

Invisible Votes: Non-Roll Call Votes in the European Parliament

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Abstract

Voting in the EP takes place through several procedures. Our empirical understanding of the MEPs' voting behaviour, however, derives almost entirely from analyses of only a sub-set of those – roll call votes. To fully understand the complexity of the MEPs' voting behaviour, it is essential not to stop with analyses of roll call votes but also look beyond those. Are the MEPs' following different voting patterns when voting by roll call, show of hands, and electronically? If so, what kind of bias do the analyses of roll call votes suffer from?

This paper takes the first steps towards answering those questions. Relying on original MEP survey data from the current Parliament, I look at whether the MEPs follow different voting patterns when voting by roll call, show of hands, and electronically. Such an approach allows me to assess the potential presence and direction of a voting procedure effect within the MEPs' voting patterns, creating a more complex and accurate understanding of the Parliamentary decision-making.

The findings suggest that although one should not overstate the differences in the MEPs' voting patterns when voting by different voting procedures, noteworthy differences do exist. For example, considerable proportions of the MEPs are more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by show of hands or electronically in contrast to by roll call in situations where they believe those not to be in their national electorates' best interests or when those conflict with their national parties' voting instructions.

Keywords: European Parliament, voting procedure, voting behaviour, competing incentives

Introduction

The way the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) act when carrying out their duties within the European Parliament (EP) matters for several reasons, making it highly important to understand how the contemporary MEPs vote and what motivates their voting choices. On one hand the MEPs hold considerable legislative power as a result of the EP having evolved into one of the most powerful institutions within the European Union (EU). Amongst else, they are now able to enact legislation in a wide range of policy sectors as well as significantly influence the EU's budgetary process and censure the Commission. On the other hand, it is the directly elected MEPs who are expected to provide crucial democratic input to the EU and be the frontrunners of supranationalism within the organization as the inner workings of the EP ought to follow partisan politics with the MEPs basing their voting choices on ideological beliefs and supranational rather than national sentiments (e.g. European Parliament 2009a; Hix, Hoyland 2011).

Given the importance of how the MEPs vote, it is therefore hardly surprising that a vast number of both theoretical and empirical studies have been conducted over the years to study the issue. Having established that most MEPs face three salient 'principals' – their national electorate, their national party, and their EP party group – (e.g. Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Hix, Hoyland 2011; Scully 2005), there is a rather widespread agreement across the academic community that whereas transnational party group affiliations are considerably more important than national affiliations for determining how the MEPs vote (e.g. Gabel, Hix 2007; Hix 2001; Hix, Noury 2009; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Roland 2009), national parties remain the MEPs' primary principals as their defections from national parties' voting positions are considerably rarer than their defections from EP party groups' voting positions are (e.g. Hix 2002; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Kreppel 2002).

The existing empirical accounts and standard claims about the MEPs' actual voting choices are, however, fraught with a significant shortcoming. Being based on roll call votes – as those are the only Parliamentary voting occasions where individual MEPs' voting behaviour is recorded and published –, the existing understanding of the MEPs' voting patterns derives from analyses of only a sub-set of the Parliamentary voting occasions. In fact, roll call voting is used only for a minority of the Parliamentary votes, its public nature makes roll call votes by definition different unique, and they do not appear to be random samples of the Parliamentary voting occasions in general (e.g. Carrubba, Gabel, Hug 2009; Clinton, Lapinski 2008; Hoyland 2010; Thiem 2006).

My paper tests whether the differences between the voting procedures that are being used in the EP do indeed influence the MEPs to follow somewhat different voting patterns when voting by roll call, show of hands, and electronically.¹ I do so by using descriptive statistics on original MEP Survey data from the current Parliament to compare the MEPs' own self-perceived voting patterns in two situations key to our understanding of how the MEPs behave – their likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when they do not believe those to be in their national electorates' best interests and when they receive conflicting voting instructions from their national parties – across the three Parliamentary voting procedures. By controlling for the voting dilemma the MEPs face and their response options, while leaving the voting procedure as the only source of variation, I am able to study a direct and explicit link between the MEPs' voting patterns and the voting procedure used.

¹ The European Parliament does also use voting by secret ballot (European Parliament 2009a), but these votes are excluded from the analysis as they are in practice very rare.

The findings suggest that the MEPs do perceive themselves to follow slightly different voting patterns when voting by roll call, show of hands, or electronically. Although the differences in their self-perceived voting patterns are not overwhelming, a considerable proportion of the post-2009 MEPs did admit that their voting behaviour is affected by whether the vote is taken by roll call or not.² To be more specific, the MEPs are more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by show of hands or electronically in contrast to by roll call in situations where they believe those not to be in their national electorates' or when those conflict with their national parties' voting instructions.

This paper proceeds in the following manner. I will start by describing the standard claims about the MEPs' voting behaviour and how they link to voting procedures. I will then highlight my contribution to the debate and operationalize the data. Finally, I will employ descriptive statistics to study the potential presence and direction of the voting procedure effect within post-2009 MEPs' self-perceived voting patterns.

What do we know about the MEPs' voting patterns?

As the German MEP Wolf Klinz nicely mentioned in an interview in 2010, the MEPs have three salient loyalties when carrying out their duties within the EP – their EP party groups, their national electorates, and their national parties (BBC 2010).

On one hand, it is the EP party groups – emphasizing the common interests and perspectives that cross national boundaries –, which can significantly influence the MEPs' political careers within the EP. Amongst else, the supranational EP party groups determine the composition of leadership positions within the EP, allocate speaking time, and effectively set the Parliamentary agenda (e.g. Hix, Hoyland 2011; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Kreppel 2002). Benefiting from those capabilities would have strong potential to improve the MEPs' political careers and profile within the EP, allowing them to exercise greater influence over the Parliamentary policy-making and proceedings. The supra-national set-up of the EP imposes moral pressures as well as offers clear incentives to be loyal to their EP party groups. On the other hand, the nature of the European elections – held domestically with candidates focusing on national concerns and interests (Hix, Hoyland 2011; Kreppel 2002; Marsh 2005; Schmitt 2005) – means that it is the national rather than the supranational interests and allegiances that the electorates expect the MEPs to prioritize and fight for. It is in the MEPs' interests to prioritize their electorates' preferences and interests when voting in the EP in order to maintain public support and maximize their chances for future electoral success. Lastly, it is the national parties who are able to decide whether politicians are allowed to stand as party candidates, rank their candidates within party lists, and decide the levels of electoral support their candidates are offered to (Hix 2002; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Kreppel 2002; Kreppel, Tsebelis 1999). The relevance of the national parties' ability to control the rankings on their party lists is particularly relevant for re-election to the EP as virtually all countries use either ordered or closed lists at the European elections (European Parliament 2009b). As national parties exercise great influence over the MEPs' chances to get re-elected to the EP or elected to a domestic political office, there are also strong incentives for the MEPs to prioritize their national parties' voting instructions.

² As shown later, voting by show of hands and electronically can be grouped together under non-roll call voting.

Numerous empirical analyses have of course been conducted over the years to study the MEPs' actual responses to the simultaneous presence of multiple loyalties, and their comparative likeliness to follow each of their three 'principals' voting positions. It has been extensively shown that national affiliations and allegiances have considerably less significant impact on the MEPs' voting behaviour than EP party group affiliations do as supranational ideology-leadened voting has been taking clear priority over nationality-leadened voting within the MEPs' voting patterns (e.g. Gabel, Hix 2007; Hix 2001; Hix, Noury 2009; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Roland 2009), while it is the national parties' voting positions that are more dominant within the MEPs' voting patterns than the EP party groups' voting positions are (e.g. Hix 2002; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Kreppel 2002). In general, numerous large-n studies have clearly shown the dominance of EP party groups' preferences over national allegiances as well as the dominance of national parties' preferences over EP party groups' preferences within the MEPs' voting choices.

Focusing on non-roll call voting procedures

The existing understanding of the MEPs' voting patterns, albeit invaluable, is fraught with a significant shortcoming. Being based on roll call votes only, it derives from analyses of a minority sub-set of the Parliamentary voting occasions.³ It is by nature reliant on the assumption that roll call votes are representative of all the Parliamentary voting occasions.

Traditionally, this assumption has been widely accepted. The empirical studies, which our understanding of the MEPs' voting patterns derives from, present roll call votes not just as convenience samples but also as random and representative samples of all votes taken in the EP – including the more important decisions, covering a broad range of issues and not being called disproportionately (e.g. Faas 2003; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Hix, Noury, Roland 2009; Noury, Roland, Piketty, Verdier 2002; Raunio 1997). As such, the reliance on roll call votes is seen both practical and appropriate for studying the MEPs' voting choices in general.

This assumption is, however, increasingly questionable. On one hand, roll call votes are the only Parliamentary voting occasions where individual MEPs' voting choices are recorded and publicised. The public nature of the roll call votes clearly differentiates these voting occasions from the rest. It allows actors to scrutinize the MEPs' voting choices, which is something that is effectively unrealistic or plain impossible when the vote is not taken by roll call, and to link those to the rewards and punishments that they have to offer for following or discarding their voting instructions and/or policy preferences. On the other hand, there is also a rapidly growing body of empirical literature showing that considerable discrepancies exist between the samples of roll call and non-roll call votes. Amongst else, it has been shown that roll call votes under-represent voting occasions on legislative proposals and are requested disproportionately more often by the EP party group leaders when vote defection of national delegations is unlikely (e.g. Carrubba, Gabel, Hug 2009; Gabel, Carrubba 2003; Hoyland 2006; Hug 2011; Thiem 2006). Although those studies are based on novel datasets from relatively limited time periods – covering mostly a legislative year –, their findings should be taken seriously as all studies of roll call vote requests have found some discrepancies between samples of roll call and non-roll call votes. Furthermore, the kind of selection bias that the reliance on roll call votes only has been shown to introduce gives reasons to believe that this

³ The EP uses four distinct voting procedures – voting by roll call, show of hands, electronically, and secret ballot –, with the voting by show of hands being treated as the default procedure (European Parliament 2009a). Roll call votes are used in minority of cases – approximately for a third of all Parliamentary voting occasions (e.g. Carrubba, Gabel, Murrah, Clough, Montgomery, Schambach 2006; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007).

bias may also influence the findings that are reached upon on the MEPs' voting behaviour. Amongst else, empirical research has shown that voting on legislative issues – which are underrepresented in roll call samples – are characterized through particularly higher levels of defections from EP party groups' voting positions, and that it is the EP party groups' leaders who strategically initiate the vast majority of roll call processes (e.g. Carrubba, Gabel, Hug 2009; Epstein, O'Halloran 1999; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Hoyland 2006; Thiem 2006).

The traditional assumption that roll call vote samples are representative of the Parliamentary voting occasions in general simply does not appear to be the case. There is growing evidence to suggest that roll call votes do not simply differ from non-roll call votes by nature, but that they are also not random sub-sets of the Parliamentary voting occasions. As such, the possibility that the MEPs do follow somewhat different voting patterns when voting by roll call and when not is real and plausible. It is necessary to study in greater detail the potential presence and direction of the voting procedure effect within the MEPs' voting patterns.

Research questions

This paper aims to build on the rich body of roll call voting and roll call vote request analyses by linking the MEPs' voting patterns with the voting procedures used. Looking at original MEP Survey data, I will empirically test whether the post-2009 MEPs do perceive to follow different voting patterns when voting by roll call, show of hands, and electronically in two voting situations key to our understanding of how the MEPs fulfill their mandates.

RQ1.1: How does the MEPs' likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions, when those are not believed to be in their national electorates' best interests, vary in relations to the voting procedure used?

RQ1.2: How does the MEPs' likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions, when those conflict with their national parties' voting instructions, vary in relations to the voting procedure used?

These are answered with individual-level data on the post-2009 MEPs' self-perceived voting patterns, while employing descriptive statistics to compare their likeliness to defect from EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by roll call, show of hands, and electronically.

Voting procedure matters

There are several reasons to expect a voting procedure effect – the MEPs following different voting patterns when voting by roll call in contrast to by show of hands or electronically – to be present and of a particular nature.

Firstly, the public nature of roll call votes effectively means that those are the only voting occasions where the MEPs' voting behaviour can be scrutinized by interested actors – something that is as good as impossible when voting by show of hands or electronically. However, it has been shown that different 'principals' are somewhat different in their desire and ability to use roll call voting information for linking the rewards and punishments available for them with the MEPs' voting choices. Whereas the EP party groups hold considerable and widespread interest in the MEPs' voting patterns across the roll call voting occasions, national parties scrutinize the MEPs' roll call voting choices only when the issue in consideration is of special importance to them, and the national electorates remain virtually unaware of the MEPs' roll call voting choices altogether (EES 2009; European Commission 2009; Faas 2003). Therefore, the increased ability to punish and reward the MEPs on the

basis of their voting choices by virtue of a vote being taken by roll call rather than by show of hands or electronically is considerably more salient for the EP party groups in comparison to the national parties and national electorates. It is only fair to expect that this also translates into the MEPs being particularly reluctant to discard their EP party groups' voting instructions during roll call votes, whereas no such gap seems to be present for discarding national electorates' interests or national parties' voting instructions.

Secondly, roll call is not the norm within the EP. Instead, its rules of procedure specify voting by show of hands as the default voting procedure (European Parliament 2009a). Roll call votes need to be asked for, and this rhetoric in itself carries a rather strong indication of heightened interest by whoever is calling for a proposal to be voted by roll call. In practice, it is the EP party groups and their leaders who are the driving forces behind proposals being voted on by roll call (e.g. Carrubba, Gabel, Hug 2009; Epstein, O'Halloran 1999; Saalfeld 1995; Thiem 2006). Different scholars have highlighted different potential reasons for the EP party groups to do so – demonstration of a united front (Carrubba, Gabel 1999; Corbett, Jacobs, Shackleton 1995), monitoring and disciplining its members (Carrubba, Gabel, Hug 2009; Raunio 1997), signalling a policy position (Kreppel 2002; Thiem 2006) –, but they all imply the EP party groups' desire for high levels of cohesion in order for the roll call votes to fulfil their purpose. As the EP party groups request roll call votes disproportionately often, it is fair to assume that there is also disproportionately more pressure on the MEPs to follow their EP party groups' voting instructions during roll call. As a result, roll call votes should show particularly low levels of defection from the EP party groups' voting instructions.

Thirdly, roll call votes under-represent legislative proposals (e.g. Carrubba, Gabel, Murrain, Clough, Montgomery, Schambach 2006; Hoyland 2006). At the same time, it is voting on legislative proposal that is characterized by particularly high levels of defections from EP party groups' voting positions (Attina 1990; Hix, Noury, Roland 2007; Hoyland 2006). This is hardly surprising as it is the non-legislative proposals which are more often than not of procedural and non-divisive nature as well as deal with intra-organizational relations between different EU institutions, whereas legislative proposals have more potential for direct policy influence and dividing the MEPs by their national affiliations. Over-representing non-legislative votes, therefore, implies that roll call votes are also likely to reveal artificially high levels of supranational partisan voting in the EP. They are simply masking the voting occasions where there is greater propensity for salient national and national party interests to compete with the EP party groups' voting instructions. As a result, it is fair to expect that on aggregate the MEPs are more inclined to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by non-roll call.

As a combination of these factors, I expect the following:

H1.1: The MEPs are less likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions, when those are not believed to be in the best interests of their national electorates, when voting by roll call in contrast to by show of hands or electronically.

H1.2: The MEPs are less likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions, when those conflict with their national parties' voting instructions, when voting by roll call in contrast to by show of hands or electronically.

Modeling voting procedure effect

In order to overcome the problem of roll call votes being the only voting occasions where individual MEPs' actual voting choices can be analyzed, and to still provide an empirical

account of the MEPs' voting patterns across different voting procedures, I carried out an original MEP survey amongst all post-2009 MEPs who were serving in the EP at the start of 2011. The survey was tailored to answering the particular research questions about the presence and direction of a voting procedure effect within the MEPs' voting patterns.⁴

Sample

As part of data collection, 736 MEPs were approached to participate at the survey. The obtained sample includes 181 MEPs, making the response rate 25%. Amongst the 132 respondents for whom I know the country in which they were elected, 42 (32%) came from 2004/2007 EU accession states and 90 (68%) from the pre-2004 EU member states.

The sample is both representative and reliable. Comparing it with the full population of post-2009 MEPs at the beginning of 2011, the Duncan indexes of dissimilarity remain 0.15 and 0.10 when comparing the distribution of countries and EP party groups within the full population and the MEP survey sample.⁵ In order to validate the MEP survey findings, further steps were also taken. As part of the survey, all MEPs were asked about their sense of representation as has been done in the previous 2010 EPRG MEP Survey and in the 2009 EECS.⁶ As Table 1 clearly shows, the mean scores for the three sub-questions of representation in the EP are highly similar, and the comparative importance of the three categories identical, across all three surveys.

[INSTERT TABLE 1 HERE].

The sample of the MEP survey that is used to address the research questions at hand is both representative and reliable. There appears no strong bias on the basis of the respondents' nationalities and EP partisanship, nor do the respondents' opinions differ meaningfully from the respondents' of past analogous surveys on a key question of representation.

Dependent and explanatory variables

The dependent variable in my study – the MEPs' voting behavior – is operationalized as likeliness to defect from EP party group's voting instructions. For the purpose of RQ1.1, it is defined as the MEP's likeliness to defect from EP party group's voting instructions when the MEP does not believe those to be in national electorate's best interest. For the purpose of RQ1.2, as the MEP's likeliness to defect from EP party group's voting instructions when those conflict with national party's voting instructions.

The explanatory variable in my study – the voting procedure – is operationalized as voting by either roll call, show of hands, or electronically. This applies to both RQ1.1 and RQ1.2.

In terms of obtaining measurements for the dependent and explanatory variables, this study faces a somewhat special situation as those variables are by nature interlinked – the MEPs' voting patterns need to be manifested at voting occasions, whereas voting procedures need to be acted upon to provide measurable information. As a result, three combinations of dependent and explanatory variables are estimated to answer both RQ1.1 and RQ1.2.

⁴ The exact survey questions can be found in Appendix 2.

⁵ Detailed information on the MEP Survey sample can be found in Appendix 1.

⁶ How important is it to you to represent the following people in the European Parliament?

a) all people in Europe; b) all people in your member state; c) all the people who voted for your party.

The measurements for all six combinations of dependent and explanatory variables are obtained from the original MEP survey where questions that targeted those particular situations were asked.⁷ The measurements range from 1 ‘very unlikely to defect’ to 4 ‘very likely to defect’.

Presence and direction of the voting procedure effect

The presence and direction of the voting procedure effect within the MEPs’ voting patterns is measured by descriptive statistics, while the methodological approaches to answer RQ1.1 and RQ1.2 are identical as those differ only in the situations which the MEPs are asked to describe their voting behavior in.⁸

Initially, the MEPs’ mean likeliness to defect from their EP party groups’ voting instructions were calculated for voting by each of the three voting procedures – roll call, show of hands, and electronically –, and separately for the two voting dilemmas. The comparison of means allowed me to comparatively assess how the MEPs’, as a whole, voting patterns change by their own admissions in relations to the voting procedure used when either of the two voting dilemmas is present.

In addition to providing an aggregate account of the voting procedure effect within the MEPs’ voting patterns, I also looked at changes in individual MEPs’ self-perceived voting patterns during different voting procedures. This was done by pairing the MEPs’ likeliness to defect from their EP party groups’ voting instructions during each possible pair of voting procedures – given the presence of three distinct voting procedures, there are also three pairings for both RQ1.1 and RQ1.2 –, and calculating the differences in the MEPs’ voting patterns by deducting their likeliness to defect from their EP party groups’ voting instructions during one voting procedure from their likeliness to defect during another voting procedure. As a result, I obtained three measures of difference for both research questions, corresponding to the degree to which the MEPs’ likeliness to defect from their EP party groups’ voting instructions varies when two particular voting procedures are used – difference between the MEPs’ voting patterns when voting by roll call and show of hands, by roll call and electronically, by show of hands and electronically. Looking at these differences allowed me to assess the direction as well as extent of the voting procedure effect amongst the MEPs, highlighting the proportions of the MEPs who perceive no difference to occur in their voting patterns during two particular voting procedures as well as the proportions of the MEPs who perceive a difference of a particular nature and strength to occur.

Findings I: EP party group v. national electorate

The following section looks at the MEPs’ self-perceived likeliness to defect from their EP party groups’ voting instructions when voting by roll call, show of hands or electronically in situations where those are not believed to be in their national electorates’ best interests.

Aggregate differences

⁷ The exact survey questions together with their response options can be found in Appendix 2.

⁸ A more in-depth multivariate analysis into the effects of the MEPs’ individual-level characteristics on the voting procedure effect within their voting patterns could not be undertaken due to the limitations set by the data. Given the traditional problems with low response rates to elite surveys, and a restricted population of 736 MEPs, the contacted MEPs were not asked to provide their names to maximize the response rate. Whereas this was justified by resulting in a relatively large 25% sample, the nature of the data does set limits to its use.

The comparison of the MEPs' self-perceived mean likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting positions when those are not believed to be in their national electorates' best interest confirms the theoretical expectation as set out in H1.1. As shown in Table 2, the MEPs' mean likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when facing the particular voting dilemma and voting by roll call, show of hands, or electronically are respectively 2.77/3.02/3.03.⁹

Firstly, the considerably lower value for defection from the EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by roll call in comparison to when voting by either show of hands or electronically – 2.77 in contrast to 3.02 or 3.03 – shows that, as expected, roll call votes are characterized by lower levels of defection from the EP party groups' voting instructions than non-roll call voting occasions are. When facing the particular voting dilemma, the MEPs are on aggregate more inclined to disobey their EP party groups' voting instructions and in doing so risk their potential punishment when voting by show of hands or electronically in comparison to by roll call.

Secondly, one, however, needs to be careful in interpreting the voting procedure effect. Although differences clearly exist in the MEPs' voting patterns based on whether votes are taken by roll call or not, these are by no means overwhelming. The differences of 0.25 and 0.26, albeit noteworthy, respectively cover 8.3% of the range when comparing voting by roll call with voting by show of hands and 8.7% of the range when comparing voting by roll call with voting electronically. Therefore, the degree to which the MEPs are on aggregate more likely to defect from their EP party group's voting instructions when voting by show of hands or electronically in contrast to by roll call – a trend which is evident and should be accounted for – is relatively limited and should be interpreted as such. The voting procedure effect, albeit noteworthy, should not be over-emphasized.

Furthermore, the comparison of the MEPs' self-perceived mean likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting positions when facing the particular voting dilemma also confirms that on aggregate the MEPs approach voting by show of hands and electronically similarly. Although the respective mean scores – 3.02 and 3.03 – are not identical, the 0.01 difference corresponds to merely 0.3% of the potential range and can be interpreted as effectively non-existent. When facing the particular voting dilemma, the MEPs' mean likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions do not differ by whether they are voting by show of hands or electronically.

Individual-level differences

To complement the aggregate analysis of the voting procedure effect within the MEPs' voting patterns, an individual-level analysis was also conducted. This allowed focusing on differences in each MEP's self-perceived voting patterns across the three voting procedures, and to better highlight the true scope of the voting procedure effect. The detailed findings are presented in Table 3.

The analysis confirms that slight differences in the MEPs' voting patterns across roll call and non-roll call voting occasions – either by show of hands or electronically – do exist. Looking at the proportions of the MEPs who claim to be similarly likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions – if those are not believed to be in their national electorates' best

⁹ This is measured on a scale from 1 to 4, where lower values denote to lesser likeliness to defect from the EP party groups' voting instructions.

interest – when voting by roll call on one hand and by either show of hands or electronically on the other hand, the respective measurements remain 68.4% and 73%. Although both proportions relate to the majority of the MEPs, they do on average miss out on a rather significant 29.3% of the MEPs. Leaving over a quarter of the MEPs unaccounted for, it is fair to say that one should go in greater depth than analyzing roll call voting behavior only when trying to understand the true complexity of the MEPs' voting patterns. Considerable proportions of the MEPs do follow different voting patterns when voting by roll call in contrast to when voting by show of hands or electronically.

Furthermore, the differences in the MEPs' voting patterns are not of a random nature but clearly highlight the presence of a particular empirical tendency. In fact, the individual-level analysis is particularly useful in indicating the MEPs' likeliness to defect more likely from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by non-roll call – either by show of hands or electronically – in comparison to when voting by roll call. As shown in Table 3, as many as 27% and 25.1% of the MEPs are more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions if facing the particular voting dilemma and when voting by respectively show of hands or electronically in contrast to by roll call. At the same time, only 4.6% and 2% of the MEPs were likely to act vice versa. Although those proportions are by no means overwhelming nor constitute a majority of the MEPs, they are certainly noteworthy and should be accounted for when studying the true complexity of the Parliamentary voting behavior. With as many as 85.4% and 92.7% of the MEPs – who do follow different voting patterns when voting by roll call on one hand and show of hands or electronically on the other hand – being more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting respectively by show of hands or electronically in comparison to roll call, there is a clear empirical tendency for the voting procedure effect to be of this particular nature. Vast majority of the MEPs who follow different voting patterns when voting by roll call in comparison to non-roll call – either by show of hands or electronically –, are more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting positions when voting by the latter.

The individual-level analysis also reveals an important empirical comparison regards the MEPs' voting patterns when voting by show of hands or electronically. By large, the MEPs do in fact claim to follow same voting patterns when voting by either of the two non-roll call voting procedures. As highlighted in Table 3, as many as 140 MEPs out of 152 (92.1%) perceived themselves to be as likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by show of hands or electronically. What is also important is that, although 7.9% of the MEPs perceived to follow different voting patterns when voting by show of hands or electronically, there is no clear direction of the voting procedure effect present – as was the case when comparing roll call and non-roll call voting patterns – amongst those MEPs. Whereas 6 (4%) MEPs perceived to be more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting electronically, 6 (4%) also perceived to do so when voting by show of hands. By large, the MEPs follow similar voting patterns when voting by show of hands or electronically.

The individual-level analysis very much confirms the expectations. Considerable proportions of the MEPs do in fact follow different voting patterns when voting by roll call in contrast to when voting by show of hands or electronically. Furthermore, these differences are not random as the vast majority of those MEPs who do identify a voting procedure effect in their voting patterns are more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by non-roll call. At the same time, the individual-level analysis finds very few MEPs to follow different voting patterns when voting by show of hands or electronically.

Findings II: EP party group v. national party

I move my attention now to the MEPs' self-perceived likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by roll call, show of hands or electronically, and facing the other voting dilemma – the MEPs receiving contrasting voting instructions from their EP party groups and national parties – that was controlled for by the MEP Survey.

Aggregate differences

The comparison of the MEPs' mean likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting positions when receiving conflicting voting instructions from national parties confirms H1.2 and is consistent with the findings of the MEPs' voting patterns during the previous voting dilemma. As shown in Table 4, the MEPs' mean self-perceived likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when facing the particular voting dilemma and voting by roll call, show of hands, or electronically are respectively 2.73/2.96/2.95.¹⁰

Regards to the MEPs' voting patterns during roll call and non-roll call voting occasions, two salient empirical trends are highlighted. Firstly, the considerably lower value for defection from the EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by roll call in comparison to when voting by either show of hands or electronically – 2.73 in contrast to 2.96 or 2.95 – shows that, as expected, roll call votes are characterized by lower levels of defection from the EP party groups' voting instructions than non-roll call voting occasions are. When facing the particular voting dilemma, the MEPs are on aggregate more inclined to disobey their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by show of hands or electronically in comparison to by roll call. Secondly, the degree to which defection from the EP party groups' voting instructions is more frequent during non-roll call voting occasions than roll call voting occasions is limited. The differences of 0.23 and 0.22 respectively cover only 7.7% of the range when comparing voting by roll call with voting by show of hands and 7.3% when comparing voting by roll call with voting electronically. Therefore, the voting procedure effect, albeit noteworthy, is relatively limited and should be interpreted as such.

Similar to the context of the previous voting dilemma, the comparison of the MEPs' mean likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting positions also confirms that the MEPs approach voting by show of hands and electronically similarly. Although the respective mean scores – 2.96 and 2.95 – are not identical, the 0.01 difference corresponds to merely 0.3% of the potential range and is effectively non-existent. When facing the particular voting dilemma, the MEPs' aggregate likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions do not differ by whether they are voting by show of hands or electronically.

Individual-level differences

In addition, individual-level analysis was carried out into the voting procedure effect within the MEPs' comparative likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when different voting procedures are used. The detailed findings are presented in Table 5.

As expected, it confirms the theoretical expectations. There are indeed noteworthy, albeit not overwhelming, differences in the MEPs' likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when comparing voting by roll call on with voting by either show of

¹⁰ This is measured on a scale from 1 to 4, where lower values denote to lesser likeliness to defect from the EP party groups' voting instructions.

hands or electronically in situations where conflicting voting instructions are received from their national parties. Looking at the proportions of the MEPs who claim to be as likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by roll call as when voting by show of hands or electronically, the respective measurements remain 70.1% and 75.7%. Although both proportions relate to the majority of the MEPs, those miss out on average of a rather significant 24.5% of the MEPs. Leaving almost a quarter of the MEPs unaccounted for, the voting procedure effect needs to be addressed when trying to understand the true complexity of the MEPs' voting patterns. As expected, considerable proportions of the MEPs do in fact follow different voting patterns when voting by roll call in contrast to either show of hands or electronically.

The differences in the MEPs' voting patterns when voting by roll call and non-roll call are also not random. As shown in Table 5, as many as 24.2% and 21.4% of the MEPs are more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by respectively show of hands or electronically in contrast to by roll call in situations where they are facing the particular voting dilemma. In contrast, only 5% and 2.9% of the MEPs considered themselves to act vice versa. Although differences in those proportions – respectively 19.2% and 18.5% – are not overwhelming by any means, they certainly need to be accounted for. With as many as 82.9% and 88.2% of the MEPs – who do follow different voting patterns when voting by roll call on one hand and show of hands or electronically on the other hand – being more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting respectively by show of hands or electronically in comparison to by roll call, there is a clear empirical tendency within the voting procedure effect. Roll call votes are characterized by higher levels of EP party group cohesion as defection from their voting instructions is more likely when the MEPs voting by show of hands or electronically in contrast to by roll call.

Furthermore, the individual-level analysis provides further evidence for clustering voting by show of hands and electronically together as non-roll call voting. As highlighted in Table 5, 131 MEPs out of 140 (96.4%) perceived themselves to be as likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by show of hands or electronically in situations where they receive conflicting voting instructions from their national parties. What is also very important is that, although 3.6% of the MEPs did perceive to follow different voting patterns when voting by show of hands or electronically, there is no clear direction of the voting procedure effect present as 4 (2.9%) MEPs perceived to be more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting electronically and 5 (3.6%) to do so when voting by show of hands. By large, the MEPs follow similar voting patterns when voting by show of hands or electronically.

Conclusion

Our empirical understanding of the MEPs' voting patterns, albeit extremely insightful, is fraught with a significant shortcoming as it is based on analyses of only a sub-set of the Parliamentary voting occasions – roll call votes. Roll call votes, however, differ by nature from the rest of the Parliamentary voting occasions as they are the only ones where individual MEPs' voting choices are recorded and publicised, whereas there is increasing evidence that roll call vote samples are not representative of the Parliamentary voting occasions in general.

This study aims to empirically assess the presence and direction of the voting procedure effect within the MEPs' voting patterns, assessing whether the MEPs follow somewhat different voting choices when voting by roll call, show of hands, and electronically. I do so

by using descriptive statistics on original individual-level MEP Survey data from the post-2009 Parliament to compare the current MEPs' self-perceived voting patterns across the three voting procedures – voting by roll call, show of hands, and electronically – and within two situations – when the MEPs do not believe that their EP party groups' voting instructions are in their national electorates' best interests, and when they receive conflicting voting instructions from their national parties – key to our understanding of the comparative relevance of the MEPs' 'principals' in influencing their voting choices.

The aggregate analysis demonstrates that the MEPs do indeed, as a whole, follow somewhat different voting patterns when different voting procedures are used. In fact, the MEPs are slightly more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions – when they do not believe those to be in their national electorates' best interest or when those are in conflict with their national parties' voting instruction – when the vote is taken by either show of hands or electronically in contrast to by roll call. These comparative voting patterns are very much in line with the theoretical expectations of the roll call votes – predominantly called the by EP party groups and over-representing non-legislative voting occasions where salient national affiliations are less likely to come to forefront – producing particularly strong incentives to follow EP party groups' voting instructions.

The aggregate analysis also reveals that voting by show of hands and electronically can be grouped together under non-roll call voting. Whereas, the MEPs' likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions during the two situations of voting dilemma does vary marginally when voting by either show of hands or electronically, these differences are virtually non-existent and statistically non-significant. By large, the MEPs do follow similar voting patterns when voting by either show of hands or electronically.

Unsurprisingly, the individual-oriented analysis confirms those trends. I found that on average 26.1% and 22.8% of the post-2009 MEPs consider themselves to be more likely to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by either show of hands or electronically in contrast to when voting by roll call in situations where they respectively believe those not to be in their national electorates' best interests or receive conflicting voting instructions from their national parties. The analogous proportions of MEPs who consider themselves to act vice versa remain respectively as low as 3.3% and 4%, whereas the proportions of MEPs who claim to follow different voting patterns when voting by show of hands or electronically remain also just 7.9% and 3.6% with no clear pattern of particular difference being present. A noteworthy, albeit not overwhelming, proportion of MEPs do consider themselves to follow different voting patterns when different voting procedures are used, while the vast majority of them are more inclined to defect from their EP party groups' voting instructions when voting by either show of hands or electronically in contrast to by roll call. This tendency holds for both situations of voting dilemma and follows nicely the narrative that it is the EP party group leaders, rather than national electorates or national party leaders, who are particularly more interested in the MEPs' voting choices during roll call.

My study has significant implications to our understanding of decision-making within the EP. I have empirically shown that the MEPs, as a whole, do after all – by their own admission – follow slightly different voting patterns when voting by roll call in contrast to by show of hands or electronically, as roll call voting is characterized by the MEPs' lower likeliness to defect from their EP party groups' voting positions in favour of their national electorates' interests and national parties' voting instructions. It is necessary that this voting procedure effect, albeit not overwhelming by any means, is taken into consideration when explaining

the true complexity of voting dynamics within the EP. Furthermore, this paper also highlights the need to take this kind of empirical research into the voting procedure effect on the MEPs' voting patterns even further, increasing potentially the scope of situations that are covered as well as the sample of the MEPs.

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Table 1 – Sense of Representation in the MEP Surveys

	Trumm MEP Survey 2011	EPRG MEP Survey 2010	EECS 2009
All people in Europe	3.76	3.64	3.61
All people in your member state	4.13	4.17	4.18
All the people who voted for your party	4.17	4.18	4.37

How important is it to you to represent the following people in the European Parliament?

Scale: 1 - of little importance; 5 - of great importance

Table 2 – MEPs' likeliness to defect: EP party group vs. electorate

	Roll call		Show of hands		Electronically	
Very unlikely	13	8.5%	9	5.9%	8	5.3%
Unlikely	42	27.5%	3	21.7%	32	21.1%
Likely	65	42.5%	56	36.8%	60	39.5%
Very likely	33	21.6%	54	35.5%	54	34.2%
Mean	2.77		3.02		3.03	

How likely to defect from EP party group's voting instructions if not in national electorate's interest?

Table 3 – Difference in the MEPs' likeliness to defect: EP party group vs. electorate

	Roll call - Show of hands		Roll call - Electronically		Show of hands - Electronically	
-2	7	4.6%	6	4.0%	1	0.7%
-1	34	22.4%	32	21.1%	5	3.3%
0	104	68.4%	111	73.0%	140	92.1%
1	4	2.6%	2	1.3%	5	3.3%
2	3	2.0%	1	0.7%	1	0.7%

How likely to defect from EP party group's voting instructions if not in national electorate's interest?

Positive - more likely to defect if by former voting procedure

Neutral - equally likely to defect

Negative - more likely to defect if by latter voting procedure

Table 4 – MEPs' likeliness to defect: EP party group vs. national party

	Roll call		Show of hands		Electronically	
Very unlikely	10	7.0%	4	2.8%	5	3.6%
Unlikely	48	33.8%	43	30.5%	41	29.3%
Likely	55	38.7%	48	34.0%	50	35.7%
Very likely	29	20.4%	46	32.6%	44	31.4%
Mean	2.73		2.96		2.95	

How likely to defect from EP party group's voting instructions if conflict with national party's?

Table 5 – Difference in the MEPs' likeliness to defect: EP party group vs. national party

	Roll call - Show of hands		Roll call - Electronically		Show of hands - Electronically	
-3	1	0.7%	1	0.7%		
-2	6	4.3%	5	3.6%		
-1	27	19.2%	24	17.1%	4	2.9%
0	100	70.1%	106	75.7%	131	96.4%
1	6	4.3%	4	2.9%	5	3.6%
2	1	0.7%				

How likely to defect from EP party group's voting instructions if conflict with national party's?

Positive - more likely to defect if by former voting procedure

Neutral - equally likely to defect

Negative - more likely to defect if by latter voting procedure

Appendix 1 – MEP Survey Sample

Country	MEPs (%)	Sample (%)	EP Party Group	MEPs (%)	Sample (%)
Austria	2.3	3.0	PPE	36.0	27.3
Belgium	3.0	3.0	S&D	25.0	27.3
Bulgaria	2.3	3.0	ALDE/ADLE	11.4	10.7
Cyprus	0.8	0.8	GUE-NGL	4.8	9.9
Czech Rep.	3.0	4.6	G/EFA	7.5	9.1
Denmark	1.8	2.5	ECR	7.3	7.4
Estonia	0.8	1.5	EFD	4.3	5.0
Finland	1.8	1.5	Duncan index of dissimilarity		0.10
France	9.8	7.6			
Germany	13.5	15.2			
Greece	3.0	2.3			
Hungary	3.0	3.8			
Ireland	1.6	3.8			
Italy	9.8	5.3			
Latvia	1.1	0.8			
Lithuania	1.6	0.8			
Luxembourg	0.8	0.8			
Malta	0.7	0.8			
Netherlands	3.4	4.6			
Poland	6.8	9.1			
Portugal	3.0	2.3			
Romania	4.5	5.3			
Slovakia	1.8	0.8			
Slovenia	1.0	0.8			
Spain	6.8	3.8			
Sweden	2.4	3.8			
UK	9.8	9.1			
Duncan index of dissimilarity		0.15			

Appendix 2 – MEP Survey Items

Question 1. How important is it to you to represent the following groups of people in the EP?

- a) All people in Europe
- b) All people in your member state
- c) All people who voted for your party

Scale: 1 - of little importance; 5 - of great importance

Question 2. There are likely to be occasions when you do not believe that your EP political group's voting instructions are in the best interests of your national electorate. Please tick the appropriate box to indicate how likely you are in such occasions to defect from your EP political group's voting instructions when:

- a) Voting by roll call
- b) Voting by show of hands
- c) Voting electronically

Scale: 1 - very unlikely to defect; 4 - very likely to defect

Question 3. There are likely to be occasions when you receive different voting instructions from your EP political group and your national party. Please tick the appropriate box to indicate how likely you are in such occasions to defect from your EP political group's voting instructions when:

- a) Voting by roll call
- b) Voting by show of hands
- c) Voting electronically

Scale: 1 - very unlikely to defect; 4 - very likely to defect