The European Parliament
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Introduction

Among the various institutions of the European Union (EU), the European Parliament (EP) is undoubtedly the one that has changed most over the decades (Hix and Scully 2003; Rittberger 2005; Judge and Earnshaw 2008; Corbett et al. 2011). Initially a purely consultative body with members seconded from national parliaments, the European Parliament is now vested with significant legislative, control and budgetary powers. The Parliament shapes EU laws, particularly through the co-decision procedure, is involved in the appointment of Commission members (and can force them to resign) and decides on the EU’s budget in cooperation with the Council.

The Parliament has been directly elected since 1979, and 751 members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are scheduled to be elected in the eighth round of elections in 2014. However, at least in terms of voter turnout, the Parliament has failed to connect with Europeans: Euroelections are almost universally described as a disappointment by both the media and political scientists. Turnout has steadily fallen since the first elections, with only 43 per cent of eligible voters participating in the 2009 elections. Although the initial expectations regarding turnout were probably unrealistic, the main concern for the EP is that turnout has declined despite the Parliament’s empowerment.

These two themes – the increase in the Parliament’s powers and the failings of Euroelections – have been widely explored in the literature. In addition, there is an important body of work on party politics and committees in the Parliament. Many scholars would argue that the EP is one of the most researched parliaments in the world; it is certainly the EU institution we know the most about.¹ This chapter examines the state of scholarly understanding of the EP. The first section focuses on direct elections; we then turn our attention to the European Parliament’s party groups before exploring committees and the Parliament’s inter-institutional relationships with the Council and the Commission. The concluding discussion suggests some avenues for further research.

Elections

The literature on European Parliament elections has largely been based on the theory of ‘second-order’ elections, a model first developed by Reif and Schmitt (1980) in their article on the first Euroelections in 1979. According to this analytical framework, second-order elections are less
important than first-order elections, with the latter referring primarily to domestic parliamentary and/or presidential elections. Research on this topic can be divided into two areas: studies focusing on citizens’ attitudes and preferences toward voting and the European Parliament/EU, and research explaining party strategies and performance in the elections. Much of this research has utilized data generated by the European Election Studies (EES) project, which has conducted citizen surveys (in all elections except 1984) and candidate surveys (in 1994 and 2009) in connection with the elections.²

The second-order election model draws on the premise that citizens’ behaviour in second-order elections is more significantly affected by the national first-order context than by factors related to the European Parliament elections themselves. The model is based on the following three main hypotheses: (1) turnout is lower in European Parliament elections than in national elections; (2) government parties suffer losses in Euroelections; and (3) larger parties do worse and smaller parties perform better in EP elections. Regarding the first hypothesis, turnout is on average substantially lower than in national parliamentary elections – and has indeed declined consistently, from 63 per cent in 1979 to 43 per cent in the 2009 elections. Turnout has thus fallen despite the considerable empowerment of the Parliament. This finding contradicts the second-order theory, in that turnout should have increased when there was ‘more at stake’ in European Parliament elections (Mattila 2003).

The timing of European Parliament elections plays a crucial part in the second-order model. The performance of government parties suffers when EP elections take place halfway through the national parliamentary electoral cycle. But when European Parliament elections are scheduled just before or after national first-order elections, then governing parties do better. The poor results of government or large parties can also be explained by the ‘less at stake’ argument. Voters may experiment with new parties in EP elections, since they know that the elections will not result in major societal changes – at least, not in their home country. Consequently, citizens may vote for parties that are a closer match to their own preferences; alternatively, they might use European Parliament elections to protest against governing or mainstream parties (see, for example, van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Koepke and Ringe 2006; Hix and Marsh 2007; van der Brug and van der Eijk 2007; Weber 2007; Hobolt et al. 2009; Hobolt and Spoon 2012).

The outcome of these second-order effects is that the composition of the European Parliament is biased in favour of parties that fare worse in national first-order elections, with national governing parties being consistently punished in Euro-elections (Manow and Döring 2008; Hix and Marsh 2011). However, as in national legislatures, highly educated, politically knowledgeable and pro-European voters are better represented in the chamber (Stockemer 2012; Walczak and van der Brug 2013).

As the second-order model suggests, voting decisions in Euroelections are heavily influenced by the domestic party-political environment. The primacy of domestic factors results in part from the strategies of the national parties that control candidate selection and conduct the electoral campaigns. Most national parties wage European Parliament campaigns based on domestic issues. These parties are mainly positioned around the traditional social cleavages recognized in political science literature, and because the anti/pro-integration dimension tends to cut across these cleavages, parties often experience internal fragmentation on EU questions (Hix and Lord 1997; Hix 1999; Marks and Wilson 2000; Marks and Steenbergen 2004; Szczepanik and Taggart 2008; Almeida 2012). Moreover, survey data shows that parties are on average more representative of their voters on traditional left–right matters than on issues related to European integration, with the political elite more supportive of integration than the electorate (Mattila and Raunio 2006, 2012; Arnold and Franklin 2012). Thus, established parties have an incentive to contest elections along the familiar left–right dimension, downplaying integration issues.
Elections to the Parliament are held during the same week in all member states, and the candidates are all competing for seats in the same EU institution, but there is no common electoral system, and campaigning is conducted by national parties on the basis of largely domestic agendas. However, Europe as an issue has become increasingly politicized and salient. This has also become apparent in Euroelections, as demonstrated by the increasing importance of the EU as an issue in explaining citizens’ voting behaviour:

governing parties may lose votes because of the disconnect between major governing parties and their voters on the issue of EU integration, and the fact that EP elections make this issue, and therefore this disconnect, more prominent. On both the contextual and individual levels, it appears that Europe can matter when voters go to the polls. Governing-party voters who are more sceptical about further integration are more likely to defect or abstain in EP elections.

(Hobolt et al. 2009: 111; see also Clark and Rohrschneider 2009; de Vries et al. 2011; Hobolt and Spoon 2012)

Research thus indicates that national parties that are out of tune with their electorates over European integration are punished in Euroelections.

Party groups and coalitions

The Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the predecessor of the European Parliament, held its inaugural session in September 1952. In the very first important vote held in the Assembly, for the purpose of electing its president, the members split along group lines instead of voting as national blocs. The decision to form party groups crossing national lines must be understood in the light of developments in the early 1950s. First, the creation of the High Authority (the predecessor of the Commission) and the Assembly marked the emergence of truly supranational institutions, in contrast to those of the intergovernmental Council of Europe (and its Consultative Assembly in particular). Second, the national interests in the ECSC were already represented in the Council of Ministers; the Assembly sought to counterbalance this through its ideologically based group structure.

A comparison with parties in European national legislatures reveals that European Parliament party groups operate in a very different institutional environment. The political and social heterogeneity of the EU is reflected within these groups, with around 170 parties from 27 member states winning seats in the 2009 elections. However, EP party groups have gradually consolidated their positions in the Parliament. Kreppel (2002b) shows how the increase in the legislative powers of the Parliament has contributed to the centralization of power in the hands of two large party groups – the centre-right European People’s Party (EPP), which unites Christian Democrats and Conservatives, and the centre-left Party of European Socialists (PES; became the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) after the 2009 elections) – and to more pragmatic cooperation between these groups in order to influence the EU policy process. Kreppel also describes how the two main party groups have introduced changes to the Parliament’s rules of procedure that have further marginalized the smaller party groups.

The EP’s Rules of Procedure set out numerical criteria for group formation. Following the 2009 elections, a political group must include at least 25 MEPs from at least one-quarter of the member states (groups consisting of MEPs from only one country have not been permitted since the 1999 elections). In addition to ideological ties, the availability of considerable financial,
material and procedural benefits has provided further incentives for group formation and party group switching (Maurer et al. 2008; McElroy 2009; McElroy and Benoit 2010; Bressanelli 2012). Although the financial support from the Parliament may seem inconsequential in absolute terms, it has nevertheless been crucial for certain smaller parties – such as regionalist and green parties – that often do not have access to comparable resources at the national level. With regard to procedural rights, appointments to committees and intra-parliamentary leadership positions and the allocation of reports and plenary speaking time are all based on the rule of proportionality between groups. Certain plenary actions, such as tabling amendments and presenting oral questions, require the backing of a committee, a party group or at least 40 MEPs. Non-attached representatives are thus procedurally marginalized in the chamber.

Much of the research on EP party groups is based on roll-call data, with vote data often supplemented by MEP surveys. Following the ‘first generation’ of studies, which examined data on relatively limited numbers of votes (Attinà 1990; Raunio 1997), subsequent research by Hix and others on more extensive data sets has been far more ambitious and methodologically more sophisticated. This research has produced two main findings. First, the party groups achieve relatively high levels of cohesion, between 85 and 90 per cent, and sometimes even above 90 per cent. Probably the principal reason for MEPs and national parties to vote with their group most of the time is policy influence. Cohesive action is essential for the achievement of a group’s objectives, and cooperative behaviour within groups helps individual MEPs to pursue their own goals. Moreover, given the enormous number of amendments and final resolutions voted upon in plenary sessions, the voting cues provided by groups and particularly by group members in the responsible European Parliament committee are an essential source of guidance for MEPs (Ringe 2010).

Second, the main cleavage structuring competition in the Parliament is the familiar left–right dimension, with the anti/pro-integration dimension constituting the secondary axis of competition (e.g. Hix et al. 2005, 2007). Studies based on EES survey data and on expert surveys have produced largely similar results with respect to both the dimensionality of the political space in the chamber and the levels of group cohesion (Thomassen et al. 2004; McElroy and Benoit 2007, 2012; Schmitt and Thomassen 2009).

Although the primary voting decision rule in the chamber is simple majority, on certain issues (mainly budget amendments and second-reading legislative amendments adopted under the co-decision procedure) the European Parliament must achieve an absolute majority (50 per cent of MEPs + 1). This absolute majority requirement facilitates cooperation between the two main groups, the EPP and the S&D, which between them control around two-thirds of the seats. Cooperation between the EPP and the S&D has also been influenced by inter-institutional considerations, as the Parliament must moderate its resolutions in order for its legislative amendments and other policies to be accepted by the Council and the Commission (Kreppel 2002b; Rose and Borz 2013). Competition on the left–right cleavage has benefited the smaller groups, particularly the liberals (the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe [ALDE]). Situated ideologically between the EPP and the S&D, the liberals have often played a pivotal role in the formation of winning coalitions.

The eastern enlargements have not significantly changed cohesion levels or coalition patterns in the chamber; after an initial period of adjustment, the voting behaviour of MEPs from new member states converged with that of the incumbents (Lindstädt et al. 2012). Party cohesion remained stable, and the EPP and the PES voted together at almost exactly the same rate in the 2004–9 Parliament (68 per cent) as in the previous electoral period – and this cooperation between the two large groups and the building of ‘super-majorities’ continued after the 2009 elections (Rose and Borz 2013). However, in the 2004–9 Parliament there was a more clearly defined centre-right majority bloc (EPP, ALDE and Union for Europe of the Nations), while
the three less united leftist groups (PES, Greens/European Free Alliance and European United Left/Nordic Green Left) were often in a minority position (Hix and Noury 2009; see also Voeten 2009). In fact, this shift to the right began in the 1999 elections, when the EPP emerged as the largest group (Warnjet et al. 2008).

National parties are crucial to understanding how the EP party groups work. MEPs can be seen as agents serving multiple masters: voters, national parties and European Parliament party groups (Thiem 2009). Arguably, national parties represent the most powerful principals, as they control candidate selection, especially in countries that use closed lists. Although the links between national parties and their MEPs have traditionally been fairly loose, recent research indicates that these ties are gradually becoming stronger. There has been more policy coordination between MEPs and their parties in recent years, as case studies on British and German parties have confirmed (Ovey 2002; Messner 2003), but national parties nonetheless generally refrain from ‘mandating’ their MEPs (Raunio 2000; Blomgren 2003; Bailer 2009). It is also interesting to note that overall the preferences of national MPs and MEPs concerning integration are quite similar; in addition, contrary to much accepted wisdom, there is no evidence that MEPs ‘go native’ in Brussels, becoming considerably more pro-European than their party comrades back home (Scully 2005).

Voting behaviour in the Parliament provides further evidence of the influence of national parties. Research indicates that when MEPs receive conflicting voting instructions from national parties and their EP party groups, they are more likely to side with their national party, particularly in parties in which the leadership has considerable power to punish and reward its MEPs (e.g. through centralized candidate selection or closed lists):

Despite the fact that the parliamentary principals in the EP control important benefits – such as committee assignments and speaking time – it is the principals that control candidate selection (the national parties) who ultimately determine how MEPs behave. When the national parties in the same parliamentary group decide to vote together, the EP parties look highly cohesive. But when these parties take opposing policy positions, the cohesion of the EP parties breaks down.

(Hix 2002: 696; see also Faas 2003; Hix 2004; Hix et al. 2007; Coman 2009; Mühlböck 2012; Arnold and Sapir 2013)

Thus, we can expect that MEPs who are seeking re-election will be particularly reluctant to ignore national party guidelines, and that this attentiveness to national party positions will be more evident in the run-up to the Euroelections (Lindstät et al. 2011); in addition, MEPs seeking to return to domestic politics will defect from group positions more often (Meserve et al. 2009).

But can European Parliament party groups and the Parliament influence EU politics? This question is addressed in the next section, which first examines the committees that function as key actors in shaping supranational laws and forming the European Parliament’s positions; it then focuses on the legislative and control powers of the Parliament vis-à-vis the Council and the Commission.

**Committees and policy influence**

Unlike many national constitutions, the EU Treaties allow the Parliament to design its internal rules. The EP has structured and reformed its internal organization to make the most of its
hard-won powers in the EU political system (Kreppel 2002b, 2003). In line with the similar empowerment of committees in national parliaments, as the European Parliament has gained new powers the full chamber has delegated greater authority to parliamentary committees. The substance of legislative work is accomplished in committees where individual rapporteurs draft reports that form the basis of parliamentary resolutions. Committees are also key forums for holding institutions such as the Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB) to account, as well as for shaping the EU’s budget and monitoring its implementation. The 2009–14 Parliament features 20 committees.

European Parliament committees have only recently attracted scholarly attention. This research has largely been driven by the debate between informational, distributional and partisan models of legislative politics derived from literature on the US Congress. The studies on EP committees have found support for all three perspectives with regard to the distribution of committee seats and rapporteurships; the latter are distributed among the groups on the basis of an auction-like points system. Because the point total of each party group is proportional to its share of seats in the chamber, the most expensive reports, such as those on the EU budget or on important pieces of co-decision legislation, are generally controlled by the larger groups (Bowler and Farrell 1995; Whitaker 2001, 2005, 2011; Mamadouh and Raunio 2003; Kaeding 2004, 2005; Benedetto 2005; Hauserer 2006; Hoyland 2006; McElroy 2006; Yordanova 2009, 2011a, 2013; Yoshinaka et al. 2010; Hurka and Kaeding 2012). 7

Committees enjoy extensive procedural rights within the Parliament (and, by extension, within the entire EU legislative process), and thus it is in the interests of both the party groups and the national parties to influence committee work. Party groups monitor committee proceedings, appointing group working parties and coordinators in key roles. The procedures for allocating committee chairs, seats and reports, all roughly based on proportionality, can also be seen as mechanisms allowing the party groups to control the committees. Moreover, national parties are key players in the allocation of committee seats and reports, and there are signs that these parties are increasingly using committee assignments to achieve their policy goals. Committees hence clearly serve the policy goals of both national parties and the EP party groups, with the legislative empowerment of the Parliament as a whole providing incentives for parties to more closely monitor committee proceedings (Whitaker 2011; Yordanova 2013). However, more research is needed on decision-making in committees. For example, although committees may act consensually (Settembri and Neuhold 2009), future research should more carefully address the balance of power between rapporteurs, committee chairs and group coordinators. Existing evidence suggests that the rapporteurs, whose reports are the basis of first committee and plenary deliberations, are the crucial actors in committee and parliamentary decision-making, particularly under the co-decision procedure (Benedetto 2005; Costello and Thomson 2010; Finke 2012; Jensen and Winzen 2012).

But can the Parliament influence EU politics? More specifically, has the EP managed to parlay its constitutional powers into legislative success? Research on the European Parliament’s policy influence can be divided into two categories: theoretical modelling and empirical analyses. The former branch of research was initiated by the article by Tsebelis (1994) on the cooperation procedure. Subsequent publications have generated useful insights regarding the impact of the Parliament under the various legislative procedures, with the debate largely focusing on the respective powers of the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament under the co-decision procedure. Interestingly, practitioners and academics have not always agreed on the extent to which the co-decision procedure has actually empowered the Parliament (Crombez et al. 2000). Empirical analyses have likewise attempted to measure and explain the
influence of the Parliament under alternative law-making procedures (e.g. Kreppel 2002a; Kardasheva 2009), in specific issue areas such as economic policy or foreign and security policy (e.g. Lord 2003, 2011; Burns 2005; Peters et al. 2008, 2010) and in relation to the control of regulatory agencies (Trauner 2012); other scholars have examined how inter-institutional relations and particularly the co-decision procedure have impacted coalition politics and power distribution within the Parliament (Hagemann and Høyland 2010; Naurin and Rasmussen 2011; Héritier and Reh 2012; Rasmussen 2012; Rasmussen et al. 2013).8

As the co-decision procedure – officially referred to in the Lisbon Treaty as the ‘ordinary legislative procedure’ – has gradually become the standard mode of adopting EU laws, scholars have turned their attention to the political dynamics of this procedure (Rasmussen 2012; Rasmussen et al. 2013). The co-decision procedure has resulted in a dramatic increase in interactions between the European Parliament and the Council. These repeated interactions, together with concerns over legislative delays, have contributed to the higher rate of early agreements in co-decision procedures. Essentially, this means that laws are adopted behind closed doors in informal trilogues. This reduction in inter-institutional rivalry has arguably been a factor in the lack of public debates and the technocratization (or de-politicization) of EU decision-making, trends that have made it more difficult to observe the decisions being made and how the different actors involved in the game participate (Shackleton and Raunio 2003; but see Toshkov and Rasmussen 2012); this concern is shared by many backbench MEPs who are dissatisfied with the resulting power shifts inside the chamber (Héritier and Reh 2012). Currently, an overwhelming majority of co-decision processes are concluded at first reading, signalling a need to study the political profiles and policy influence of the MEPs (in particular the rapporteurs) who bargain on behalf of the Parliament in trilogues, instead of focusing on the conciliation committees (Rasmussen 2008; Franchino and Mariotto 2013), as these groups are now rarely convened (Farrell and Héritier 2004; Häge and Kaeding 2007; Costello and Thomson 2010; Rasmussen 2011).

The Parliament has also gradually gained new competences that enable stronger control over the Commission. This applies in particular to the institution’s appointment powers, as the link between European Parliament elections and the composition of the Commission has become more direct since the early 1990s (Moury 2007). Because both the Commission and its president must be approved by the Parliament before they can take office (and can also be voted out of office by the MEPs), the Parliament has explicitly demanded that the voice of the voters not be ignored in the make-up of the Commission. The basic outcome is that party politics have become more significant in EU policy-making as a whole, not just within the Parliament. For example, since the 2004 elections there has been a kind of government–opposition divide in the Parliament. Because the EPP is the largest group and centre-right groups control the majority of the Parliament (and centre-right cabinets dominate the Council), the partisan composition of the 2004–9 and 2009–14 Commissions has leaned toward the centre-right, with a clear majority of the Commissioners and the president representing either EPP or ALDE member parties. Not surprisingly, there has consequently been a firm ‘centre-right’ grip on EU politics that has unquestionably left its mark on legislation.

In fact, quite a lively debate has emerged over whether the European Parliament should become a fully fledged ‘federal’ parliament, with the composition of the Commission determined by the results of Euroelections. The defenders of such a parliamentary model, or of stronger supranational democracy in general, argue that since the EU already possesses significant authority over a broad range of policy areas the choice of who exercises this authority should be based on competition between political forces – in this scenario, essentially Europarties
competing in the EP elections (Føllesdal and Hix 2006; Hix 2008). More cautious voices contend that this is not the appropriate way to address the democratic deficit, due in part to the lack of a common European identity, and also because the issues that are most salient to voters are still decided nationally (Moravcsik 2002). Others have pointed out that installing party government at the EU level may not be a good solution in an era in which political parties are facing serious difficulties in the context of national democracies (Mair and Thomassen 2010).

Conclusion

The European Parliament has undergone tremendous changes since the 1950s, evolving from a non-elected consultative ‘talking shop’ into a directly elected legislature vested with significant law-making powers. At the same time, scholarly understanding of the Parliament has taken major strides forward, to the extent that the EP is arguably one of the most researched legislatures in the world. Much of this research (in particular, studies on plenary voting and seat and report allocation in committees) has certainly been systematic, and its methodological diversity has increased; however, in many ways, the majority of scholars have eschewed broader longitudinal analyses that would make it possible to establish causal mechanisms between reforms inside the Parliament and alterations in its external environment. It is hard to argue with Yordanova (2011b: 598), who argues that existing research ‘has so far been based on snapshot views offered by studies on specific organizational aspects covering narrowly delimited time periods’. Notable exceptions are recent studies on the development of the co-decision procedure examining how changing inter-institutional relations have shaped the EP’s internal organization and power structures.

Interestingly, the increase in the powers of the institution and the improved state of academic research have coincided with a growing distance between the Parliament and its electorate. Turnout has declined consistently since the first elections in 1979, and Europeans seem to know very little about the Parliament. Future research should thus focus more on the links between citizens and the Parliament. For example, studies indicate that the design of the electoral system impacts MEPs’ campaigns and contact with their electorates, with MEPs from more ‘open’ systems paying more attention to individual voters and constituency interests (Bowler and Farrell 1993, 2011; Farrell and Scully 2005, 2007, 2010). Overall, however, the constituency activities of MEPs – and how these might differ from the constituency work of national MPs – have thus far largely been neglected by scholars.

The literature on Euroelections has perhaps been too closely tied to the second-order model. Although it represents a relatively powerful tool for understanding European Parliament elections, the dominance of the second-order paradigm has perhaps unintentionally resulted in somewhat one-sided research on elections. There is clearly scope for comparative studies of European Parliament elections and national elections (e.g. Caramani 2006; Franklin and Hobolt 2011; Söderlund et al. 2011), or of EP elections and other second-order elections. More research is also needed on public perceptions of the Parliament. Who are the ‘supporters’ of the European Parliament, and how have voters’ views on the Parliament changed over time? Do people see the Parliament as an important and trustworthy institution (Scully 2000; Gabel 2003)? Does the European Parliament receive regular media coverage and does such media attention affect public opinion about the institution (Gattermann 2013)? Concerns over the democratic deficit have been one of the key factors behind the gradual empowerment of the Parliament (e.g. Rittberger 2005, 2012; Benedetto and Hix 2007), but whether the EP can actually reduce this deficit will depend at least in part on the institution’s ability to connect with the people it represents.
Although there is already a substantial body of work on the European Parliament party groups, particularly on their cohesion and coalition formations, future research should focus on the internal dynamics and decision-making of party groups; the same applies to committees. Future research could also devote more attention to the smaller party groups (and the more Eurosceptical MEPs) to determine whether their organization and behaviour differ from those of the larger party groups (Jensen and Spoon 2010; Brack 2012, 2013). Researchers should also focus on explaining the variation between the activities of individual MEPs beyond roll-call voting – for example how often and why they act as rapporteurs, make speeches or ask questions. Proksch and Slapin show how MEPs use legislative tools such as parliamentary questions and plenary speeches to pursue their re-election purposes and to advance the policy goals of their national parties (Slapin and Proksch 2010; Proksch and Slapin 2011; see also Sigalas 2011); plenary speeches can also be employed to study party positions and the dimensions of contestation in the chamber (Proksch and Slapin 2010) – or to examine the nature of supranational deliberation (Lord and Tamvakis 2013). Such research could be linked to a longitudinal study of the political careers of MEPs (Scarrow 1997), especially as recent studies have demonstrated how re-election considerations shape the voting behaviour and other legislative activities of Europoliticians.

Finally, much of the research on inter-institutional relations has been in the form of either theoretical modelling or empirical analyses of the legislative performance of the various EU institutions. Future research could intensify the focus on the ‘partyness’ of EU politics. Although scholars have been investigating the role of parties and party preferences in EU decision-making since the late 1990s, this line of research is still relatively underdeveloped, with respect both to theory and to empirical measurements and explanations of partisan links between the EU institutions (Lindberg et al. 2008; Plechanovová 2013). As a result, political science still cannot give a satisfactory answer to a question that is central to EU studies: are EU laws and policies more significantly affected by party preferences or by national interests?

Notes

1 This is in large part explained by the openness of the European Parliament, which enables scholars to gather data on various aspects of the Parliament’s work. In contrast, the other EU organs are much less transparent, and thus less empirical research has been conducted on these institutions.

2 The main publications of the EES project are the volumes and special issues edited by van der Eijk and Franklin (1996), Katz and Wessels (1999), Schmitt and Thomassen (1999), van der Brug and van der Eijk (2007), Schmitt (2009), Thomassen (2009) and Hobolt and Franklin (2011).

3 The largest group, the EPP, consisted of 41 national party delegations after the 2009 elections. Interestingly, the larger groups in particular often contain more than one party per member state, and therefore these parties compete against each other in elections.

4 In addition to the EES candidate surveys, the European Parliament Research Group (EPRG 2014) has carried out three MEP surveys (in 2000, 2006 and 2010) that have been utilized in several of the publications referred to in this chapter (Scully et al. 2012).

5 The busy agendas of the plenaries and the committees together with the often quite technical nature of EU legislation suggest that MEPs’ assistants and committee and party group staff perform an important role in the Parliament (Busby and Belkacem 2013; Dobbels and Neuhold 2013).

6 There is also some debate over the validity of the roll-call data. Because recorded votes represent only a sample of the totality of votes in the Parliament, the representativeness of the sample is of crucial concern, especially for the investigation of conflict dimensions in the Parliament (Carrubba et al. 2006).

7 Yordanova (2011b, 2013) provides an excellent overview of studies on EP committees.

8 The website of the European Legislative Politics Research Group (ELPRG 2014) provides a variety of data sets and other information on research on the European Parliament and EU legislation.

9 Most of this data is available online at the websites of the European Parliament and VoteWatch Europe (2014).
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