

Semi-detached Houses? Geographic representation and bicameral relations in the European Union.

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Work in progress - comments welcome!

Abstract. Bicameral legislatures in federal systems are designed to provide distinct representation for societal and regional interests. This is also the case in the EU, where the European Parliament (EP) represents the citizens of the EU and the Council of Ministers represents the member states in legislative decision making. However, a weak party system in the EP, nationally-oriented MEPs and a comparable distribution of votes in both institutions implies that the EP will often be a mirror image of the Council, rather than a distinct chamber. Using data from roll-call votes in the EP, this paper shows that the level of conflict between the chambers is significantly reduced when MEPs act along national rather than partisan lines. Furthermore, MEPs most often act as national representatives on policy areas where the Lisbon Treaty enhances the power of the EP, thereby reducing the potential impact of these changes. The findings are illustrated by a detailed examination of decision making on a proposal on for sugar sector reform.

Bicameralism has often been advocated as a means to increase the range of interests represented in decision outcomes (Buchanan and Tullock 1962; Levmore 1992). This occurs most effectively when the two conditions of 'strong bicameralism' are met: both chambers have the power to influence the outcome, and they each represent different interests (Lijphart 1999). The European Union has a bicameral legislature consisting of the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament (EP). Traditionally, the Council has acted as the primary legislative body; however, successive treaty reforms have promoted the European Parliament to a position of equal power with the Council under the codecision procedure. The latest round of treaty revisions (the Lisbon Treaty) will greatly extend the range of policies covered by codecision, making it the normal legislative procedure of the EU. This satisfies the first condition for strong bicameralism. However, the question remains: to what extent and under what conditions do the two bodies represent distinct interests?

In many ways, the structure of bicameralism in the EU mirrors that in federal states such as Germany, where the upper house represents federal units and the lower house represents societal interests through a party system (Borzel and Hosli 2003). Unlike established federal systems, however, it is far from clear that the lower house in the EU acts as an effective channel for the major social cleavages. Transnational party groups exist, but they have few tools for disciplining members; furthermore, MEPs often see their main function as representing the interests of their member state rather than the interests of a particular social group (Farrell and Scully 2007). In certain circumstances, both institutions act as representatives of national interests. In this paper, it is argued that this duplication of roles reduces the extent to which the EP can be viewed as an

independent chamber: when MEPs pursue national rather than partisan interests, the EP as a whole will tend to accept whatever position is advocated by the Council. Furthermore, it is argued that the independence of the EP is likely to be lowest on many of the policy areas that will come under the codecision procedure following the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty reforms.

In the following section, the nature of representation in the EP and the Council and relations between the two bodies are discussed. Section two employs voting data in the EP to describe patterns of national and partisan alignments across policy areas, and to examine the relationship between patterns of representation in the EP and inter-institutional conflict. Section three illustrates the findings by focusing on decision making on one particular proposal which gave rise to strong national differences in both the EP and the Council. This case study is based on information gathered in interviews with key informants in the EP, the Council and the Commission. The final section concludes by discussing decision making and representation in the EU in light of the findings.

1. Representation in EU legislative politics

Representation under 'Federal Bicameralism'

From its earliest incarnation, bicameralism has been designed to ensure the representation of diverse interests. In federal systems, where bicameralism is most common, these interests are typically *regional* and *societal*. For instance, in accordance with the desire of

the authors of the Federalist papers that ‘the concurrence of separate and dissimilar bodies’ should be required for every public act (Hamilton *et al* 2003, no. 63), the US Congress is composed of two legislative chambers with distinct compositions: a lower house, where representation reflects population; and an upper house, where each state is represented equally. In other federal systems the manner in which regional interests are represented is different: for example, in Germany, the upper house is composed of representatives of the regional governments rather than directly elected senators.

This principle of distinct representation of regional and societal interests in two legislative chambers has also shaped the institutional design of the EU. As outlined in Article 10 of the Treaty on European Union (as amended by the Lisbon Treaty), the European Parliament exists to provide direct representation to citizens at the EU level, while the Council of Ministers provides representation for the member states in legislative politics. Like the German system, the upper house is composed of representatives of the state governments, thereby providing strong protection for the interests of ‘federal’ units. While all member states do not have equal representation in the Council, except for when it decides under the unanimity rule, the Council is strongly malapportioned (meaning that small states have more votes than they would have under a population-based voting system). The requirement for at least a qualified majority in the Council provides additional protection for national interests.

Evidence of competition within the Council suggests that national interests are indeed dominant. To the extent that any structure can be found to competition within the Council, most research has found that it takes place along geographical rather than ideological lines (Zimmer 2005, Thomson 2009). These studies conclude that factors

such as the existing levels of regulation in place in a member state are more important determinants of the position it takes than the political colours of the incumbent government.

National interests are evidently well represented in the EU, but providing representation for European social groups is a more difficult proposition. As Thomassen *et al* (2004: 144) argue, '(t)he major challenge for an effective democratic political system at the European level is to counteract the traditional dividing lines in Europe, the national borders'. The main cleavage dimension *within* virtually all European countries is the left-right dimension (e.g. Benoit and Laver 2007); this cross-cuts national divisions and creates the potential for effective representation of different societal interests at the European level. Thus, the effective representation of social groups at the European level would require mobilisation along the left-right dimension. European Party Groups are organised on this basis, and correspond to the major party families in European democracies (Hix *et al* 2007: 65). These groups are therefore crucial for the successful functioning of the EP as the representative body for European social groups. This is acknowledged in the Treaty on European Union, which states that 'Political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union' (art. 10).

Evidence from EP voting records suggests that these groups do perform the task of representing differences on the left-right dimension relatively well. Hix *et al* (2007) find that these groups are quite cohesive, and structure conflict within the EP along left-right lines. Similarly, Thomassen *et al* (2004: 163) find on the basis of roll-call and survey data that the European party system is 'not an unsuccessful aggregation of the

major cleavage structure dominating politics in most European countries'. However, others have argued that roll-call data exaggerates the level of cohesion of European party groups (Carrubba *et al.* 2006), and there are strong reasons to believe that nationality continues to play an important role in structuring MEP behaviour.

National interest representation in the European Parliament

There are several reasons to believe that there are significant shortcomings in the extent to which the EP acts as a representative body for the major societal interests in Europe. First, EP political parties ('party groups') do not have strong tools at their disposal to counter national-interest representation on the part of MEPs. Crucially, these party groups do not control candidate selection at EP elections, so can not threaten to deselect MEPs who do not tow the party line. Thus, MEPs are relatively free to pursue the representation of national interests at the expense of the social group associated with their party, if they so choose. Related to this, transnational party groups do not mediate citizen's interests in the way that national parties do in domestic parliaments. These groups are loose federations of national parties, and are entirely absent from the EP electoral process. There is therefore no mobilization of EU social classes or functional interests behind particular party groups. Furthermore, EP elections can generally be viewed as 'second-order' national elections (Hix and Marsh 2007), which means that the activities of MEPs and party groups in the EP do not greatly influence their electoral chances. Thus, there are weak incentives for party groups to faithfully represent the interests of particular social groups.

Second, MEPs often view their role as one of representing national interests, even though their national government representatives in the Council also perform this role. A survey carried out in 2006 found that the representation of national interests and constituency interests are considered to be of 'great importance' by a majority of MEPs (58% and 64% respectively). (Given that most member states function as a single district in EP elections, 'constituency' and 'national' interests are generally the same). Fewer MEPs considered other types of representation to be of great importance, such as representing the people who voted for their party (48%) or representing all people in Europe (31%) (Farrell *et al* 2006). The importance of national interests in shaping MEP behaviour is also reflected in the contacts they maintain with national bodies. The same survey found that 50% of MEPs are in contact with civil servants from their national government at least once a month, and many report receiving regular voting instructions from their national government. Furthermore, MEPs are in contact with and receive voting instructions from national interest groups more often than European interest groups (*ibid*). One British MEP, in what was described as a 'not untypical response' in an attitudinal survey, described the role of the MEP as similar to that of a US senator representing a geographic region (Farrell and Scully 2007: 189). If MEPs are like senators, and the Council is also like the senate, this suggests a duplication of roles rather than the representation of distinct interests.

Thus, MEPs are willing and able to pursue national rather than partisan policy goals. This is not unique: other bicameral legislatures with weak parties (such as the chambers of the US Congress) may both divide along territorial rather than partisan lines, particularly on 'pork-barrel' issues (Lee 2004). However, this does not necessarily imply

agreement between the chambers. This is because the members of bicameral houses typically represent different geographic areas (for instance, districts in the US House of Representatives and states in the US Senate). Furthermore, the same geographic areas (e.g. states) typically have different weights in each chamber so that more populous regions are better represented in the lower house. As Lee points out in the US context, ‘the different bases of representation in the House and Senate shape the two chambers’ interactions in distributive politics’ (ibid: 186). Thus, even when members of both houses are pursuing territorial interests, inter-chamber disagreement is common (ibid, 196).

In contrast, both MEPs and member states in the Council typically represent the same geographic area; and both institutions are malapportioned (Rodden 2002). In fact, the EP is one of the most malapportioned lower chambers of any federal system (ibid: 155). Thus, the territorial composition of the EP largely mirrors that of the Council. This is illustrated in Table 1, which gives the number and percentage of votes currently held by each member state in the EP and the Council (under QMV). For 23 member states, the difference in the percentage of votes held in each institution is one percentage point or less; for three member states the difference is two percentage points; while only for Germany is there a substantial difference in the number of votes held in each institution.

Table 1. Distribution of votes in EP and Council by country

	EP	Council (QMV)
Germany	99 (13%)	29 (8%)
France	72 (10%)	29 (8%)
United Kingdom	72 (10%)	29 (8%)
Italy	72 (10%)	29 (8%)
Spain	50 (7%)	27 (8%)
Poland	50 (7%)	27 (8%)
Romania	33 (4%)	14 (4%)
Netherlands	25 (3%)	13 (4%)
Greece	22 (3%)	12 (3%)
Portugal	22 (3%)	12 (3%)
Belgium	22 (3%)	12 (3%)
Czech Republic	22 (3%)	12 (3%)
Hungary	22 (3%)	12 (3%)
Sweden	18 (2%)	10 (3%)
Austria	17 (2%)	10 (3%)
Bulgaria	17 (2%)	10 (3%)
Denmark	13 (2%)	7 (2%)
Slovakia	13 (2%)	7 (2%)
Finland	13 (2%)	7 (2%)
Ireland	12 (2%)	7 (2%)
Lithuania	12 (2%)	7 (2%)
Latvia	8 (1%)	4 (1%)
Slovenia	7 (1%)	4 (1%)
Estonia	6 (1%)	4 (1%)
Cyprus	6 (1%)	4 (1%)
Luxembourg	6 (1%)	4 (1%)
Malta	5 (1%)	3 (1%)
Total	736 (100%)	345 (100%)

Modes of representation and inter-institutional relations

Clearly, there is a dual mode of representation at play in the EP: sometimes MEPs represent social groups associated with their transnational political party; other times they represent national interests. The arguments presented above imply that the EP and the Council will mirror each other when MEPs pursue national interests. When the nature of the two institutions is taken into consideration, it is perhaps more accurate to say that the EP mirrors the Council. Where national interests are to the fore, for instance on distributive policies, national interests will be articulated primarily by the national executives (represented in the Council); MEPs are more likely to act as followers than leaders. Some member state governments go so far as to present MEPs from their country with complete amendments for them to table on issues where national interests are at stake¹.

MEPs pursuing national interests can therefore be expected to follow the lead of their national government; and an agreement reached by a qualified majority of member states in the Council is likely to be accepted in the EP. The EP is therefore likely to be a largely redundant chamber when MEPs vote along national lines. In contrast, when MEPs vote on party lines, differences between the institutions are more likely to emerge. In other words, *the EP is less likely to oppose the Council when MEPs vote along national lines than when they vote along party lines.*

If this expectation is confirmed, it has implications for our understanding of how the extension of the codecision procedure under the Lisbon Treaty will affect decision making in the EU. In general, MEPs can be expected to pursue national interests when

¹ Interviews with EP officials, Brussels, July 2006

the costs and benefits are distributed unequally between member states. This is arguably the case in many areas (such as agriculture and fisheries) that are currently under the consultation procedure. Thus, the increase in power of the EP on these policy areas will not necessarily have a significant effect on policy making.

2. Analysis of voting records

Data and Measurement

The purpose of the analysis is to examine how patterns of alignments in the EP (national or partisan) effect inter-institutional relations. The analysis is carried out using roll-call data from the EP collected by Hix *et al* (2007). Roll-calls are taken in the EP at the request of a party group or a group of MEPs, and tend to take place for roughly one-third of all votes. As mentioned, it is possible that roll-calls are requested for strategic reasons, and it has been suggested that they over-emphasise the cohesion of party groups (Carrubba *et al.* 2006). This does not, however, imply that the relationship between types of alignments in the EP observed in roll-call votes and inter-institutional conflict will be biased. There is variation in the extent to which MEPs vote along party or national lines; and this variation is expected to influence subsequent inter-institutional conflict. The analysis is restricted to votes from the 5th EP parliamentary term (1999-2004). This represents the first term in which the present version of the codecision procedure has been used.

The patterns of alignments in the EP are established by examining votes at the first reading. On these votes, the EP is responding to the initial legislative proposal from the Commission with a series of amendments. Second and third reading votes are not included in the analysis. Second reading votes in the EP are a direct response to the Council common position. When a majority in the EP accepts the Council position, there are generally no amendments adopted, and consequently few recorded votes. Examining second reading votes would therefore involve selection on the dependent variable (inter-institutional agreement). For third readings, amendments are not tabled in the EP, so there are very few recorded votes available from this stage. Votes on proposals that were later withdrawn are also excluded from the analysis, as on these votes it is not possible to determine whether or not there was conflict between the EP and the Council.

A total of 155 codecision proposals, giving rise to 809 votes, are included in the analysis. These represent all the proposals during this period on which there were recorded votes at the first reading, excluding proposals that were later withdrawn. The data also includes a total of 164 consultation proposals, giving rise to 602 votes. While the consultation proposals are of interest in terms of what they tell us about patterns of contestation in the EP, they are not used to test the relationship between these patterns and inter-institutional relations (as will be explained below).

The voting behaviour of MEPs is categorised according to the level of cohesion of party groups and of national groups (i.e. groups of MEPs from the same member state). There were a total of 7 party groups and 15 national groups during this period. Following Hix *et al* (2005), the cohesion of groups on individual votes is measured as follows:

$$GroupCohesion = \frac{\max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\} - \frac{1}{2}[(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\}]}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

where Y_i , N_i and A_i indicate the number of Yes, No and Abstain votes in group i on a particular vote. According to this measure, if all members of the group vote the same way, group cohesion equals 1; and when the members of the group are divided equally among the three voting alternatives, cohesion equals 0.

Party group cohesion and national group cohesion can both be high or low on the same vote. For instance, if the vote is uncontroversial, most MEPs will vote the same way, so both party and national group cohesion will be high. The expectations concern the level of party group cohesion relative to the level of national group cohesion. Accordingly, the variable ‘Relative Group Cohesion’ is calculated for each vote as follows:

$$Relative\ Cohesion = \ln(\text{Average Party Cohesion}) - \ln(\text{Average National Cohesion})$$

where average party cohesion is the average cohesion of the 7 party groups, and average national cohesion is the average cohesion of the 15 national groups. Relative Cohesion takes a positive value when the party groups are on average more cohesive than the national groups; and it takes a negative value when the national groups are on average more cohesive than the party groups².

² It would not be possible to compute this measure if average national cohesion or average party group cohesion was 0. However, this does not occur for any of the cases in the dataset.

The policy area of each proposal is categorised according to the EP committee with primary responsibility. There were 17 standing committees during this term; 16 of which are represented in the data. To simplify the classification, the committees are grouped into 8 categories, as follows:

Table 2: Number of proposals and issues in each policy category

Policy category	Committees included	Codecision proposals (issues)	Consultation proposals (issues)	Total
Financial	Budgets; Budgetary Control; Economic and Monetary Affairs	7 (40)	19 (45)	26 (95)
Market	Legal Affairs and the Internal Market; Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy	28 (171)	26 (76)	54 (247)
Sectoral	Agriculture and Rural Development; Fisheries	2 (3)	54 (180)	56 (183)
Regional	Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism	34 (157)	0 (0)	34 (157)
Foreign	Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy; Development and Cooperation	2 (3)	4 (10)	6 (13)
Citizens	Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs; Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities; Constitutional Affairs	11 (42)	51 (253)	62 (295)
Environment	Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy	62 (352)	6 (14)	68 (367)
Social	Employment and Social Affairs Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport	9 (41)	4 (24)	13 (65)
Total		155 (809)	164 (602)	319 (1411)

As is clear from Table 2, the main areas where the codecision procedure is set to extend under the Lisbon Treaty are sectoral policies (agriculture and fisheries) and citizens' policies (such as justice and home affairs).

It is expected that the EP opposes the Council more often when party group cohesion is high relative to national group cohesion. While voting patterns in the EP are examined at the first reading stage, inter-institutional conflict is measured by examining the subsequent stages of the legislative process. If the Council accepts the position put forward in the EP first reading, or if the EP accepts the position put forward by the Council in its common position, then there is no evidence that the EP opposed the Council. However, if the EP votes to amend the Council common position, then this indicates that the EP did oppose the Council on that proposal. It is only possible to measure this for codecision proposals, because under consultation the EP does not get an opportunity to respond to the Council. The dichotomous variable 'EP Amends Council' is coded as 0 for proposals on which the EP did not amend the Council common position, and 1 for proposals on which it did. Note that this variable is measured at the proposal level; it is much more problematic to measure inter-institutional conflict on individual votes. Of the 155 codecision first readings examined, the EP subsequently amended the Council common position on 95 proposals (61%).

Analysis

To begin, relative group cohesion is compared across policy area. Figure 1 shows the mean value of this variable (with 95% confidence intervals) for the issues in each policy category. 'Foreign policy' is excluded, as there are too few cases to calculate a meaningful average. The figures include both consultation and codecision proposals. Recall that relative group cohesion takes on a positive value when average party group

cohesion is large relative to average national group cohesion. For all policy areas, the average value of this variable is above zero, indicating that party group cohesion is generally higher than national group cohesion. However, there are significant differences across policy area. Not surprisingly, the lowest values of relative group cohesion are found on the Sectoral and Financial categories. The issues in these categories touch on distributive matters such as the Common Agricultural Policy and budgetary affairs; the costs and benefits of these proposals will therefore tend to vary significantly across member states. The level of party group cohesion relative to national group cohesion is higher in policy areas such as the environment and consumer protection, social and employment policy and citizen's policies. Here, the costs and benefits tend to vary between social groups more than member states. Perhaps surprisingly, issues in the 'regional' category do not have particularly low values of relative group cohesion. Closer inspection reveals that these proposals are overwhelmingly concentrated on rules and standards for transportation, and as such are likely to generate division along partisan lines over the appropriate level of regulation, rather than between member states.

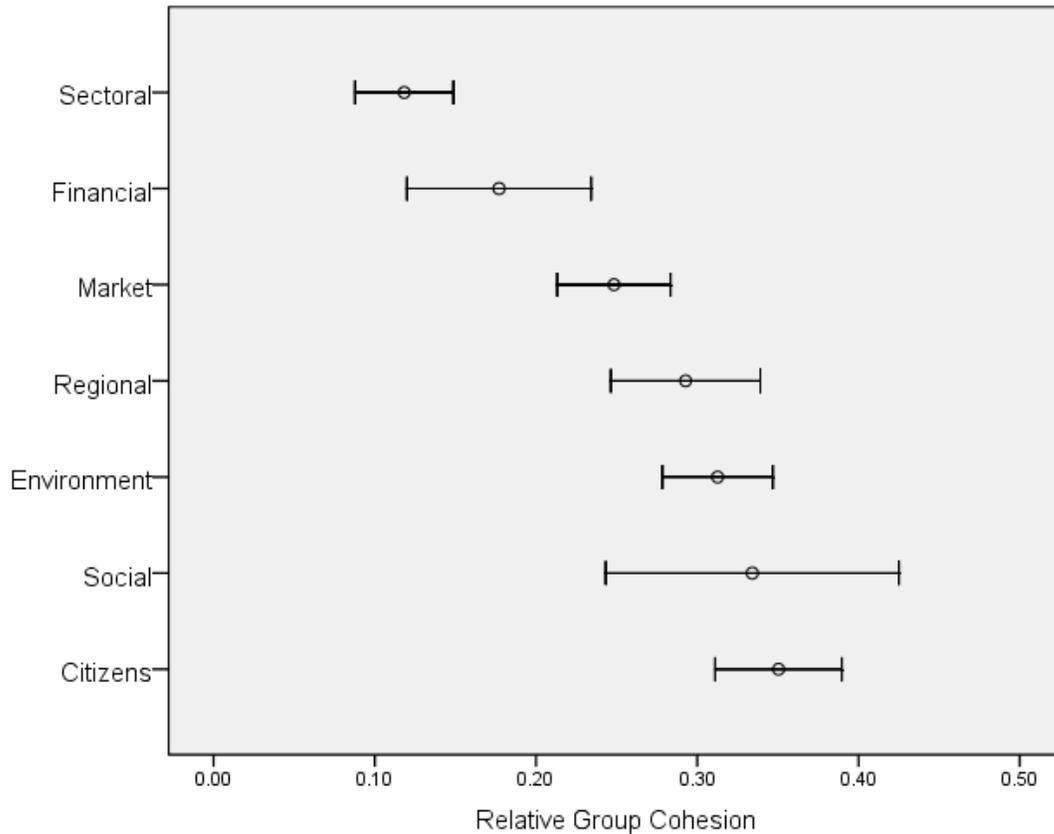


Figure 1. Relative Group Cohesion by policy area (mean values and 95% confidence intervals)

Turning to the analysis of inter-institutional conflict, Table 3 examines the relationship between patterns of contestation in the EP and the frequency with which the EP opposes the Council. As the dependent variable ‘EP Amends Council’ is dichotomous, logistic regression is used. The dependent variable is measured at the proposal level, so the total number of cases is 155. The main independent variable is the average value of ‘Relative Group Cohesion’ across all votes associated with a proposal. Model 1 presents the basic bivariate relationship. It is likely that the EP amends the Council more often on some policy areas than others; Model 2 includes dummy variables to capture this. The reference category in Model 2 contains 11 proposals from the ‘foreign’, ‘sectoral’ and ‘financial’ committees. Both models are significant according to

the Hosmer and Lemshow test, as the null hypothesis of no difference between observed and predicted values of the dependent variable is not rejected. 67% of cases are correctly predicted in Model 1; this increases to 72% in Model 2 (the baseline comparison is 61%, which is the percentage of cases on which the EP amends the Council).

The coefficient for the variable ‘Party Cohesion’ is positive and significant in both estimations. This indicates that when a proposal is associated with a high degree of party group cohesion relative to national cohesion, the EP is more likely to amend the Council. Conversely, when a proposal generates a high degree of national cohesion relative to party group cohesion, the EP is less likely to amend the Council. This is in line with expectations: when patterns of contestation are geographic, the differences between the EP and Council are relatively small. The effect of this variable does not entirely account for variation across policy area; the EP tends to amend the Council more often on proposals from the Environment committee more often than other committees, regardless of the level of relative group cohesion.

While the effect of relative group cohesion is significant, it is difficult to interpret the meaning of the coefficient. This is addressed in Figure 2, which plots the predicted probability of the EP amending the Council for various values of the main independent variable, according to the estimates of Model 1³. When ‘Average Relative Group Cohesion’ is -1 (i.e. when national group cohesion is high relative to party group cohesion), the probability of the EP amending the Council is 0.14. When ‘Average Relative Group Cohesion’ is zero (i.e. national and party groups are equally cohesive), the probability of the EP amending the Council is 0.51. When ‘Average Relative Group Cohesion’ is 1 (i.e. party group cohesion is high relative to national group cohesion), the

³ Estimates computed using Clarify (King, Tomz and Wittenberg 2000).

probability of the EP amending the Council is 0.88. Note that the observed range of the independent variable is smaller than that show in Figure 2 (it ranges from -0.3 to 0.9). The important conclusion from this analysis is that the chances of the EP amending the Council falls below 50% when the EP is divided more on national rather than party group lines.

Table 3. Logistic regression analysis of EP amending the Council

	Model 1	Model 2
Average Relative Group Cohesion	2.01*** (0.70)	2.04*** (0.78)
Policy dummies		
Social		0.11 (1.00)
Market		1.13 (0.15)
Regional		0.43 (0.79)
Citizens		0.56 (0.96)
Environment		2.22*** (0.77)
Constant	0.05 (0.22)	-1.11 (0.69)
Hosmer and Lemshow goodness of fit (P)	5.54 (0.70)	6.77 (0.67)
Percentage correctly predicted	67%	72%
N	155	155

Note: Dependent variable is 'EP Amends Council'. *p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

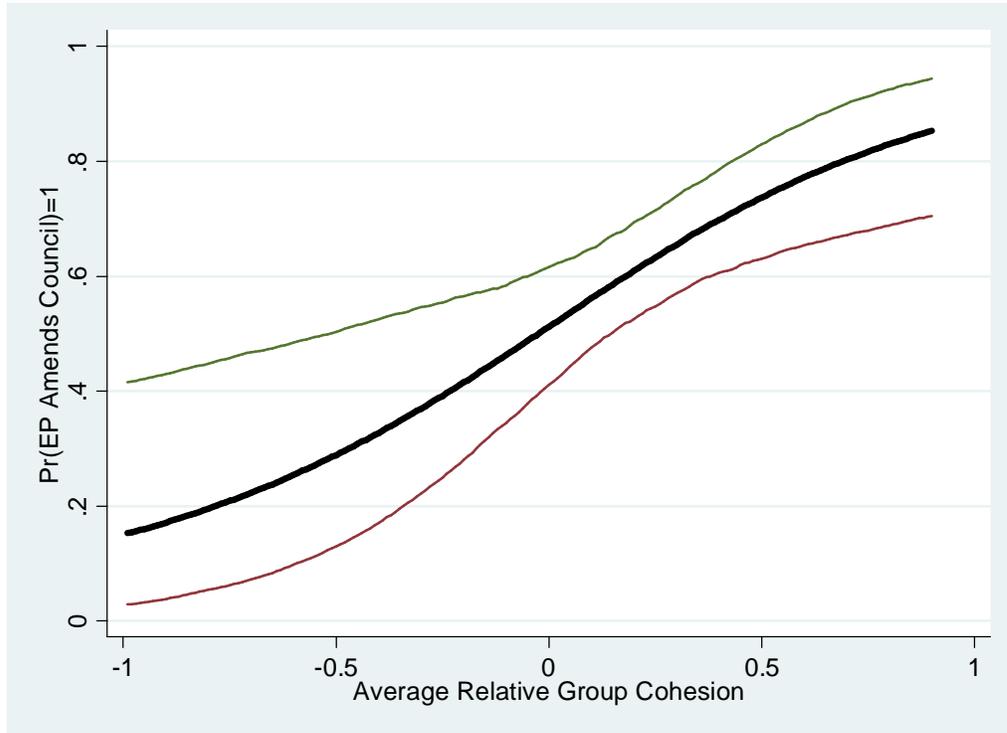


Figure 2. Predicted probability of EP amending the Council, for values of Average Relative Group Cohesion

3. Case Study

The previous section shows that the mode of representation in the EP plays an important role in shaping inter-institutional relations. Furthermore, the relative importance of national and partisan affiliations was found to vary across policy areas. In particular, some of the key policy areas which will move to the codecision procedure under the Lisbon Treaty were associated with comparatively high levels of national alignments. To explore the dynamics of internal decision making in the EP on nationally divisive issues, a recent controversial consultation proposal, the ‘Regulation on the common organisation of the markets in the sugar sector’ (cns/2005/118) is examined.

...TO BE ADDED...

4. Conclusion

The European Parliament is often seen as a vehicle designed to ‘bring Europe closer to its citizens’; and much scholarly attention has focused on the question of how the connection between MEPs and voters can be enhanced (e.g. Farrell and Scully 2007, Hix et al 2007). The EP also serves to fulfil another, arguably more important function: to improve the quality of EU policies by increasing the range of interests represented in the decision making process. EU policy making has traditionally been dominated by territorial interests represented in the Council; a powerful EP can serve to provide equal representation to societal interests that cut across national borders. This paper has argued that the nature of representation in the EP serves to undermine the extent to which it acts as an independent legislative body with distinct policy preferences from the Council of Ministers. Due to the weakness of European party groups both in the electorate and in parliament, MEPs often pursue national rather than partisan policy goals; and because territorial representation in the EP mirrors that of the Council, the EP often simply follows the lead of the Council. Thus, despite the growing powers of the EP, the EU cannot be classified as a ‘strong’ bicameral system in all policy fields.

The importance of nationality in shaping the role of the EP in the legislative process was illustrated by way of a large-n analysis of proposals introduced during the 5th parliamentary term. While national groups were found to be less cohesive than transnational party groups on average, there was considerable variation across policy areas. Nationality was found to be particularly important in structuring behaviour on proposals dealt with by sectoral and financial committees (although even here, party

groups were found to be more important on average). Interestingly, these are also policy areas where the power of the EP is set to be enhanced under the Lisbon Treaty reforms. As expected, the frequency with which the EP opposes the Council was found to be significantly lower on proposals with strong national alignments in the EP. These findings challenge the view of Hix *et al* (2007: 66) that ‘national-territorial conflicts... are kept ‘off the table’ in the day-to-day legislative business of the EU’. They also imply that the extension of the codecision procedure will affect decision making in certain areas (such as justice and home affairs) much more than in others (such as agriculture, fisheries, and budgetary affairs).

Perhaps paradoxically, the two major shortcomings of the EP – the disconnection between MEPs and voters, and the failure of the EP to present an independent voice in certain policy areas – imply opposing solutions. It has been argued that the EP can be brought closer to EU citizens by moving to open list electoral systems, which encourage greater levels of geographic representation and less party cohesion (Farrell and Scully 2007: 205). In contrast, the evidence presented in this paper suggests that the independence of the EP is enhanced by greater party group cohesion and less attention to national interests. Furthermore, the EP would act as a more effective representative of citizens’ interests if it were apportioned on the basis of population, as is the case in most federal lower houses. It is hard to deny that decisions taken at the EU level should take account of the interests of the greatest possible number of EU citizens across member states as well as the interests of member state governments. Only by moving to a fully population based representative system for the European Parliament, and by the strengthening of political parties in the EP, can this be achieved.

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