other unrecorded means. Thus, if the vote is by roll-call it becomes common knowledge how each MEP voted, while if the vote is by any other means individual votes can only be deduced indirectly. This is important, as the roll-call provides the only means by which MEP voting behavior can be monitored.

Only Party Group leadership or national party delegation leadership may call RCVs. This assumption is made solely for expositional convenience. Since calling a RCV is at least minimally costly, and non-leaders do not have the sanctioning power necessary to influence others' votes, non-leaders would never call a RCV in our model.

Once the leader decides whether or not to request a roll-call, the MEPs' votes are cast and the outcome is determined by majority rule. As mentioned above, each MEP's decision on how to vote is based upon two factors, his preferences over the two alternative pieces of legislation and the rewards and punishments that his leaders can impose. This utility function makes the MEPs vote choice quite simple. When sanctions are not threatened the MEP will vote for his most preferred policy.<sup>8</sup> When sanctions are threatened the MEP must decide whether to switch to the other alternative. The MEP only switches if the loss of utility from switching policies is less than the net amount of sanctions avoided. Note that we say net because the MEP's Party Group leader might want her to vote one way, while the MEP's national delegation leader might want her to vote the other.

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, rather than sanctioning, the leadership could offer a carrot by suggesting that the MEP will be rewarded with a future committee position or desired amendment to a piece of legislation instead.

<sup>8</sup> Under these conditions, sincere voting by MEPs, based on their policy positions, is a dominant strategy.

### *c. Solving the Game*

We can trivially establish that RCVs will only be called when the requesting party is whipping its members, and that a party only whips when it knows it is going to call a RCV. First, because we assume that there is some--albeit very small--cost involved in a request, leaders will need to expect some policy benefit from calling a RCV in order to off-set the cost of the request. There is no added policy gain from calling the RCV—i.e., no gain from monitoring voting behavior—when MEPs are not being whipped. Thus, the costs of requesting the RCV outweigh the benefits and no RCV is requested if the whip is not on.

Similarly, a leader derives little or no value from whipping her MEPs if she cannot then monitor their behavior through a RCV. It is much easier to sanction a MEP on a roll-call than otherwise. A RCV allows the leader to point to the offending vote and assign a punishment. A non-RCV forces the leader to backwards induce how each MEP voted and then assign punishment. While leaders do backwards induce all voting behavior in this model, if we allowed a leader to think that there is some small chance of punishing the wrong person when backwards inducing, that leader would strictly prefer to call a RCV before threatening sanctions. Consequently, the leader's decision to whip his constituent MEPs will always be paired with a request for a RCV.

Deriving general results for this game is complicated by the wide variety of possible distributions of MEP preferences within and across Party Groups and national delegations. Thus, in order to characterize the behavior of Party Group and national delegation leaders and MEPs, we must first introduce and define some terms.

An individual is said to prefer one policy,  $p_0$ , to the alternative,  $p_a$ , if

$|p_0 - I_i| < |p_a - I_i|$ . That is, the MEP prefers the policy closer to her ideal point. A chamber is

said to prefer  $p_0$  to  $p_a$  if  $\sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i}{N} > .5$  where  $ind_i$  is an indicator variable that, for each MEP,

equals 1 iff  $|p_0 - I_i| < |p_a - I_i|$ . Since  $\sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i}{N} > .5$  iff  $ind_m = 1$ , where  $m$  is the chamber median,

we can say the chamber prefers the policy  $p_0$  if the chamber median prefers the policy.

An MEP is said to be *disciplined* when a leader's threat of sanctions causes a MEP to vote for a policy that the member would otherwise oppose. Assuming for the moment that national delegation leaders cannot impose sanctions, Party Group discipline occurs when  $|p_0 - I_i| < |p_a - I_i|$ , but  $U_i(p_a, c_{pg}) > U_i(p_0, c_{pg})$ , where  $p_a$  is the policy voted for by MEP  $i$ , and  $c_{pg}$  is the sanctioning behavior of the MEP's party group leader (PGL) given the policy voted for by MEP  $i$ . Thus, due to sanctions, the MEP derives greater utility from voting for the policy further from her ideal point. When national delegation leaders can sanction PGM  $i$ , Party Group discipline occurs when

$|p_0 - I_i| < |p_a - I_i|$  and  $U_i(p_a, c_{pg} = 0, c_{nd}) < U_i(p_0, c_{pg} = 0, c_{nd})$ , but

$U_i(p_a, c_{pg}, c_{nd}) > U_i(p_0, c_{pg}, c_{nd})$ , where  $c_{nd}$  is the sanctioning behavior by the national

delegation leader of MEP  $i$  given the policy voted for by MEP  $i$  and the sanctioning behavior of MEP  $i$ 's PGL. National delegation discipline is defined equivalently.

Party Group or national delegation leader  $k$  is said to have *swung a vote* when

$$(1) \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^{c_{j \neq k}}}{N} > .5,$$

where  $ind_i^{c_{j \neq k}}$  is an indicator variable that equals 1 when an MEP votes for alternative  $p_a$ ,

given that all party group and national delegation leaders but  $k$  who wish to impose discipline do so, and

$$(2) \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^c}{N} < .5,$$

where  $ind_i^c$  is an indicator variable that equals 1 when an MEP votes for  $p_a$ , given that all party group and national delegation leaders, including  $k$ , who wish to impose discipline do so. Put simply, these equations state that a leader has swung a vote when, by imposing sanctions on his members, he changes the outcome of the vote (holding the behavior of all other leaders constant).

Using these definitions, when will a leader of a Party Group or a national delegation request a RCV? The somewhat banal answer is: 1) the leader must want to call a RCV in order to influence the legislative outcome; and 2) the leader must be able to swing the vote by calling a RCV. Formally, a leader  $k$  will request a RCV when  $U_k(p_a) > U_k(p_0)$ ,

$$\sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^{c,j \neq k}}{N} > .5, \text{ and } \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^c}{N} < .5. \text{ We also learn something from this about the character of}$$

non-RCVs, which we will discuss later in the paper. For now, note that if either the leader expects to win without having to impose sanctions or the leader expects to lose even with imposing sanctions, she will not request a RCV.

For ease of exposition we will focus on Party Groups and their leaders for the rest of this discussion. Except where noted, every reference to Party Groups and their leaders applies equally to national delegations and their leaders. Explicit reference to national delegations only will be made if additional insights can be gained.

All PGLs can be identified according to whether they are on the majority- or minority-side of the vote. A PGL is defined as being on the majority-side if he prefers the policy that wins when all Party Groups exert perfect Party Group discipline. Conversely, a PGL is defined as being on the minority-side if he/she prefers the policy that loses when all Party Groups exert perfect Party Group discipline. We could equivalently speak of majority-



side and minority-side national delegation leaders. For convenience, we assume that the Party Groups on the right are the majority side and the Party Groups on the left are the minority side.

By analyzing the strategic situation in terms of minority and majority-side Party Groups it is natural to think about this setting as a two Party Group system. That is, since each of the PGLs on the majority-side will want the same bill passed and each of the PGLs on the minority-side will want the alternative bill passed, all of the Party Groups on the majority-side can be thought of as the *majority coalition* and all of the Party Groups on the minority-side can be thought of as the *minority coalition*. Again, we could equivalently speak of majority and minority coalitions of national delegations. Although this simplification may seem dramatic, all it really does is treat each sides' PGLs as unitary actors. The only strategic dynamic that this simplification eliminates is a potential coordination problem among one side's PGLs.<sup>9</sup>

With this framework in place, we can now explore the connection between roll-call votes, MEP voting behavior, and legislative outcomes. First, under what conditions can a PGL swing a vote by calling a RCV? The answer depends on two things: whether the PGL is minority or majority-side and the distribution of MEP ideal points. When MEP ideal points within Party Groups are concentrated, such that no member of a Party Group on the minority-side has an ideal point between members of the majority-side, we call the distribution *non-overlapping*. That is, the ideal points of all members of each coalition adjoin each other. When MEPs have ideal points that are not concentrated in this way, we call the distribution *overlapping*. Figure 2 depicts overlapping and non-overlapping preference distributions.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, if a side knows it needs to attract one more vote to win, one of two PGLs can threaten the necessary sanctions to get that vote, but if doing so is at all costly, then each wants the other to pay the price and

*c. 1. Non-Overlapping MEP Preferences*

When preferences are non-overlapping, only the majority PGL can swing a vote. The majority PGL swings the vote iff  $\sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^{c_{Maj}}}{N} < .5$  where  $c_{Maj}$  indicates that the majority coalition threatens sanctions (independent of any other sanctioning behavior). There are three observations to make from this solution. First, whether the minority coalition disciplines its members or not is irrelevant. The minority PGL cannot affect the majority PGL's ability to win the vote because preferences are non-overlapping. Even if the minority PGL can ensure perfect discipline, it will not be sufficient to swing the vote.

Second, the majority PGL only needs to threaten sanctions if the median voter prefers the alternative policy, otherwise the policy preferred by the majority would pass without calling a RCV. Third, the majority party will display perfect cohesion if it has a bare majority of the chamber. And, because threatening sanctions against each additional member is individually costly, cohesion will decrease by one for each majority MEP to the far side of the median. That is, where the majority has surplus MEPs, the majority PGL will not pay to constrain their votes and we will see less than perfect cohesion. In sum, the majority coalition's destiny is in its own hands when preferences are non-overlapping, and majority coalition cohesion should be high. The majority party should only experience defections to the degree that it has surplus votes and chooses not to threaten sanctions against those votes.

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attract the vote. However, as long as the cost of sanctioning is less than the benefit gained by winning the vote, Nash equilibria exist in which either one or the other threatens sanctions.

*c. 2. Overlapping MEP preferences*

When preferences are overlapping, either coalition can swing votes under the right conditions. For the majority coalition, a PGL can swing the vote if  $\sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^c}{N} < .5$ . That is, a majority PGL can swing a vote when the total number of majority MEPs who vote for the majority PGL's position plus the number of undisciplined minority PGMs who vote for the majority PGL's position is at least minimum winning.

Again there are three observations to make about this simple solution. First, it is now possible for the minority coalition to influence outcomes. If the majority PGL cannot ensure discipline from enough of its members to gain a bare majority, and the minority PGL can enforce enough discipline that the majority coalition cannot pick up the needed extra votes from minority coalition MEPs, then the minority PGL can foil the majority coalition. Of course, if the majority PGL can ensure enough discipline to have a bare majority without any minority coalition votes, then the minority coalition is still out of luck.

Second, the majority coalition might have to threaten sanctions even if the chamber median prefers the majority PGL's preferred bill. If minority MEPs have most preferred bills on the far side of the median from the minority PGL, and the PGL can discipline any of those PGMs, then the majority coalition would have to have the support of at least one member to the left of the median. If that MEP (or MEPs) does not want the PGL's bill, discipline would have to be imposed. One significant implication of this finding is that, unlike in many legislative settings, only under special circumstances can one characterize chamber preferences by the preferences of the chamber median. This is particularly relevant for models of institutional bargaining in the EU, where the EP's position is assumed to be the chamber median.

Third, the more Party Group members' ideal points overlap, the greater the opportunities for low Party Group cohesion. To the degree that disciplining members is costly to the majority PGL, and to the degree that the minority PGL cannot discipline its own members, then the PGL calling the RCV may choose to allow some of its members to defect because it is costless to rely upon the minority coalition's undisciplined members to win the vote. That is, the greater the overlap, the more votes from the minority coalition the PGL might be able to rely upon.

These conditions for the majority coalition PGL to swing a vote generally apply to the PGLs of the minority coalition. The important difference is that the minority coalition must rely upon some majority coalition votes to win. Thus, if the majority PGL can ensure sufficient cohesion, the minority PGL cannot swing a vote.

### **III. Empirical Implications**

Four empirical questions can be answered using the analysis from the last section: 1) who should we expect to see win RCVs; 2) when should we expect RCVs to display low cohesion; 3) how often should we expect to see RCVs display low cohesion; and 4) how representative should we expect RCVs to be of the universe of votes. Each of these issues are considered in turn.

#### *Who should Win?*

The first question is trivial, Party Groups that call RCVs should win. Because we assume that RCV requests are used to make sanctioning threats credible, sanctioning is only beneficial if the PGL successfully swings the vote, and there is perfect information so that everyone will know how RCVs and non-RCVs will turn out, a PGL should never call a RCV

unless the leader will win the vote as a result. Of course, since the world is not one of perfect information, occasionally PGLs are going to make mistakes and call votes that they will lose. Thus, more realistically, our model would predict that Party Groups that call RCVs should almost always win. This finding is true of RCVs requested by national delegation leaders as well.

### *When Should there be Low Party Group Cohesion?*

The question of when RCVs should display low Party Group cohesion is somewhat more complex. When preferences are non-overlapping there should always be fairly high cohesion. The majority coalition is calling the RCV to swing a few recalcitrant members and may have some surplus votes or not, the minority coalition should all vote against the bill. When preferences are overlapping the answer depends upon the degree to which they are overlapping. If the minority and majority coalitions only overlap a little, it should look much like the non-overlapping case, perhaps with a few minority coalition votes breaking ranks as well. However, if the coalitions overlap significantly we can have quite low cohesion, with numerous defectors from both sides.

When are Party Group preferences likely to overlap significantly? When preferences are ordered nationally rather than ideologically. For example, if the issue being voted on involves the distribution of the EU budget, as opposed to worker protection, MEPs are more likely to have preferences based upon their country of origin than whether they are leftist or not. Thus, low Party Group cohesion is more likely when the issues being decided involves nationally, rather than ideologically, ordered MEP preferences.

Interestingly, low cohesion votes are most likely when the PGL requesting the RCV wins, not because he/she successfully sanctions enough of his/her extreme party members to have a bare majority, but because the opposition fails to maintain its own discipline. When

this event happens, and particularly when it is the minority PGL requesting the RCV, such votes will look like embarrassment votes. Of course, according to our model the motivation for such a vote would not be to embarrass the other Party Group, but simply to win the vote. Thus, we can say that *policy driven* embarrassment votes are more likely to occur when preferences are nationally ordered, and disciplining is weak.

### *How Often should we Observe Low Cohesion?*

While Party Groups are more likely to display low cohesion when preferences are nationally ordered, we should not expect to see this low cohesion displayed very often. Rather, we should expect such issues to be resolved in non-RCVs. Why? Simply put, it will always be at least as difficult for a PGL to successfully swing a vote when preferences are nationally ordered as when they are ideologically ordered. Recall that two sets of leaders may have sanctioning power in the EP, the Party Group leaders and the national delegation leaders. When preferences are ideologically ordered, a Party Group's national delegation leaders will tend to have the same preferences as the PGL. However, when preferences are nationally ordered, and a PGL wants to swing a vote, he/she will have to swing that vote against the wishes of at least one national delegation leader.<sup>10</sup> To the degree that the national delegation leader has sanctioning power, a PGL is less likely to be able to swing a vote when the national delegation leader is using his sanctioning power against the position of the PGL rather than in concert. Thus, while low cohesion should occasionally be observed, to the degree that national delegation leaders have any sanctioning power, low cohesion RCVs should be comparatively rare events.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> We assume here that at least a majority of MEPs from a national delegation do not share the preferences of the PGL over the two alternatives.

*Should We expect RCVs to be Representative Samples of the Universe of Votes?*

Given what RCVs will look like, we can address the central question of this paper: how representative do we expect them to be if RCVs are used to discipline MEPs? That is, will RCVs tend to display the same level of cohesion that non-RCVs display under these conditions? The short answer is no, or at least not under reasonable expectations. Most likely, RCVs will systematically display higher levels of cohesion than non-RCVs because the decision to call a RCV is a strategic one.

The likelihood of a RCV depends upon the heterogeneity, or diversity, of MEP preferences. When Party Group or national delegation preferences are highly homogenous, leaders generally will not be able to use a RCV to swing a vote; group or delegation members will mostly be voting the way their leaders want them to without sanctions.<sup>12</sup> Thus, if each group's or delegation's ideal points are packed tightly enough around its mean, almost all constituent MEPs will already prefer the same policies as their leaders, and we would not expect to observe RCVs.

Similarly, when MEP preferences are very heterogeneous, a group or delegation leader will rarely be able to use a RCV to swing a vote. For any pair of alternatives that a member and his leader have different preferences over, the cost the leader must be able to impose to discipline the member increases with the distance between their ideal points. Thus, at high levels of constituent heterogeneity, a RCV is of little value to a leader.

Putting these two pieces together, we find that non-RCVs will be characterized by both highly homogenous and highly heterogeneous distributions of preferences. Since there

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, the probability of the low cohesion RCV depends upon the underlying probability of preferences being nationally ordered as well.

<sup>12</sup> Note that the heterogeneity of group and delegation preferences should be highly correlated. When national delegation preferences are homogenous, Party Group preferences will have to be as well. When Party Group preferences are heterogeneous, national delegation preferences will have to be as well. The only time these two should not be equivalent is when national delegation preferences within a Party Group are heterogeneous, but Party Group preferences are still non-overlapping, or homogenous.

is no sanctioning under non-RCVs, this result implies that both high cohesion, under homogeneity, and low cohesion, under heterogeneity, will occur in non-RCVs.

For what distribution of preferences should we see RCVs requested? Only when preferences are moderately heterogeneous would we expect to see many RCVs. Under these conditions some disciplining is necessary because either the majority or the minority coalition sees the opportunity to swing the vote and preferences are not so dispersed within groups and delegations that the leaders cannot successfully do so. Thus, we should expect to see RCVs primarily on ideological issues in which parties have somewhat-overlapping preferences and not see RCVs on non- or highly overlapping issues. And, as discussed above, we should expect to see generally high levels of cohesion (particularly within the Party Groups and national delegations requesting the RCV) when RCVs are requested.

If RCVs really are being used to discipline MEPs, these conclusions force us to question the use of RCVs. To demonstrate why, we will focus on Party Group cohesion for the rest of this discussion, although equivalent arguments could be put forward for national delegation cohesion.

For RCVs' high levels of cohesion to be representative of Party Group cohesion across the universe of votes, the non-RCVs would need to be of a particular character: ideologically homogeneous. That is, the issues decided by non-RCV must be those on which Party Group cohesion is attained without sanctioning. How realistic is this assumption? Well, it would require that the vast majority of EP votes (85% of votes are by non-RCV), ranging across a broad set of policy areas, are homogenous. This seems highly unlikely. Furthermore, not only would RCVs be unrepresentative, but the direction of bias would certainly be toward higher cohesion. That is RCVs most likely *overestimate* the level of Party Group cohesion on legislative votes when sanctioning is possible.



What is the magnitude of this bias? Without systematic data on non-RCV preference distributions, it is impossible to say. However, the model provides some guidance in assessing the bias. The key issue is the number of non-RCVs that are homogeneously distributed relative to the number that are heterogeneously distributed. The greater the number of homogeneously distributed non-RCVs, the less the bias. To the extent we can infer the ratio of these two distributions--from the policy area considered, for example--we can estimate the extent of that bias.

What about Party Discipline--is the level of Party Group cohesion on RCVs indicative of the level of Party Group discipline on legislative votes in general? To address this question, we first need to distinguish Party Group discipline from Party Group cohesion. By Party Group discipline we mean that Party Group leadership induces its MEPs to vote for the leader's preferred policy, even though some MEPs' might prefer the alternative policy. Thus, the level of Party Group discipline is continuous and is indicated by the utility, in policy distance multiplied by the number of MEPs, a leader can induce MEPs to forgo due to threat of sanctioning.

According to our model, a Party Group leader who has sufficient sanctioning power to enforce Party Group discipline and stands to gain from enforcing this discipline will always call a RCV. This means that, if a Party Group leader requests a RCV, and we observe high Party Group cohesion, then that Party Group is demonstrating Party Group discipline. To assess the level of discipline, however, requires information about the ideal points of the Party Group leader and the MEPs, as well as the position of the alternatives. Lacking such data, we can observe if there is discipline, but we cannot differentiate among votes in terms of the extent of discipline. Note also that we are not claiming that all Party Group cohesion on RCVs represents party discipline. A Party Group that does not request the RCV may

show high cohesion on a RCV simply because its MEPs share preferences over legislative outcomes.

How can we use this information to assess the level of Party Group discipline on EP votes in general? The main question here is whether Party Group leaders fail to call RCVs because their MEPs share their preferences (i.e., PG homogeneity) or because they lack sufficient sanctioning power to induce cohesion (i.e., PG heterogeneity). If all non-RCVs are homogeneous, then high cohesion by the requesting Party Group on RCVs would indicate that Party Group discipline is very high. In this case, non-RCVs would be irrelevant to assessing party discipline. However, if the heterogeneity characterizes some non-RCVs, then we would be over-estimating the level of Party Group discipline by focusing only on MEP voting behavior on RCVs. Under this condition, we would not observe cases of Party Group leaders failing to discipline their members. And the more often the latter condition holds for non-RCVs, the more egregious the over-estimation of Party Group discipline. Thus, unless one is willing to assume a very particular distribution of preferences for non-RCVs, Party Group discipline is over-estimated by measures of cohesion on RCVs.

In sum, we cannot assume that MEP voting behavior in RCVs is representative of MEP voting behavior in general. The answer to the question depends upon a number of currently unmeasured parameters such as the distribution of preferences, leadership sanctioning power, and the relative positions of the policy alternatives under consideration. Thus, while RCVs may be representative, it would be a gross simplification to assume they are. Fortunately, this model helps identify the conditions under which RCVs would be representative, and thereby provides the ability, once the empirical resources are gathered, to address this question. In the following section we provide some preliminary evidence regarding some of the empirical implications of the model.

## IV. Empirical Evidence

Many of the empirical implications of our model are difficult to test with currently collected data. Obviously, we would like data on MEP preferences on legislative proposals, both on RCVs and non-RCVs. However, some existing data suffice for testing, in a general way, some of the implications of the model. Below, we present results from analysis of such data. We have not collected a large, randomly selected set of votes, due to resource constraints. Thus, our empirical findings should be considered preliminary.

### *a. Data:*

Recall that one of the primary motivations for studying roll-call voting behavior in the European Parliament is to learn about the legislative process in the European Union. Thus, while chamber resolutions, and other on-legislative votes, might well be interesting in their own right, including them in an empirical analysis here would only have potentially confounding affects upon our findings. This problem is particularly significant because non-legislative votes are such a large portion of RCVs. Note that many studies of RCV voting behavior have analyzed all RCVs, which include votes on resolutions and internal institutional decisions.

We will analyze only final votes on legislative proposals. It is important to note that among legislative votes, some votes are on final legislative decisions and others are on amendments. In one sense, these are all legislative votes, as they pertain to legislative proposals. However, as our model illustrates, the context of a particular legislative issue may be more amenable to RCVs than others. For example, the distribution of preferences may be conducive to discipline. As a result, RCVs on different versions of the same legislative proposal are not independent. Since the number of amendments is not uniform across legislation, we could over-sample particular issue areas or preference distributions by

including amendments in the analysis.<sup>13</sup> Thus, we would like to control for the legislative proposal on which the vote was based. A simple way to avoid this problem is to focus only on the final vote on a proposal, which we adopt here.

### *b. Results*

With these two concerns in mind, we collected RCV data from all EP sessions in the 1994-99 European Parliament, through December 1998. The data were collected from the *Official Journal of the European Communities, Series C*. In these sessions, about 16% of legislative votes were decided by roll-call. Of these RCVs, 73% were on resolutions, so only 41% were on legislation proper. If this is typical of RCV data, it indicates that we should be cautious in drawing inferences about legislative voting behavior from patterns of behavior on RCVs as a whole.

Turning to the theoretical implications, we first examine whether legislation voted under RCVs is won by the requesting agent. The evidence suggests that the winning side does indeed predominantly call RCVs. In the 113 RCVs, (75%) were requested by a winning Party Group.<sup>14</sup> Occasionally, more than one Party Group called a RCV. In some of these cases the Party Groups took opposing positions. Consequently, we also want to consider all RCV requests. The total number of RCV requests was 118, and the number of RCV requests made by an eventual winning Party Group was 93 (79%).<sup>15</sup> Again, Party Groups that request RCVs typically win them.

Second, we expect Party Group cohesion on RCVs to be generally high for Party Groups that call RCVs. Our evidence is consistent with this expectation. Table 1 presents cohesion scores (the percentage of MEPs voting with their Party Group majority position)<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The results might then be biased in favor of our theoretical expectations.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, all RCVs were decided in favor of the proposal.

for each Party Group requesting a RCV. For the vast majority of RCVs, the level of Party Group cohesion is 0.90 or above.

**Table 1. Party Group Cohesion on Roll-call Votes They Request**

Party Group	Number RCVs	Average Cohesion
PSE	29	0.97
PPE	49	0.93
UPE	6	0.93
ELDR	4	0.92
GUE	7	0.75
GREENS	18	0.98
ARE	4	0.91
I-EDN	5	0.92
Total	118	0.94

One final implication of our model is worth noting. In summarizing the results, we have ignored the possibility that national delegation leaders request a RCV. The reason for this omission is that national party delegation leaders, even when they have sanctioning power, will generally not request RCVs. Any time a national delegation leader might want to make a request there will always be at least one Party Group leader who will want to make the same request. This theoretical implication is consistent with the observed behavior of national delegation leaders. Previous research has found that the vast majority of RCVs are requested by Party Group leaders.

## V. Conclusion

Given the ascendance of the European Parliament in the EU legislative process over the last ten years, legislative voting behavior in the EP is an increasingly important aspect of EU legislative politics. Consequently, to understand EU legislative politics, we need to

<sup>15</sup> Five of the six RCVs requested by a losing Party Group were called by very small Party Groups: the Greens (2), Europe of Nations (2), and European Radical Alliance.

<sup>16</sup> We adopt the convention that abstentions and absences are not counted in the cohesion score. However, as discussed earlier, one could consider absences and abstentions as votes against the proposal.

understand why MEPs vary in their voting behavior. In particular, we need to understand the impact of Party Groups, as they provide a potentially important constraint on the voting behavior of their member MEPs.

A common approach to addressing these questions is to empirically investigate MEP voting behavior on roll-call votes (RCVs). RCVs are an invaluable source of information about MEP voting behavior, since they are the only systematically collected data. However, before drawing inferences about voting behavior from RCVs, we should think carefully about whether RCVs are representative of legislative votes. This is a particularly important concern since RCVs have strategic value to Party Group leaders. RCVs allow Party Group leaders to observe their members' voting behavior, which is crucial for enforcing discipline in order to promote Party Group cohesion. Consequently, RCVs may provide a biased view of MEP voting behavior.

In this paper, we have attempted to address whether and how RCVs are representative of MEP legislative votes. We developed a formal model of the decision to request a RCV, which provides a framework to assess the bias in RCVs. The principle result is that RCVs are only representative in terms of Party Group cohesion and Party Group discipline for very specific conditions regarding the distribution of MEP preferences within and across Party Groups. Indeed, there is no *ex ante* reason to believe such a fortuitous coincidence of conditions exist. Under realistic conditions, RCVs will be biased toward higher levels of Party Group cohesion and discipline than are characteristic of the universe of legislative votes.

Of course, the extent to which these conclusions are accurate depends on the validity of our formal model. Consequently, we would like to test the empirical veracity

of its empirical implications. Although we lack sufficient data to provide rigorous tests of the model, we have provided some suggestive evidence that is consistent with the predictions of the model.

While these results appear pessimistic regarding the value of RCVs for studying MEP legislative voting behavior, we want to end the paper on an optimistic note. Knowledge of the process by which the data are generated can help inform analysis that avoids, or at least attenuates, the bias inherent in the data. In particular, through the use of a selection bias model, we can model both the RCV request decision and the vote decision of the MEP. Specifically, the selection bias model first estimates the decision by a Party Group leader to call a RCV for a particular piece of legislation. Thus, at that stage we would consider all legislation under consideration (which is reported regularly by the EU). Ideally, we would be able to acquire sufficient information about the legislation under consideration (e.g., the policy area) to specify an appropriate model of this decision. We would then model the level of cohesion for each Party Group, but correct for any correlation of errors between the two models, thereby eliminating bias (Timpone 1998).

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