

**Understanding European Parliament Elections:
Punishment or Protest?**

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1. Introduction

In June 2004 almost 25 million European citizens (about 15 percent of total voters) supported anti-European parties in the sixth European Parliament elections. But, did these citizens vote for anti-European candidates to punish their governments, as a protest against the European Union (EU), or some mix of the two?

The standard political science theory of European elections is that these are mid-term contests in the battle to win national government office, so voters are primarily motivated to reward or punish political parties in the basis of their domestic policy priorities and performance. Nevertheless, this is not the impression of the political establishment in Brussels or the media in many national capitals. They see falling turnout in European elections and increased support for anti-European parties as indicators of growing public antipathy towards the EU. Some recent research, which suggests that ‘Europe matters’ in European elections, at least at the margins, lends support to this perception.

Which side is right has implications for whether the EU’s so-called ‘democratic deficit’ can be reduced by increasing the powers of the European Parliament. If European Parliament elections are simply about protesting against national governments, and have very little to do with EU policies, then the gradual increase in the powers of the European Parliament has done little to increase the connection between European voters and EU governance. However, if citizens increasingly use European elections to express their preferences about the EU as a whole or on the policy priorities of the EU, regardless of whether these are pro- or anti-European views, then one could argue that the political majority that emerges in the European Parliament from these elections has some sort of mandate from EU citizens.

In this paper we try to resolve this argument by looking closely at the empirical evidence. The rest of the paper is organised as follows. In the next section we review the existing theoretical and empirical claims about how to understand European Parliament elections. Section three explains our methods – we apply a series of statistical models to estimate the amount of votes parties gain or lose in each European election relative to the previous national general election. Our dataset covers all six European elections since 1979 and includes parties in all twenty-five member states. Section four presents the empirical results and section five contains a brief conclusion.

2. Existing Research on European Parliament Elections

2.1. The Classic View: ‘Second-Order National Contests’

The classic view of European elections, repeated in many textbooks on EU politics, is that these elections are ‘second-order national contests’ (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). As this phrase suggests, this conception of European Parliament elections has two elements: (1) they are ‘national’ contests rather than ‘European’ contests; and (2) they are less important than the main national contests (national general elections) and are hence ‘second-order’.

The theoretical logic behind this is as follows. The main political office in the EU polity, in terms of the resources available to policy-makers, is national government. Hence, the primary motivation of politicians and parties in Europe is to win, and hold on to, national government office. The main political battle in all European countries, then, is the national general election, which has a direct influence on the make-up of national government. All other elections – be they European elections, regional elections or local elections – are fought

in the shadow of these ‘first-order’ contests. Put this way, European Parliament elections are similar to mid-term Congressional elections in the United States, *Landtagswahlen* in Germany, by-elections in the British House of Commons, or local elections throughout the democratic world (Tufte, 1975; Anderson and Ward, 1996).

The second-order nature of European elections has two main empirical effects. First, parties devote fewer resources to these election campaigns and there are lower incentives for people to vote in these contests because these contests are less important than general elections (Schmitt and Mannheimer, 1991; Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis, 1996). As a result, there is generally a lower turnout in European elections than in national elections. While this may affect the fortunes of some parties more than others, analyses to date have proved inconclusive as to whether government parties in particular lose out because of this.

Second, although European Parliament elections do not have a direct impact on the formation of national government, they can be used by voters to influence the next general election or the policies of the current government. Hence, the people who do participate in European elections may vote differently than they would have done if a national election were held at the same time. Oppenhuis, van der Eijk and Franklin (1996) identify two main reasons motivating such ‘vote-switching’ in European elections. First, European elections give citizens an opportunity to vote sincerely rather than strategically (‘vote with the heart’). With little at stake, citizens are free to vote for the party that is closest to their ideal policy preferences, rather than supporting a (usually larger) party that is further from their preferences but has a greater chance of forming government. As a result, large parties, whether in government or opposition, lose votes to smaller parties.

Second, European elections allow people to express their dissatisfaction with the party or parties in government (‘put the boot in’). European elections give citizens the opportunity to signal particular policy preferences or demonstrate dissatisfaction with particular policies

of the current party/parties in government by voting for the main opposition party or a single-issue party which promotes an issue that a citizen cares about, such as environmental or immigration concerns. As a result, governing parties lose votes to opposition parties, whether small or large.

The final element of the standard second-order-national-contests theory is that the size of these possible turnout and switching effects depends on when a European Parliament election is held in the national election cycle (Reif, 1984). If a European election is held shortly after a national general election, the party or parties in government will be in a 'honeymoon' period. At this point in the cycle, turnout in European elections might still be lower than in the previous general election. However, support for the governing parties may even rise as voters switch support to the winners of the previous election. In this situation, governing parties may do even better in the European election than in the previous general election. Alternatively, if a European Parliament election is held in the build-up to a new national general election, parties will be motivated to spend a lot of time and money in the campaign, and citizens will be motivated to vote, to try to influence the up-coming national election. In this situation, turnout should be comparatively high, and vote-switching should be limited since voters are likely to behave as if this were a national election. At the other extreme, if a European Parliament election is held in the middle of a national election cycle, the party or parties in government are likely to be at their most unpopular. In this situation, the anti-government and anti-big parties effects resulting from a lower turnout and vote-switching are likely to be largest.

In sum, the basic arguments of the classic theory of European Parliament elections can be summarised in the following three hypotheses:

H1-Government-Opposition. Parties in government at the time of a European Parliament election will receive a smaller share of the vote in the European election than they did in the previous national general election.

H2-Party Size. The larger a political party, in terms of its vote-share at the last national general election, the larger the losses in the subsequent European election.

H3-Timing. The closer a European election is to the middle of a national election cycle, the larger the effect described in H1.

2.2. An Alternative View: European Still Matters, Through Party Policy Positions

Despite the standard view, that European elections have very little to do with Europe, there is a widespread perception that ‘Europe matters’ in European elections, and increasingly so. This seems to be based on a selective viewing of the evidence. For example, falling turnout in European elections seems to go hand-in-hand with declining support for European integration, as expressed in Eurobarometer opinion polls. There appeared to be a ‘green tide’ across Europe in the 1989 elections, as voters demanded that environmental issues should be tackled at the European level (Curtice, 1989). Anti-European movements emerged, seemingly from nowhere, in European elections in Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. And, existing parties with anti-European policies, on the extreme right and left, seem to do better in European elections than in national elections, at least in some countries on some occasions. Surely, all of these seemingly European-related outcomes cannot be explained away by the second-order model?

Starting with turnout, there is some evidence that attitudes towards European integration effect turnout in European elections. At an individual level, citizens who support

European integration or their country's membership of the EU are more likely to vote in European Parliament elections than citizens who are opposed to the EU or European integration more generally (Blondel et al., 1997) – although these effects have been shown to be very small: van der Eijk and Schmitt (forthcoming). At an aggregate level, moreover, member states who are net recipients from the EU budget or who have higher aggregate levels of support for EU membership tend to have higher levels of participation in European elections (Mattila, 2003), as do those who stand to gain more from the EU budget (Studlar et al., 2003). If Europe influences who participates in these elections, then presumably Europe may affect party-choice in these elections (although the logic here is that results should favour pro EU parties).

Ferrara and Weishaupt (2004) consequently suggest that if some voters in European elections base their vote-choice on the positions parties take on the question of Europe this could affect outcomes in at least two ways. First, parties whose platforms give greater salience to European issues, either in a positive or negative way, are likely to do better in European elections than if a national election were held at the same time. Second, parties or movements that are strongly opposed to European integration are likely to do better in European elections than in national elections.

Related to the second of these propositions, that anti-European parties should do better in European elections than in national elections, some parties are more likely to be anti-European than others. Specifically, parties on both the extreme left and extreme right have policy preferences that cannot be achieved within the centrist 'social market' EU policy regime. Extremist parties are consequently more anti-European than parties in the centre of the left-right spectrum (Taggart, 1998; Ray, 1999). Hence, if voters are motivated in European elections to protest against the established EU policy regime, extremist parties on both the left and right should do better in European elections than in national elections.

Europe could also affect voters' party choices in European elections in an indirect way. Carrubba and Timpone (2004) argue that it is rational for citizens to vote for different parties in different elections. This could be because voters deliberately want to 'balance' policy outcomes, and so try to produce divided-government (Fiorina, 1996). Alternatively, citizens could have different sincere policy preferences for different levels of government. For example, because of the negative externalities of different environmental policies in different member states, it is better that these issues are tackled at the European level than at the national level. Also, green parties are closer to the median voters' preferences on environmental issues than on many other issues. Hence, if voters express their preferences in European elections on some of the main EU policy issues, then green parties should do better in European elections than in national elections.

One caveat to both the second-order elections theory and the 'Europe matters' view is that European Parliament elections in the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe are likely to be different from European elections in the 'old 15' member states. Part of this difference may simply be a result of the high levels of electoral volatility in many of these states, as the new democratic party systems take time to stabilise. However, European elections in the new member states may also be different because of the wide variance in anti-European sentiments and parties in these states, which have been thrown up in the process of preparing for EU accession (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004). For example, if voters in the new member states chose to protest against the EU in the 2004 European elections, these votes could have gone to nationalist parties in some states, Christian democrat parties in others, agrarian parties in others, and even centrist or liberal parties in others.

In sum, these expectations about the role Europe might play in European Parliament elections can be summarised in the following hypotheses about the effect of party policy positions on voting in European elections:

H4- Europe Salience. The more salient the issue of Europe is for a political party, the more its vote-share will increase between the last national general election and the subsequent European election.

H5-Position on Europe. The more anti-European the policy position of a party, the more its vote-share will increase between the last national general election and the subsequent European election.

H6-Left-Right. The more extreme a party is, in terms of its distance on the left-right scale from the centre, the more votes it will gain between the last national general election and the subsequent European election.

H7-Greens. Members of the green party family should receive a greater increase in their vote-share in a European election.

H8-Anti-Europeans. Members of the anti-European party family should receive a greater increase in their vote-share in a European election.

2.3. Empirical Evidence So Far

Both sides of the debate can claim that existing empirical evidence supports their argument. From the second-order-national-elections side, there is overwhelming evidence that in the five sets of European elections up to 1999, large parties did worse and small parties did better relative to their performance in the national general election prior to each European election (e.g. Reif, 1984; van der Eijk, Franklin and Oppenhuis, 1996; Marsh, 1998, 2003, 2005;

Kousser, 2004; Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004). There is some dispute, however, about whether governing parties lose and opposition parties gain in European elections. For example, Oppenhuis, van der Eijk and Franklin (1996: 303) find ‘no support whatsoever for the notion that government parties in particular stand to suffer’. In contrast, Marsh (1998: 606) finds clear evidence of an ‘anti-government swing’. The difference here perhaps lies in the fact that the former study uses survey data to assess vote choice at a hypothetical general election coincident with the European elections whereas the latter uses vote in the previous general election to provide the baseline. Marsh also treats the set of governing parties as a single unit. Ferrara and Weishaupt use deviation from the inter-general election trend to assess whether government parties lose and their findings are in accord with those of Marsh (1998).

Similarly, the evidence in support of the size of the second-order effect as a result of the timing of the European election in the national electoral timetable is also mixed. Kousser (2004: 17) finds that ‘those who cast their ballot for a different party usually switch away from the government, with the number of defectors increasing as the time between domestic and EP contests grows’. However, Marsh (1998: 606) qualifies this: ‘while government losses are greatest around mid-term, thereafter they tend to level off rather than diminish as the cycle continues’.

There are also some interesting corollaries to the standard view of second-order elections. For example, Marsh (1998) finds that the second-order effect is largest in those states where government alternation is the norm. Meanwhile, Kousser (2004) finds that a large proportion of the decline in support for governing parties in European elections is explained by governments’ economic records (though see Marsh, forthcoming). And, Heath et al. (1999) find evidence in Britain that national electoral concerns, such as the popularity of

the governing party, play an even greater role in shaping voting behaviour in European elections than in local elections (Heath et al., 1999).

Evidence in support of the 'Europe matters' view is less voluminous and mainly unstructured. Reports on European election results in particular member states have often emphasised the role Europe played in the election. For example, Europe has been mentioned as a key factor in explaining the shifting fortunes of parties in all European elections in Denmark (Worre, 1996; Nielsen, 2001), in the 1994 and 1999 elections in France (Ysmal and Cayrol, 1996; Howarth, 2001), and the 1999 elections in Britain (Mather, 2001).

Using evidence from a Eurobarometer survey in June 1994, Carrubba and Timpone (2004) find, among other things, that voters who are most concerned about environmental issues and who feel that the European Parliament is an important institution are most likely to switch their vote to a Green party in a European election. They hence conclude that: 'At least some of the electorate is demonstrating a tendency to cast votes [in European elections] because of how the EP may influence policy outcomes in the future' (*ibid.* 277). Furthermore, on the basis of data from the 1999 European Election Study, Marsh (2003, 2005) shows that voters who think the pace of integration is too fast are more likely to defect from government parties in European elections (although they do not necessarily defect to more Euro-sceptical parties).

The most systematic research investigating the effect of Europe in European Parliament elections using aggregate data is the paper by Ferrara and Weishaupt (2004). Ferrara and Weishaupt add new variables to the standard mix, which measure a party's policy towards European integration, the salience a party places on this issue, and whether a party is internally divided on Europe. They find that the EU policy preferences or the saliency of the issue do not seem to matter. But, they find that 'parties experiencing deep Euro-divisions

suffer substantial desertions in elections to the European Parliament' (*ibid.* 301). They also find that green parties do systematically better in European elections than other small parties.

Nevertheless, despite over two decades of research on European elections, few papers attempt to assess the relative size of the second-order effect compared to the Europe effect on voting patterns in these contests. Perhaps the only exception is Ferrara and Weishaupt (2004). However, even they find that although internal divisions on Europe reduce a party's votes in a European election, the magnitude of this effect is in fact extremely small. And, they find no evidence that the policy stance of a party towards the EU or the salience a party gives to the issue of Europe effects the performance of a party in a European election. Furthermore, following the 2004 elections, which involved ten new member states for the first time, the number of observations, in terms of the vote-shares received by national parties in European elections, has increased considerably. In other words, the issue of whether national or European concerns drive voting behaviour in European elections has not yet been resolved, and we now have more data than ever with which to try to resolve the debate.

2.4. The Problem of Observational Equivalence

Before turning to our method and results it is worth briefly considering one key problem in trying to assess the relative importance of the second-order and Europe effects: that there is an observational equivalence of some of the empirical predictions of the two perspectives. This problem operates on several levels.

First, the absolute level of 'vote-switching' may indicate either a second-order effect or a European effect. For example, if an election is purely about the performance of the government and the government is unpopular, many voters will switch votes in a European election. However, the same could happen if the election is mainly about Europe rather than

national concerns, and so voters behave very differently than if a national election were held at the same time.

One solution to this problem might be to look at which parties voters switch to in a European election. For example, if anti-European parties do better in European elections than in national elections, this could indicate a ‘European’ reason for switching votes. However, drawing this conclusion might also be a mistake, as a second observational-equivalence problem comes in at this level. Governing parties tend to be more pro-European than opposition-parties (e.g. Taggart, 1998; Sitter, 2001). Hence, if voters switch votes because they are protesting against a governing party’s policies they are likely to vote for a party which is more anti-European than the governing party, even if this is not the reason for them making this switch. Hence, again, isolating which effect is driving electoral gains for parties with anti-European policies is also difficult.

Third, what would a ‘truly European contest’ look like anyway? The powers of the European Parliament primarily relate to shaping legislation governing regulation of the single market, such as environmental or social standards. Not surprisingly given the preferences of national and European-level parties on such regulatory issues, the main dimension of conflict in the European Parliament is the left-right (Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999; Hix, 2001; Hix, Noury and Roland, 2005). Related to this, differences in national party policies on European integration are largely explained by different party families’ preferences on other socio-economic issues (Marks and Wilson, 2000; Hooghe et al., 2001; Marks et al., 2002). Carrubba (2001) and van der Eijk, Franklin and van der Brug (2001) also find no gap between the European policies of national parties and the preferences on European issues of their supporters. In other words, if citizens vote in a European election because of their preferences about the socio-economic policy outputs of the EU, they are likely to vote for exactly the same parties they voted for in the previous national general election.

In contrast, van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) offer some support for the view that if European integration was the issue, election results would be a little different but they demonstrate that at present voters are given relatively little choice on EU issues relative to left-right ones.

Despite these problems, there are some ways of differentiating between the second-order and Europe effects in a competitive test between the two approaches. For example, Kousser (2004) argues that if voters switch support because of a government's economic record and not because of its European policies, then this would clearly indicate a second-order rather than a Europe effect. Alternatively, if particular party families do better or worse in European elections, regardless of their size or whether they are in government or opposition, then this suggests that voters are switching votes in European elections for specific policy reasons.

3. Model and Variables

We use OLS regression to estimate a series of models of party performance in European elections. The basic structure of these models is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 GAIN_{it} = & \beta_0 + \\
 & \beta_1 GOVT_{it} + \\
 & \beta_2 SIZE_{it} + \\
 & \beta_3 GOVT * CYCLE_{it} + \\
 & \beta_4 FAMILY_i + \\
 & \beta_5 NEW_PARTY_{it} + \\
 & \beta_6 EU_POLICY_{it} + \\
 & \beta_7 LR_POSITION_{it} + \\
 & \varepsilon_{it}
 \end{aligned}$$

Here, $GAIN_{it}$ represents the dependent variable (*Gain*), which is the change in the vote-share of political party i between the previous general election and the European Parliament election at time t . The observations for this dependent variable include all parties in all six sets of European elections between 1979 and 2004 and all member states who took part in these elections. This gives us more than 500 observations.¹

$GOVT_{it}$ represents a dummy variable (*Govt*) which captures the effect of whether a party is in government or opposition, and hence takes the value 1 if party i was in government at the time of the European election at time t , and 0 if the party was in opposition.

$SIZE_{it}$ is a vector of variables that capture the effect of the size of a party, in terms of the vote-share party i received in the general election immediately prior to the European election at time t . Previous research has found that the relationship between vote-share in the previous general election and vote-share in the subsequent European election is in fact a cubic function – specifically, small parties gain votes, medium-sized parties remain stable while large parties lose votes (Marsh, 1998). We hence use three variables to capture this effect: $Size$, $Size^2$, and $Size^3$.

$GOVT * CYCLE_{it}$ is a vector of variables that capture the interaction between whether party i is in government at the time of a European election at time t and the timing of the European election in the national general election cycle. The variable $Govt * Time$ is the *Govt* variable multiplied by the proportion of the national election cycle that has passed in a particular member state since the last general election. This is calculated as the number of months since the previous general election in that state divided by the total number of months from the previous to the next general election, and hence varies between 0 and 1. $Govt * Early$ is the *Govt* variable multiplied by a dummy variable which takes the value 1 if a European

¹ Parties winning less than 1 percent of the vote in the European election and who did not win at least 1 percent in the previous national election are excluded.

election was held in the first fifth of a national election cycle (which in most cases is the first year), and otherwise takes the value 0.

$FAMILY_i$ is a vector of dummy variables that take the value 1 if party i belongs to a particular party family, and otherwise takes the value 0. We include all the main party families in Europe: social democrat (*Soc*), Christian democrat (*CDem*), conservative (*Con*), liberal (*Lib*), radical left (*Left*), green (*Green*), regionalist (*Regional*), extreme right (*Right*), and anti-European (*Anti-EU*). These variables do not change over time, as we assume that parties do not change family between elections. When this set of variables is included, the Liberal group is used as the reference category, as this party family is on average the most pro-European and is also amongst the largest. These variables consequently capture the effect of party-family affiliation, which is a proxy for parties' policy preferences on a variety of issues including the question of Europe.

NEW_PARTY_{it} is a dummy variable that capture the emergence of new parties in European elections. *New-Party* takes the value 1 if party i wins votes in a European Election at time t without winning any votes at the preceding general election and otherwise takes the value 0. Note that parties that contest only European Parliament elections and not general elections are always coded as new parties.

EU_POLICY_{it} is a vector of two variables which take account of the policy position of party i on the specific issue of European integration at the time of the European election at time t . The first variable (*Pro/Anti-EU*) measures how favourable a party is towards the EU, on a scale from 1 (most anti-EU) to 20 (most pro-EU). The second variable (*EU-Salience*) measures how much emphasis a party places on the issue of Europe, on a scale from 1 (lowest salience) to 20 (highest salience). The data for these variables are taken from two expert judgements surveys: one by Gary Marks and Marco Steenbergen (1999), which we use for the 1979-1999 elections, and the other by Kenneth Benoit and Michael Laver (2005), which we

use for the 2004 elections. Because the two datasets used different scales we standardised the data on the 20-point scale used by Benoit and Laver. We do not include a variable for the extent of the internal divisions of a party on Europe. This is because the data for this variable, collected by Marks and Steenbergen, only exist for a couple of European elections and do not exist for 2004. Ferrara and Weishaupt (2004) assume that the extent of internal divisions of a party on Europe remain constant across all European elections. We feel, however, that this assumption is questionable, and hence prefer to only use the two other measures of party positions on Europe.

$LR_POSITION_{it}$ is a vector of two variables which capture the effect of the general policy position, on the left-right dimension, of party i at the time of the European election at time t . The first variable (*Left-Right*) measures the absolute position of a party on the left-right scale, ranging from 1 (most left) to 20 (most right). The second variable (*Extremism*) measures the relative extremism of a party on the left-right scale, which is calculated by taking the absolute value of the difference between the left-right position of the party and the centre of the scale (10.5). The data for these variables are also taken from the Marks and Steenbergen (1999) and Benoit and Laver (2005) surveys, and standardised on the 20-point scale used by Benoit and Laver.

Finally, ε_{it} is the error term.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

We first discuss some key descriptive statistics before turning to the results of the regression models. Table 1 shows the average gain/loss of parties in government and opposition in all

European elections. The results reveal that on average governing parties in both the old and the new member states lost votes and opposition parties gained votes in European elections. Hence, this evidence suggests some support for one of the main propositions of the second-order model. Nevertheless, the standard deviation in the performance of governing parties is almost twice as large as the mean in both the ‘old15’ states and the ‘new10’ states.

(Table 1 About Here)

Table 2 shows the actual gains and loses for each party family in all six sets of European elections. The first half of the table shows the results for the old15 states and the second half shows the results for the new10 states. The party families are sorted from the top to the bottom of the table in increasing order of their positive attitudes towards the EU: hence the ‘anti-EU’ family is the most anti-European and the liberal family is the most pro-Europe.

(Table 2 About Here)

The evidence reveals that in the old15 states, anti-EU – in particular – and green parties tended to gain votes in European elections, and socialists on average lost votes. While the major winners are in the top half (relatively anti European) and the major losers in the bottom half (relatively pro European) a number of parties across the spectrum neither gain nor lose to any important degree. In contrast to the situation amongst the old15 states, there was very little difference in the average performance of each party family in the first European elections in the ten new member states in 2004. Moreover, the differences between the party families are very small compared to the differences between governing and opposition parties.

In other words, at face value, with the exception of a bonus for parties in the old states, being in government seems to exert more influence on how parties perform in European elections than the do preferences parties. We will now see how these descriptive results hold up in multivariate analysis.

4.2. Predictive Power of the Second-Order National Elections Theory

Table 3 consequently presents the results of a series of models that test the three basic claims of the second-order model: that governing parties lose, large parties lose, and timing matters. Several results are worth highlighting. First, as predicted, governing parties lose, and this is statistically significant. Nevertheless, the results in models 2-6 reveal that it is mainly large governing parties that are punished in European elections. Small parties in government do not lose as much.

Second, and related to this, the results on the three variables that capture the cubic effect of party size reveal that larger parties lose votes in European elections compared to national elections, while small parties gain votes and medium-sized parties remain stable. Furthermore, the sign of the coefficient on the *Size*³ variable shows that the main effect in European elections is that large parties that lose most, whether they are in government or opposition.

(Table 3 About Here)

Third, however, the results suggest no strong relationship between the timing of a European election in a national electoral cycle and the extent of government losses. There is no discernable mid-term effect, nor any increasing government loss as the election cycle unwinds. Only the *Govt*Early* variable is significant, in model 6, which suggests that there is

a ‘honeymoon effect’, with governing parties gaining votes in European elections that are held shortly after a national election – as was the case in Britain in 1979 and in Spain and Greece in 2004.

The second-order model really assumes a constant party system across the two elections. This *New-Party* variable, which identifies those who did not fight in the previous national general election, allows us to track significant deviations from this assumption. The average net change between general and European Parliament elections is about 12 percent. As the size of the coefficient on the *New-Party* variable reveals, the emergence of ‘new’ parties in European elections explains a significant proportion of this switch in votes; a change in the party system itself thus accounts for almost half of this change. However, without either knowing or controlling for the policy positions of these new parties, we cannot tell whether the success of new parties is driving by domestic policy concerns or European-level policy concerns.

(Figure 1 About Here)

Figure 1 illustrates the predicted vote-share gains and losses for governing and opposition parties using the results in model 6 from Table 3. The upper line in the figure is the pattern for opposition parties and the lower line in the figure is the pattern for governing parties. As the shape of the two lines show, small parties, who win less than 10 percent of the vote, gain the most votes in European elections, whether in government or opposition. The difference in the performance of government and opposition parties increases as the size of a party increases, with large governing parties losing the most votes. For example, a party that won 40 percent of the vote in a general election and then entered government can expect to win about 32 percent of the vote in the next European Parliament election. Meanwhile, a

party that won 40 percent of the vote in a general election but went into opposition can expect to win about 38 percent of the vote in the next European Parliament election.

4.3. How Much Does Europe Matter? The Effect of Adding Party Policy Positions

Table 4 presents a set of models which estimate the effect of adding party policy positions to the basic second-order national elections model, with the aim of assessing whether voters switch votes from large parties and parties in government for domestic or European-based policy concerns. The first result to note is that adding party family, European policy positions, and left-right positions to the mix does not change the main results of the second-order elections model. Basically, large governing parties lose votes in European Parliament elections (if the election is not held immediately after a national general elections), regardless of their party family, whether they are pro- or anti-European or whether they are on the left, the right or at the extremes. This result is robust across all specifications in Table 4.

(Table 4 About Here)

Nevertheless, differences in the performance of parties in European elections are not only explicable in terms of the second-order national elections framework. Put another way, adding party policy positions increases our understanding of European elections significantly (for example the adjusted R-squared increased from .393 in model 6 to .492 in model 10).

In particular, if a party places a lot of emphasis on the issue of Europe, it will increase its votes in a European election. This result supports the intuition of Ferrara and Weishaupt (2004), despite the fact that they could not confirm their intuition with their dataset. However, as the results in models 8 and 10 show, the direction of the emphasis a party places on Europe does not seem to matter: parties that are strongly anti-European do not do better

than parties that are strongly pro-European. Anti-European parties and green parties do significantly better than the other party families in European elections even when we control for size and government status, as predicted by the Europe-matters theorists. Yet, as model 10 shows, when the position of parties on left-right and EU issues are controlled for, greens do not do significantly better than conservatives, regionalists or Christian democrats although Greens do outperform other leftish parties: socialists and the radical left each do relatively poorly. Even so, leaving aside the anti-EU family, the range of differences between parties is less than 3 percent.

Finally, the general policy preferences of a party, in terms of its absolute location on the left-right dimension or its relative location at one of the extremes of this dimension, does not have a significant effect on party performance in European elections. There is no sign of gains by left parties or right parties, of by more extreme parties.

(Table 5 About Here)

Table 5 explores the residuals from the final model in table 4, model 10, examining first how well the model first the actual pattern of results in each of the various European parliaments and second, the various (old) members states. The fit across the six parliaments is pretty uniform with no evident bias (residuals average close to zero for each) and little difference in the extent of variation around the absolute deviations. In particular there is no sign that second-order plus policy model is becoming more or less effective as the EU ages. When it comes to the various countries, there is a an underestimate of mean changes in Austria and Portugal by around 2 percent, and an overestimate in Denmark of over 1 percent but even these biases are not large and in most countries the average bias in prediction is well below 1 percent. Absolute variations in residuals are generally larger where gains and losses

themselves are larger, notably in Portugal, Britain and Scandinavia. In general it appears that the fit of the model is reasonably uniform across member states. A combination of the second-order effect and the policy positions of parties thus explain a large degree of the variation in the performance of parties across all the European elections and (old) countries between 1979 and 2004.

4.4. Except in the New10 Member States!

However, these general findings do not hold so well for the 10 member states that joined the EU in May 2004 and so experienced European elections for the first time in June 2004. Table 6 shows a series of models which compare the fit of the basic second-order theory for all the member states in all European elections between 1979 and 2004 (in model 12), just the old15 member states in all elections between 1979 and 2004 (model 13), and the new10 member states for just the elections in 2004 (models 14-16).

(Table 6 About Here)

These results illustrate that larger government parties did worse than smaller government parties in the 2004 elections in the new member states as well as in the old member states. However, the general effect of size on party performance was different for the new member states. Specifically, the new member states do not follow the same cubic model of the relationship between the size of a party and its performance in a European election – as the signs on the coefficients for the quadratic and cubic versions of the *Size* variable in model 13 are in the opposite direction than expected. Only the simple size variable performs in the expected fashion and even then this is not robust (see below).

The timing of the European elections in the national election cycles in the new member states did not make a difference in terms of the magnitude of the losses of governing parties. No election took place in the early part of the cycle and in further analysis not shown here, none of the alternative cycle specifications performed significantly. And, unlike the old15 member states, the emergence of new parties in the 2004 European elections does not explain any significant change in voting patterns in the new member states.

(Table 7 About Here)

Table 7 adds the effect of party families and party policies to the basic second-order model for only the new member states. These results show that party policy positions, however measured, do not explain any significant variation in the performance of large parties or governing parties. The only variable that remains significant across all model specifications is the variable that accounts for the size of a government party. Which party family a party belongs to did not make a difference. Also, the position of a party towards the EU or the salience of this position did not make a difference. And, the location of a party on the left-right dimension or how extremist a party is on this dimension did not make a difference. Basically, the only thing that can be said about European elections in the new member states is that large government parties did poorly.

5. Conclusion

We started this paper by asking the rather simplistic question as to whether voters used European Parliament elections to punish governments or protest about Europe. As our

discussion made evident, voters could also use them to punish ‘their’ (opposition) parties, or even to indulge in the luxury of supporting smaller parties that might seem irrelevant in a general election where government formation was a salient issue. And even if voters choose to vote for a different party in a European election for reasons to do with the competences of the European Parliament that may be a positive rather than a negative act as far as their opinions on Europe are concerned rather than a protest. However, on the main question it does appear that while much of the volatility apparent in European parliament elections can be put down to anti-government voting and the support for ‘new’ parties, issues of policy in general and perhaps European policy in particular are significant. It is clear that, as proponents of the second-order model have suggested, ‘size’ matters. Small parties gain and large parties, particularly large government parties once an initial honeymoon is over, lose. This fairly mechanical formulation accounts for almost 40 percent of the apparent volatility we see between general elections and European elections. We then explored whether all small parties gain, or whether winners and losers could be distinguished in policy terms. It is apparent that even when size and government status are held constant, there is a pattern in which Anti-EU parties do much better than average. Green parties also perform relatively well, and Socialist parties relatively poorly although leaving aside the Anti-EU parties all differences are quite small. It must be admitted that these Anti-EU parties are relatively rare, and also that at least some of them – notably in Denmark – appear only in EU elections. When we look across the board, using the placement of parties on the EU and the salience of EU issues for a party, the EU itself seems to matter less. The positional variable was not significant, although salience was significant. In contrast, there is no sign at all of any systematic pattern of gains by extreme left or extreme right parties. Overall then, European Elections should not be seen as solely second-order national elections because policy in general and EU policy in particular can be significant. Even so, the fact remains that the

European dimension as such remains at best the minor element in such elections in most cases.

While the EU itself has undergone very significant change since the first election in 1979 in terms of issue competences, rules of decision-making and indeed membership, the above pattern seems to be as true of 2004 and it was of 1979, at least for the old15 members who joined. However, it is not true of the new10. The European elections in those countries seem to have followed a different pattern. Size matters, but only for government parties and there is no sign of all of any election cycle. Nor is there any sign that Europe matters in any systematic way. While the concept of party families in the new accession states might not carry the policy overtones, and in particular policy overtones with respect to Europe, that they carry in the old15, there is no sign that the position of the party on Europe, or the salience of the EU itself matters to party fortunes in European Parliament elections.

Broadly speaking, our results seem to point to ‘punishment’ rather than ‘protest’ being a primary force in making European Parliament elections different for general elections. The obvious exceptions to this are thus perhaps just that – exceptions. While there are incidences of anti-EU surges these remain fairly exceptional rather than systematic. However, they do raise the question why this should happen in one place rather than another: what role does context play? The success of anti-EU parties in particular in the absence of a more widespread swing to less pro-EU parties is puzzling while the differences between the old15 and new10 also require explanation. In further work we will explore the importance of various institutional differences between countries to see to what extent they can account for some of these differences. Some institutional differences may simply amplify or muffle particular effects. This was shown by Marsh (1998) with respect to pattern of government formation and by Kousser (2003) with respect to electoral systems. The degree of public

support for the EU could be another factor which could explain when voters protest and when they punish.

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Table 1. Average Gains and Losses of Governing and Opposition Parties

Party	Old15 States			New10 States		
	Gain	St. Dev.	N	Gain	St. Dev.	N
Governing	-3.0	6.2	162	-5.2	11.0	24
Opposition	1.2	4.3	420	2.5	7.4	58
Total	0	5.3	582	0.2	9.2	82

Table 2. Average Gains and Losses by Party Family and Old/New Member State

	Old member states			New member states		
	Average gain	Standard deviation	N	Average gain	Standard deviation	N
Anti EU	9.50	6.51	22	3.30	4.25	3
Right	.39	4.04	46	2.53	8.94	9
Left	.73	2.80	88	-2.53	4.08	6
Green	2.75	2.76	67	1.63	7.29	3
Cons	-1.90	6.99	65	.58	6.24	25
Regional	.46	1.86	43	2.90	1.27	2
Soc	-3.05	6.56	97	-1.23	18.31	12
CDem	-.04	3.58	69	2.03	7.54	7
Lib	-.93	3.75	85	-1.65	7.73	15
Total	-.01	5.25	582	.21	9.28	82

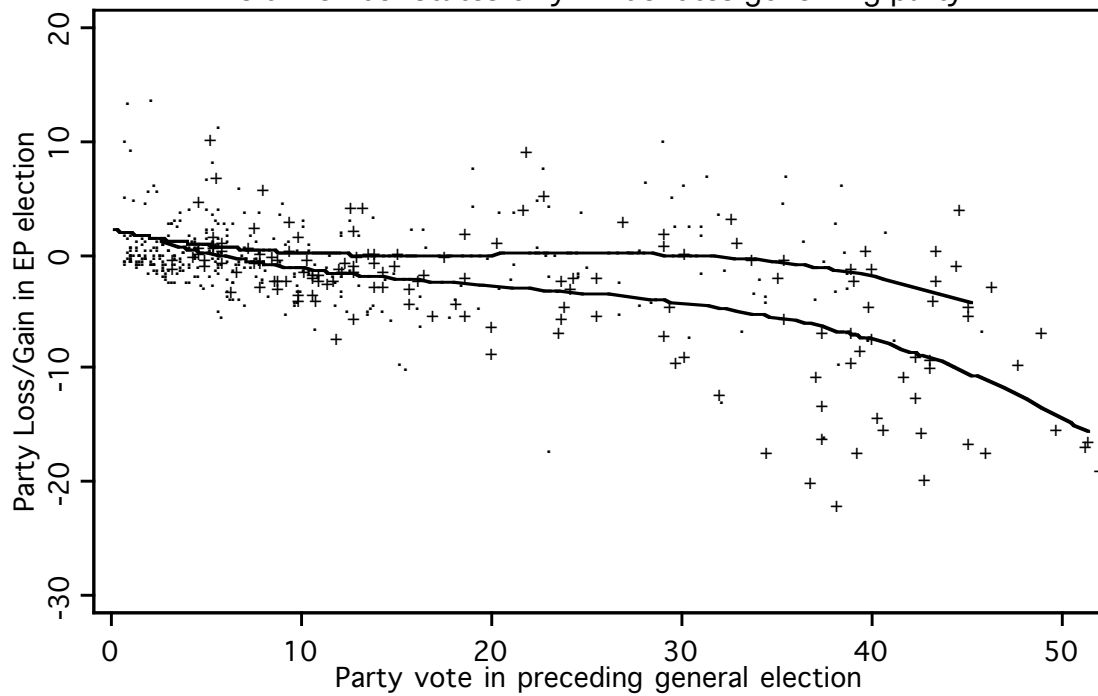
Table 3. The Basic Second-Order National Elections Theory in the Old Member States

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Govt	-1.7263 (.001)	.7849 (.250)	.7785 (.264)	.7981 (.370)	.0137 (.986)
Size	-.3188 (.002)	-.3643 (.001)	-.3715 (.001)	-.3720 (.001)	-.3624 (.001)
Size ²	.0171 (.004)	.0189 (.002)	.0191 (.002)	.0192 (.002)	.0188 (.002)
Size ³	-.0003 (.000)	-.0003 (.001)	-.0003 (.001)	-.0003 (.001)	-.0003 (.001)
Size*Govt		-.1518 (.002)	-.1329 (.051)	-.1527 (.002)	-.1437 (.004)
Time			-.6301 (.367)		
Govt*Time			-.0430 (.692)		
Time ²				-.6490 (.344)	
Govt*Time ²				-.0328 (.989)	
Early					-.3923 (.357)
Govt*Early					2.9831 (.010)
New party	5.7210 (.000)	5.6164 (.000)	5.6430 (.000)	5.6302 (.000)	5.6331 (.000)
Constant	2.1607 (.000)	2.1033 (.000)	2.4192 (.000)	2.3105 (.000)	2.1617 (.000)
Observations	520	520	509	509	509
Adjusted R-squared	.390	.408	.408	.407	.417

Note: Dependent variable: Gain. OLS estimation. Panel corrected (for election) p-values in parentheses.

Figure 1 : EP election performance and party size

Old member states only : + denotes governing party



Note: The upper line represents the predicted vote-shares in European elections for opposition parties and the lower line represents the predicted vote-shares in European elections for governing parties.

Table 4. The Effect of Party family and Policy Positions in the Old Member States

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Govt	.7879 (.288)	.2949 (.722)	.3257 (.702)	.9259 (.252)
Size*Govt	-.1681 (.001)	-.1533 (.003)	-.1528 (.004)	-.1719 (.001)
Size	-.2960 (.008)	-.4309 (.000)	-.3718 (.001)	-.3613 (.003)
Size ²	.0174 (.005)	.0219 (.000)	.0193 (.002)	.0190 (.003)
Size ³	-.0003 (.002)	-.0003 (.000)	-.0003 (.001)	-.0003 (.002)
Anti EU	7.3116 (.000)			6.7707 (.000)
Right	.4669 (.481)			1.6320 (.102)
Left	1.1415 (.029)			.5726 (.443)
Green	2.7120 (.000)			2.2688 (.003)
Con	1.3231 (.142)			2.2796 (.022)
Regional	.1484 (.768)			-.1201 (.807)
Soc	-.1158 (.892)			-.2655 (.778)
CDem	1.6062 (.020)			2.3590 (.000)
New party	3.3050 (.004)	6.0586 (.000)	6.6512 (.000)	3.4973 (.002)
Early	-.2514 (.509)	-.3149 (.484)	-.3731 (.395)	-.1887 (.674)
Govt*Early	2.7770 (.010)	2.9501 (.013)	2.9030 (.013)	2.6039 (.028)
Pro/anti-EU		-.0477 (.135)		.0501 (.318)
EU salience		.2416 (.008)		.2330 (.004)
Left-Right			-.0256 (.433)	-.1296 (.047)
Extremism			.0921 (.211)	.0823 (.443)
Constant	.5853 (.292)	.1055 (.929)	2.0601 (.000)	-1.5567 (.261)
Observations	509	494	491	491
Adjusted R-squared	.476	.441	.432	.491

Note: Dependent variable: Gain. OLS estimation. Panel corrected (for election) p-values in parentheses.

Table 5. Residuals by Parliament and Country (Model 9)

	Mean deviation	Mean absolute deviation	Standard Deviation	N
European Parliament				
1 st	0.3	2.5	2.9	58
2 nd	0.3	2.4	2.6	72
3 rd	0.1	2.8	3.0	67
4 th	-0.1	2.7	2.5	101
5 th	-0.2	3.1	2.4	95
6 th	-0.1	2.8	2.5	98
Country				
Austria	2.5	2.1	1.4	17
Belgium	0.6	1.6	1.4	51
Denmark	-1.4	3.9	3.1	58
Finland	0.5	2.5	1.7	20
France	-0.8	3.8	3.3	43
Germany	0.2	2.6	2.5	35
Greece	0.6	2.4	2.1	22
Ireland	0.3	2.3	1.6	29
Italy	-0.3	2.0	1.9	56
Netherlands	0.4	2.1	2.0	44
Portugal	1.9	3.6	3.0	18
Spain	0.0	2.4	2.2	38
Sweden	0.0	3.7	2.5	22
UK-GB	0.0	3.9	3.9	38
Total	0.0	2.8	2.6	491

Table 6. The Second-Order model in the Old and New Member States

	All Member States (10)	Old 15 States (11)	New 10 States (12)	New 10 States (13)	New 10 States (14)	New 10 States (15)
Govt	.5732 (.564)	.0137 (.986)	3.4570 (.438)	3.4570 (.438)	2.0009 (.641)	-3.3195 (.274)
Size*Govt	-.1988 (.000)	-.1437 (.004)	-.4026 (.085)	-.4026 (.085)	-.3389 (.175)	
Size	-.2371 (.059)	-.3624 (.001)	.3657 (.517)	.3657 (.517)	-.1639 (.137)	-.3122 (.016)
Size ²	.0083 (.246)	.0188 (.002)	-.0456 (.141)	-.0456 (.141)		
Size ³	-.0001 (.294)	-.0003 (.001)	.0008 (.047)	.0008 (.047)		
Early	-.5006 (.256)	-.3923 (.357)				
Govt*Early	3.2612 (.006)	2.9831 (.010)				
New party	5.3979 (.000)	5.6331 (.000)	4.5598 (.088)	4.5598 (.088)	3.6526 (.183)	2.2175 (.448)
Constant	2.0887 (.000)	2.1617 (.000)	2.1402 (.147)	2.1402 (.147)	3.0474 (.070)	4.4825 (.012)
Observations	591	509	82	82	82	82
Adj. R-sq.	.366	.417	.367	.367	.311	.281

Note: Dependent variable: Gain. OLS estimation. Panel corrected (for election) p-values in parentheses.

Table 7. The Effect of Party Families and Policy Positions in the New Member States

	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)
Govt	1.7332 (.735)	-5.2562 (.146)	-3.9398 (.176)	-4.9869 (.179)
Size	-1.1798 (.137)	-.3425 (.029)	-.3203 (.018)	-.3646 (.024)
Anti EU	-.8389 (.677)			1.0268 (.868)
Right	1.8446 (.654)			3.1503 (.664)
Left	-.3569 (.841)			14.3279 (.090)
Green	.9190 (.813)			2.5640 (.412)
Con	1.3806 (.343)			2.9269 (.122)
Regional	3.1394 (.053)			4.0285 (.056)
Soc	3.3857 (.525)			5.9188 (.364)
CDem	2.5088 (.504)			3.6790 (.371)
Pro/anti-EU		.0865 (.634)		.0963 (.810)
EU salience		.5417 (.067)		.5270 (.241)
Left-Right			.2957 (.080)	.6936 (.086)
Extremism			-.3161 (.475)	-1.0178 (.210)
New party	3.2969 (.306)	.4239 (.864)	.7638 (.718)	1.0110 (.714)
Constant	1.9589 (.281)	-3.5611 (.340)	3.0886 (.409)	-1.8248 (.058)
Observations	82	68	68	68
Adjusted R-squared	.252	.310	.299	.242

Note: Dependent variable: Gain. OLS estimation. Panel corrected (for election) p-values in parentheses.