

Cross-Pressured Voters:
Reconciling Ideologies in European Parliament Elections

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Abstract

Voters in European Parliament elections are cross-pressured voters. They must reconcile their left/right ideology and preferences on European integration when choosing a party. However, these dimensions are often not highly correlated, so voters must choose between voting for the party with the most similar ideology on the left-right or European integration dimension. Rather than focusing on EP elections as “second order” or “Europe matters”, this paper utilizes a novel dependent variable to explain the conditions under which citizens vote for the party closest on the traditional left/right spectrum, vote for the party closest on European integration scale, or vote for another party altogether. Using 2009 European Election Studies voter survey data and a spatial utility model of vote choice, I show that the salience of each dimension, measured by attitude extremity and attribution of responsibility, as well as the amount of information available to voters individually and within the political context, determine, in part, the relative “weight” that voters assign each ideological dimension to maximize their utility. This gives a clearer picture of how reconcile their competing ideologies to select a party in EP elections.

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The literature on vote choice in European Parliament (EP) elections tends to fall into two camps: those who assume that European elections are fought over domestic matters, and those who argue that under certain conditions, “Europe matters” and citizens will vote on the basis of European integration concerns (Hobolt et. al, 2009; de Vries et. al, 2011). However, Members of European Parliament (MEPs) deal with a variety of issues, some of which relate to European integration, but many more which can be defined along the traditional left/right ideological spectrum (Hix et. al, 2007). While European elections should be based on considerations other than purely domestic ones, citizens should base their vote on something more than European preferences. Ideally, for MEPs to represent their constituents, voters have to give a mandate on both left/right and EU concerns.

However, many voters in European elections are cross-pressured voters. They face competing considerations at the national and European level, and must reconcile their left/right preferences with their views on European integration when it comes to choosing a party. This would be easy if left/right preferences were highly correlated with European integration preferences, however, they are not. Large, centrist parties tend to be fairly supportive of European integration, while smaller parties vary widely on their EU preferences (Hooghe et. al, 2002). Euro-supportive and Euroskeptical parties, and individuals, are found on the left and right. Therefore, in European elections, citizens must often make a choice between voting for the party with the most similar ideology on left-right or European integration dimensions. Furthermore, over half the European electorate stays home on election day; is their abstention a sign of indifference or disinterest, as is often argued, or is it the simplest choice when faced with uncertainty?

The question is then how do voters reconcile their various ideological beliefs to choose a party in EP elections? What are the conditions under which citizens vote for the party closest on traditional left-right issues, vote for the party closest on European integration concerns, vote another party altogether, or just abstain? In the sections below, we will give an overview of the literature on elections

to the European Parliament, cross-pressure, and spatial voting assumptions. From this we develop theoretical expectations about how citizens will “weight” each dimension in choosing a party with the most utility. Specifically, we argue that attitude extremity and attributions of responsibility will increase the salience of one dimension over the other. In addition, individual- and contextual-level information increases the likelihood of citizens to vote along a particular dimension, with party system polarization along the European and left-right dimensions augmenting the amount of information available to voters. The political context can assist even low-knowledge voters to behave as if they were politically sophisticated. We test these hypotheses with a series of multilevel logistic models and interpret the findings in subsequent sections.

European Parliament Elections

The literature on European Parliament (EP) elections frequently classifies them as second-order elections (SOE) that are less important than national elections, as there is no government formation (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Hix and Marsh, 2011). Three main characteristics define SOE: defection from governing parties, lower levels of turnout than in national elections, and greater success for small parties. It is often argued that domestic concerns prevail in European elections, with citizens voting on the basis of their (dis)satisfaction with the national government or politics in general. Another explanation for the change in party fortunes between national and European elections is that citizens can vote “sincerely” in EP elections since government formation is not at stake (Marsh, 1998). However, most studies have taken a macro-approach to EP elections, and so it has been impossible to disentangle the individual motivations behind the change in voting behavior from national to European elections. This leads to a problem of observational equivalence: voting for opposition or smaller parties could reflect frustration with domestic issues, sincere voting, or it could signal concerns over European

integration, as governing or mainstream parties are generally more supportive of European integration than the general public.

Recently, more research has investigated the individual-level voting behavior in European elections. Following that that EP elections give voters the opportunity to vote “sincerely” could result in two observed behaviors. Since “less is at stake” citizens can vote for the party closest to themselves ideologically; parties that they would not vote for in national elections as they do not stand a chance of forming a government. Alternatively, sincere voting could result in citizens choosing a party based on European integration concerns. Some voters, particularly those with extreme pro or anti-EU attitudes, may see European elections as a chance to voice their feelings about European integration. However, the impact of EU attitudes on participation and vote choice in EP elections is unclear. Some studies have found that attitudes do not significantly impact the decision to participate (Franklin et. al 1996) while another study shows limited evidence that negative attitudes towards the EU are associated with abstention (Blondel et. al 1997). Moreover, there is limited research into the role that EU attitudes play in party choice.

While aggregate studies of turnout have focused on the role of institutional factors, research examining individual-level participation and vote choice has highlighted the important role that the political context plays (Hobolt, 2005). In particular, “EU-issue voting” is more pronounced in party systems polarized along the EU dimension (de Vries et. al, 2011). Party divergence on issues creates more choice for voters, and results in more information being available in the political environment. Party positions and options vary widely across the 27 member states, so citizens in some countries will have more information available to them than others.

When taking a step back to examine what all these studies have in common, it becomes clear that not only do voters have different motivations in choosing a party, but importantly that they may be cross-pressured between traditional left/right and European ideologies. This ideological tension has not

been examined in previous work on voting behavior in EP elections because they have either focused on macro analysis or voting based on European integration concerns. This paper attempts to link these two aspects of the literature to show that both left/right and EU preferences have a role in motivating voters to vote and choose a party.

Cross-Pressure

Cross-pressure has often been examined in terms of political participation, with individuals who are cross-pressured being less likely to participate. Early studies of cross-pressure examined the role that social identity plays in political participation and asserted that individuals who experience conflicting, rather than reinforcing, pressures from the various social groups to which they belong, were less likely to participate in politics (Lazarsfeld et. al, 1948; Berelson et. al, 1954; Campbell et. al, 1960). These studies found that cross-pressured individuals were less interested in campaigns, delayed their voting decisions, and were more likely to abstain. Current work seeks to uncover the causal mechanisms which link cross-pressure with participation, distinguishing between social cross-pressures and issue cross-pressures (Therriault et. al, 2011). In studies of cross-pressure in European politics, the focus has been more on “ideological” cross-pressure. Danish voters who disagree with their party’s stance on European integration more likely to abstain (Worre, 1994), and cross-pressured Norwegian voters more likely to abstain in EC referenda when parties apply hard pressure and more likely to vote their personal preference when parties apply soft pressure (Sparre Nilson, 2002).

While the emphasis of previous studies has been on abstention as a result of conflicting preferences, whether they result from social or issue pressure, no studies have yet examined how cross-pressured voters either reconcile or prioritize these competing considerations to choose a party. This seems a particularly important question for European elections, where citizens must balance their issue preferences with their position on European integration. The puzzle then is that cross-pressured citizens

do vote, but for whom? When do citizens vote based on their LR ideology, and when does their European ideology take precedence?

Spatial Model of Vote Choice

To determine who are the cross-pressured voters, we assume a proximity model of vote choice. In brief, voters and parties are positioned in ideological issue space, and voters will choose the party that is closest to their own position; or, in other words, voters have the greatest “utility” for the nearest party (Downs, 1957). Since Downs' seminal work, many modifications have been made to the spatial voting theory, including a discounting model (Grofman, 1985) whereby voters take into account the policy status quo and discount a candidate's claims about how far he can move policy when determining a party's position. The directional model (Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989; Kedar, 2005) suggests that voters will not choose the closest party, but rather the party that will move policy in the voter's preferred direction.

We acknowledge that voters have different motivations when choosing a party, and it only seems reasonable that some will pursue directional strategies while others operate on a proximity basis when selecting a party. In empirical analyses of national elections, Merrill and Grofman (1999) find evidence that both proximity and directional models help to explain vote choice in multiparty systems; in elections where a few major issues dominate, voters are more likely to vote for parties who will take policy in a preferred direction, while in intermediate elections they are more likely to vote for the party that is closest to their issue position. In line with these findings, and as this paper represents a first attempt to disentangle the conditions under which voters choose parties based on left-right versus European ideology, we have chosen to keep it simple and utilize a proximity model of vote choice:

$$U_i(p) = -w(LR_i - LR_p)^2 - w(EU_i - EU_p)^2 + c_{ip} + e_{ip}$$

Where $U_i(p)$ represents the utility that individual i receives from voting for party p , $(LR_i - LR_p)$ and $(EU_i - EU_p)$ represent the perceived distance between the voter and party in the LR and EU issue space, and w is the weight, or importance the voter assigns to each of these dimensions. Voters will naturally have other considerations, c_{ip} , and an error term e_{ip} .

When one party minimizes the distance on each dimension, voters are not forced to choose between European or left/right ideologies when casting their vote in EP elections. However, if a voter is close to one party on the left/right dimension, but a different party on the European dimension, how then do voters assign a weight to determine which one takes precedence at the ballot box? The relative *salience* of and the amount of *information* about each dimension will determine the weight that voters assign it. Voters then will have a higher utility to vote for one party over another, or perhaps to abstain rather than vote.

First, let us focus on the factors that could increase the salience of one dimension over the other. One consideration that may increase the salience of the European dimension is an individual's attribution of responsibility to the EU. Despite the enhanced power of European Parliament (and the European Union more generally) many citizens do not understand what are the policy areas for which the EU has responsibility. Indeed, many citizens claim they do not know what the EP is responsible for, or believe that it does not have any power, and these are cited as major reasons for abstaining in EP elections (Eurobarometer 69.2, 2008). If a citizen perceives the EU to have high levels of responsibility, this will make European issues more salient in their voting calculus.

H1: Citizens who attribute high levels of responsibility to the EU will be less likely to vote purely on the basis of left/right considerations.

The literature reveals little about the effects of EU-related attitudes on the decision to vote, and on party choice. An extreme attitude is more likely to be a salient attitude (Abelson, 1995), therefore

individuals with extreme ideological attitudes on one dimension or the other are more likely to weight this dimension more heavily in EP elections.

H2a: Citizens with extreme pro or anti European attitudes are more likely to vote in European Parliament elections than those with moderate attitudes.

H2b: Voters with extreme pro or anti European attitudes are more likely than moderates to vote for the party closest to themselves on the European dimension.

H2c: Voters with extreme left or right attitudes are more likely than moderates to vote for the party closest to themselves on the left/right dimension.

If attributions of responsibility and attitude extremity increase the salience of a given dimension, political information allows individuals to choose a party that minimizes the distance between their and their party's ideological position. As discussed above, the previous research on European elections has generally focused on the choice between domestic concerns or European issues. However, parties in the EP vote primarily along left-right lines, not on national matters or European integration concerns. The bulk of legislation emanating from the EP deals with matters that can be defined along the left-right dimension, with a second, less important dimension incorporating government-opposition conflicts and European integration preferences (Hix et. al, 2004; Hix et. al, 2007). Therefore European policy-making does not fall neatly into a domestic versus Europe dichotomy; instead, it involves primarily issues which parties respond to based on their left-right ideological beliefs, as well as some European integration matters. Therefore, the ideal vote choice is for a party that reconciles these two dimensions for the voter. We acknowledge that we do face a problem of observational equivalence in this situation: citizens could choose to vote on the basis of left-right concerns over EU due to habitual or partisan voting, or because they understand that the EP is responsible for policy making that falls on the traditional left-right dimension. To understand the type of policy-making that goes on in the EP is

already a challenging task for most voters, especially when parties campaign on domestic concerns. Yet, politically sophisticated voters should be the most able to understand this complexity.

H3a: Politically unsophisticated citizens will be more likely to abstain than sophisticates.

H3b: Politically unsophisticated citizens will be more likely to vote for a party that is not the closest on either dimension.

H3c: Political sophisticates will be most able to reconcile their left/right and EU preferences, and vote for the party closest on both scales.

Moving away from individual-level predictions, we turn now to the impact of the political context. Party systems that are polarized on either the LR or EU dimensions are more likely to offer citizens more information, which increases the likelihood that voters will weight that dimension more heavily. We make the following predictions about the direct effects of party polarization:

H4a: Voters in countries polarized along the left-right dimension will be more likely to vote for the party closest on the LR scale.

H4b: Voters in countries polarized along the EU dimension will be more likely to vote for the party closest on the EU scale.

Finally, we expect political sophistication to moderate the impact of the political context. If polarized environments increase the amount of information available to voters, then even politically unsophisticated citizens have the opportunity to learn about the issue space. Indeed, increased information has been found to enable low-knowledge citizens to perform as though they were well-informed (Kuklinski et. al, 2001).

H5: The impact of party polarization will be stronger for politically unsophisticated citizens than for political sophisticates.

Data and Measurement

To test our hypotheses, we utilize the 2009 European Election Study Voter Survey (EES 2009; van Egmond et al., 2009). Survey respondents were asked to place themselves and several political parties on a scale from 0 to 10, where zero is extreme left and 10 is extreme right. We refer to this as their left/right (LR) placement. They were also asked to place themselves and the same parties on a scale of European integration, where 0 means “European unification has already gone too far” and 10 is “unification should be pushed further” (EU placement). We measured the absolute distance between the voters’ self placement and their placement of each of the parties. For example, if a voter placed himself at 6, and a party at 8, the distance would be 2.

First, Table 1 summarizes how many individuals were “cross-pressured” – that is, closer to different parties on the European and LR dimensions – whether or not they voted in the EP election. Only individuals who gave self and (some) party placements can be included in the first two categories. Those unable or unwilling to give placements are in a third “don’t know” category. In addition, Table 1 shows the percentage of each group that voted. There is no difference in participation rates between cross-pressured or not voters, but a higher percentage of citizens in the DK group abstained compared to the other categories.

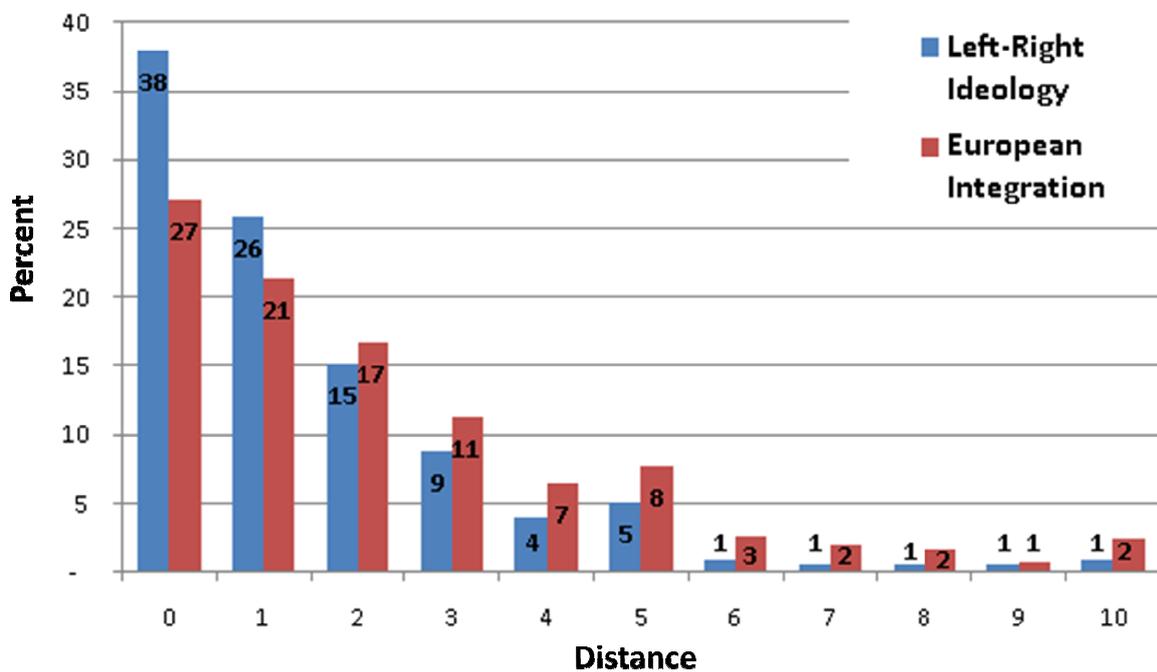
Table 1. Cross-Pressured Citizens

<i>Category</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% that voted</i>
Cross-pressured	31%	8435	75%
Not cross-pressured	36%	9631	75%
DK EU or LR placements	33%	9003	63%
Total		27069	

Source: 2009 European Election Studies Voter Survey

Looking only at the individuals who participated in the EP elections, Figure 1 shows the distance between voters and their chosen parties in the 2009 European elections. This figure shows that 38% of voters placed themselves and their party at the same position on the left/right scale, while 27% of voters placed themselves and their party at the same position on the European integration scale.

Figure 1: Distance to Chosen Party



Moreover, we are interested not only in the distance to the individual’s chosen party, but if there was another party that was closer to the voter on either scale. It is often assumed that when given the opportunity to subjectively place themselves and political parties on a scale, most individuals will minimize the distance between themselves and their chosen party. This “projection effect” has been documented in various countries, with individuals placing their preferred parties closest to themselves and overstating the distance between themselves and other parties (Merrill et. al, 2001). In

the EES 2009 Voter Survey, the self and party placement questions were asked sequentially, suggesting that voters would be able to remember how they positioned themselves and perhaps be subject to projection effects and place their chosen party at a similar location. However, many respondents actually place other parties closer to themselves on one or both scales, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Dependent Variable: Vote Choice Based on Distance to Party

Excluding Abstainers			Including Abstainers		
<i>Category</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>
LR	30%	4342	LR	19%	4342
Both	22%	3224	Both	14%	3224
EU	16%	2355	EU	11%	2355
Neither	32%	4643	Neither	21%	4643
			Abstained	35%	7797
Total		14564			22361

In Table 2, we can see how individuals voted based on distance to party: Did they vote for the party closest on the LR dimension, EU dimension, both, or neither? Or, in the language of the spatial voting theory, which dimension did they weight more heavily? To maximize the number of observations available in our study, this table includes individuals who were unable to place parties on the different scales – for example, if a voter did not place any parties on the left/right scale but did place parties on the EU scale and voted for the party closest to themselves on the EU scale, they were included in the “EU” category. If in this same scenario the individual did not vote for the party closest on the EU scale, they were placed in the “neither” category. Finally, voters who were unable to place parties on either

scale were included in the “neither” category. The logic behind these categorizations is that proximity to party could not have been a consideration if the voter did not know party positions.¹

The configuration of this dependent variable takes into consideration the ideological cross-pressures faced by voters and the relative weight they assign these ideologies. Individuals in the LR category, 30% of voters, chose to vote for the party closest to themselves on the left/right scale, meaning that a different party had a smaller distance on the EU scale (or that they did not know party positions on the EU dimension). The opposite is true for the 16% of voters in the EU category: they voted for the party closest on the EU dimension, while eschewing a different party which was closer on the LR scale. Voters in the Both category were able to reconcile these two dimensions, with the party they voted for being closest on both the EU and LR dimensions. Surprisingly, nearly a third of voters selected a party that was not the closest to them on either the LR or EU dimension.

Based on previous research and our own theoretical expectations, we include a number of variables at the individual level. First are the variables intended to measure salience. EU Responsibility measures voters’ perceptions of the level of policy responsibility held by the EU. It ranges from 0-5, and is created by summing the number of policy areas where the voter believes the EU is equally or more responsible than the national government. Next, EU Attitudes is a standardized scale, with positive values being most supportive of the European Union.² LR Attitudes ranges from 0 to 10, and is the

¹ Including voters who were unable to make party placements results in an additional 1446 people in the LR category, 337 in the EU category, and 2171 in the Neither category.

² EU attitudes is a standardized item scale created from four equally weighted questions: q79, q80, q83, and q81; alpha score of .71. Please see appendix for question wording. These items were chosen for the scale of EU attitudes as they were highly correlated with each other and meet the monotone homogeneity assumption in item-rest tests. In addition, we model it as a one-dimensional construct, as we found strong unidimensionality in the responses. Furthermore Euroskepticism is normally modeled unidimensionally in the literature (see e.g. Hooghe & Marks, 2005).

respondent's self placement where 0 is extreme left and 10 is extreme right. To test the hypothesis that extreme attitudes have a non-linear effect, quadratic terms of EU and LR attitudes are also included.

To measure the impact of information, Political Sophistication is a summated scale created from the political knowledge questions.³ At the country-level, we include two covariates which measure the level of party polarization on the left-right and EU scales. EU Party Polarization and LR Party Polarization are from the 2009 EES voter survey, and are measured as the standard deviation of respondents' placements of political parties on the LR and European integration scale. Utilizing voters' perceptions of party location allows analysis of the amount of choice individuals have in the electoral arena. It is this perception and the amount of dispersion of parties relative to voters that matters more than expert placement of parties in space. To address potential concerns about cross-national differences in scale interpretation and party dispersion relative to voters, separate models were run utilizing *compactness of parties* in the LR and EU issue space (Alvarez and Nagler, 2004).⁴ This measure standardizes perceived party polarization by voters' self placements. Finally, a cross-level interaction of each polarization measure with political sophistication is included to test our moderating hypothesis.

Included as control variables are age, government approval, party attachment, and social class. Age is a continuous variable measuring how many years old the respondent is. Government Approval is an indicator variable, taking a value of 1 if the respondent approves of the national government's record, 0 if he disapproves. Party Attachment is also an indicator variable with a value of 1 if the respondent "feels closer" to any political party. Individuals with party attachments, which are usually formed on the basis of proximity on the traditional left-right ideological scale, will be more likely to support their party in EP elections and be habitual voters. Large parties rely on their identifiers to

³ Question wording given in the appendix. Scale has an alpha score of .67. While no measure is perfect, factual true/false questions are the best measure of political knowledge (Zaller 1992).

⁴ Using the measure of party compactness in the issue space leads to the same substantive results for both the direct effect and interaction. However, it is more intuitive to interpret party polarization therefore we have not included the compactness measure in the results and discussion.

turnout and vote for them, and direct their campaigns at party supporters. The confluence of party attachment, habit, and party pressure makes it more likely that partisans will give less thought to the European integration dimension, so it is important to control for this. Social class is a series of 8 dummy variables, categorized based on the Goldthorpe class schema with “routine non-manual” as the reference category (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992).

Results and Discussion

We estimate a series of multilevel binary logistic regressions.⁵ The first set, shown in Table 3, is the turnout model which compares citizens who abstained in the 2009 EP elections with those who voted as the reference category. Table 4 is the party choice model with respondents who voted for the party closest on “LR” as the base category. For both sets, we include the same covariates at the individual and country level and run first a model with direct, or unconditional effects only, and then a second model which includes the cross-level interaction. While the focus of this paper is on cross-pressured voters, we know from previous research that many cross-pressured individuals abstain. Therefore it is helpful to assess whether the same measures of salience and information will predict abstention as well as party choice.

First, looking at the country-level variance in each of the models, it is clear that there is much more variance between countries for abstention versus voting, and much less between-country variation for actual vote choice. This would suggest that the turnout model leaves out important country-level predictors, and we acknowledge that this is the case. There has already been considerable work done on the determinants of turnout in EP elections which we do not seek to replicate here (such as Franklin, 2001; Mattila, 2003; Franklin and Hobolt, 2011). Rather, our goal was to test new

⁵ Alvarez and Nagler (1998) have shown a series of binomial logistic regressions to be statistically and functionally equivalent to a multinomial logit model.

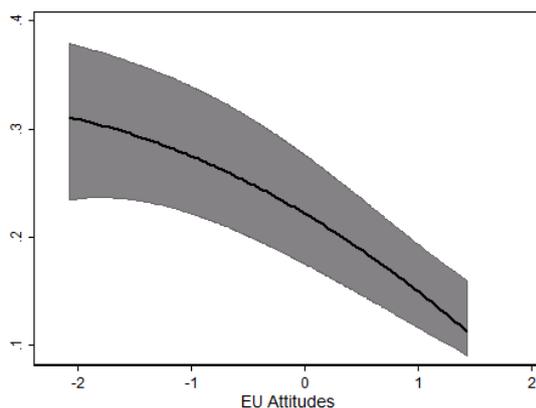
hypotheses and to see if the factors that influence party choice also influence the decision to vote or abstain.

As shown in Table 3, perceptions of EU responsibility are not a significant factor in the decision to vote or abstain. However, attitudes towards European integration are highly significant, with people who are more Europositive less likely to abstain (this is illustrated in Figure 2a below). This is in contrast to conventional wisdom and our hypothesis that individuals with extreme attitudes on both ends of the spectrum would be less likely to abstain, either as a protest/anti-EU vote, or as a show of support. On the other hand, it could be that Euroskeptics do not participate because they do not wish to “endorse” the European political system.

Figure 2b shows that left/right attitudes do not significantly impact the decision to vote or abstain in EP elections. There is a slight non-linear effect, where moderates are more likely to abstain, but the confidence intervals are so wide that we cannot say it is a strong effect.

Figure 2. Effect of Extreme Attitudes on Abstention: Probability of Abstain vs. Vote

a. EU Attitudes



b. Left/Right Attitudes

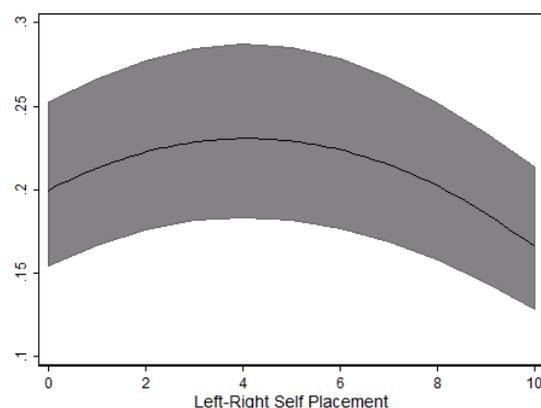


Table 3. Multilevel Model of Abstention in 2009 European Parliament Elections

	Direct Effects			Interactive Effects		
<u>Individual-Level Variables</u>						
EU Responsibility	-0.012		(.01)	-0.012		(.01)
EU Attitude	-0.410	***	(.03)	-0.410	***	(.03)
EU Attitude ^2	-0.089	***	(.03)	-0.089	***	(.03)
LR Attitude	0.094	***	(.02)	0.094	***	(.02)
LR Attitude^2	-0.011	***	(.00)	-0.011	***	(.00)
Political Sophistication	-0.154	***	(.01)	-0.164	***	(.03)
Party Attachment	-0.715	***	(.03)	-0.715	***	(.03)
Gov Approval	-0.098	**	(.04)	-0.098	**	(.04)
Age	-0.027	***	(.00)	-0.027	***	(.00)
<u>Social Class (base: routine non-manual)</u>						
Upper Service	-0.302	***	(.05)	-0.301	***	(.05)
Lower Service	-0.166	*	(.08)	-0.166	*	(.08)
Petty Bourgeois	-0.012		(.06)	-0.012		(.06)
Skilled Workers	0.135	*	(.06)	0.135	*	(.06)
Non-Skilled Workers	0.181	***	(.05)	0.181	***	(.05)
Still in Education	-0.148		(.08)	-0.148		(.08)
Other	0.086		(.06)	0.086		(.06)
<u>Contextual Level Variables</u>						
Intercept	1.08		(.63)	1.09		(.64)
EU Party Polarization	-0.356		(.38)	-0.357		(.37)
LR Party Polarization	0.214		(.26)	0.21		(.27)
<u>Cross-Level Interaction</u>						
Knowledge*LR						
Party Polarization	-			0.001		(.02)
<u>Random Effects</u>						
Variance	0.60		(.17)	0.60		(.17)
N Groups	28			28		
N Individuals	21596			21596		

Multilevel binary logistic model with "voted" as base category. Coefficients are log odds with standard errors in parentheses.

Source: 2009 European Election Studies Voter Survey

*p<.05

**p<.01

***p<.001

The effects of the remaining individual-level covariates are all as expected. Politically sophisticated voters are less likely to abstain. Individuals without a party attachment are more likely to abstain than those who identify with a party. And, citizens who are dissatisfied with the government's record are also more likely to abstain. We see the anticipated relationship between age and abstention, with younger voters more likely to stay home on Election Day. In regards to occupation, citizens in higher social classes are less likely to abstain than those in the working classes.

Moving on to the country-level variables, neither left/right nor EU party polarization are significant predictors of abstention versus participation. Furthermore, the interaction between political sophistication and polarization is not significant either. In sum, the main finding for this model is that Europositive voters are more likely to participate in EP elections, while Euroskeptics are more likely to abstain. Next, let us turn to the results of the party choice models in Table 4.

Table 4. Multilevel Model of Party Choice at the 2009 European Parliament Elections

	Direct Effects						Interactive Effects					
	1a		1b		1c		2a		2b		2c	
	Both		EU		Neither		Both		EU		Neither	
<i>Individual Level Predictors</i>												
EU Responsibility	0.056	**	0.070	***	0.040	*	0.056	**	0.069	***	0.040	*
	(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)	
EU Attitude	0.631	***	0.548	***	-0.028		0.360	***	0.547	***	-0.025	
	(.04)		(.04)		(.04)		(.04)		(.04)		(.04)	
EU Attitude ^2	0.432	***	0.334	***	0.034		0.432	***	0.335	***	0.047	
	(.04)		(.05)		(.04)		(.04)		(.05)		(.04)	
LR Attitude	-0.014		0.439	***	-0.028	***	-0.151		0.437	***	0.422	***
	(.03)		(.04)		(.04)		(.03)		(.04)		(.03)	
LR Attitude^2	0.000		-0.050	***	0.034	***	0.000		-0.050	***	-0.048	***
	(.00)		(.00)		(.04)		(.00)		(.00)		(.00)	
Knowledge	0.072	***	0.005		-0.057	*	-0.045		-0.195	**	-0.133	*
	(.02)		(.02)		(.01)		(.06)		(.06)		(.05)	
Gov Approval	0.011		-0.078		-0.070		0.012		-0.077		0.002	
	(.05)		(.06)		(.05)		(.05)		(.06)		(.05)	
Party Attachment	0.159	*	-0.173	*	-0.580	***	0.160	*	-0.167	*	-0.434	***
	(.08)		(.08)		(.06)		(.08)		(.08)		(.06)	
<i>Country Level Predictors</i>												
Intercept	-1.060	***	-1.180	***	0.127		-0.580		-0.379		0.529	
	(.26)		(.28)		(.24)		(.34)		(.37)		(.32)	
EU Party Polarization	0.228		0.352	**	0.134		0.230		0.349	***	0.132	
	(.12)		(.13)		(.11)		(.12)		(.12)		(.11)	
LR Party Polarization	-0.080		-0.366	***	-0.291	***	-0.310	*	-0.772	***	-0.492	***
	(.09)		(.09)		(.08)		(.14)		(.16)		(.13)	
<i>Cross-Level Interaction</i>												
Knowledge*LR												
Party Polarization	-		-		-		0.056	*	1.010	**	0.050	*
							(.03)		(.03)		(.03)	
<i>Random Effects</i>												
Variance	0.050		0.048		0.043		0.047		0.048		0.044	
	(.02)		(.02)		(.01)		(.02)		(.02)		(.01)	
N Groups	28		28		28		28		28		28	
N Individuals	7078		6063		7726		7078		6063		7726	

Multilevel binary logistic model with "LR" as base category. Coefficients are log odds with standard errors in parentheses. Output of social class withheld for space considerations, as no category was significant in any model.

Source: 2009 European Election Studies Voter Survey *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 4 confirms most, but refutes some of our predictions. Recall that the coefficients are given in log-odds units, so are not directly interpretable. To ease interpretation of the results, we will examine the direct and linear effects by estimating changes in predicted probabilities. Graphs will help interpret the non-linear and interactive effects. Table 5 below shows the change in predicted probability moving from the minimum to the maximum of the variable, with all other covariates held constant at their mean. For example, looking at the first row, first column: moving from low to high attribution of responsibility increases the probability of voting for a party closest on both dimensions (compared to LR dimension) by 7 percentage points.

Table 5. Predicted Probabilities of Direct Effects

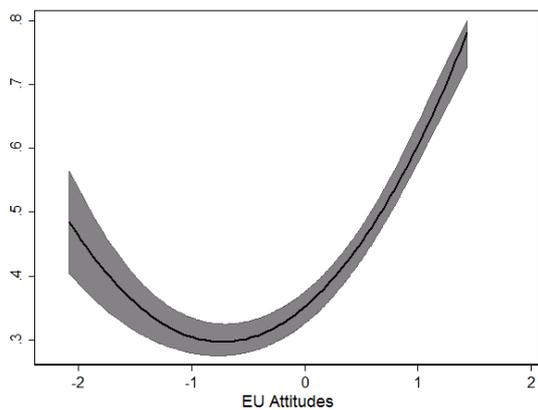
	Both	EU	Neither
	<i>(reference category: Left/Right)</i>		
EU Responsibility	7%	10%	NS
Political Sophistication	12%	NS	-6%
EU Party Polarization	8%	12%	NS
LR Party Polarization	NS	-16%	-14%

First, let us review the salience variables. There is a positive relationship between attribution of responsibility to the European Union and voting based on either the EU dimension or both dimensions, compared to LR. This is not a significant predictor when comparing individuals who vote on neither basis with those who vote on LR. Citizens who attribute more responsibility to the EU are less likely to vote purely on the basis of LR concerns, but this effect is not strong. However, this effect is seen while controlling for an individual's EU attitudes. This indicates that subjective allocation of responsibility to the EU primes individuals to consider factors other than just LR ideology when choosing a party in EP elections.

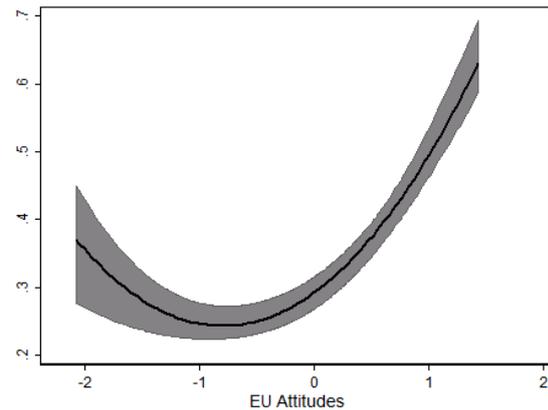
Next we examine the hypothesis that attitude extremity increases the salience of that dimension. Due to the non-linear relationship anticipated between attitudes and party choice, its effect has been graphed in Figures 3 and 4 for ease of interpretation. Figures 3a and 3b demonstrate that individuals who have extreme EU attitudes – both negative and positive – are more likely to take a party’s EU position into account when voting. Electors on both ends of the spectrum are more likely to vote for the party closest to themselves on both dimensions or the EU dimension than individuals with moderate EU attitudes.

Figure 3. Effect of EU attitudes

a. Probability of “Both” vs. LR



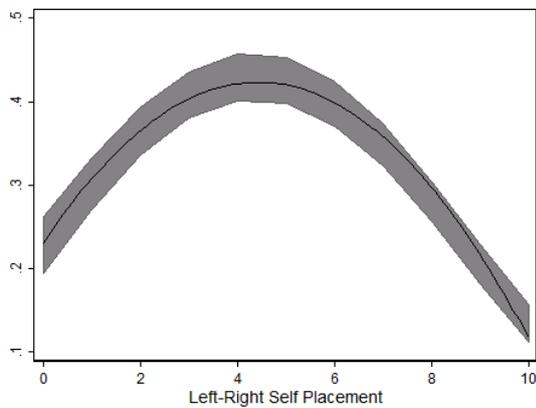
b. Probability of “EU” vs. LR



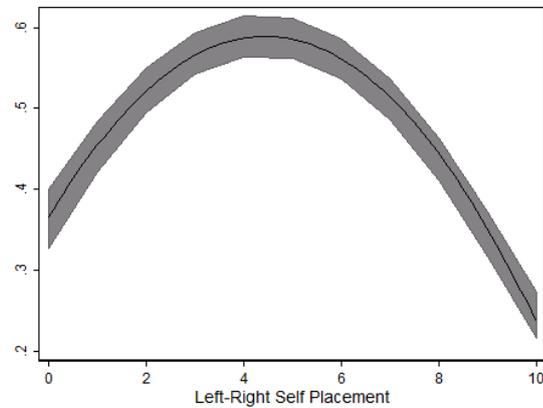
Figures 4a and 4b show that moderates are much more likely than extremists to vote on the basis of EU ideology or neither dimension, while voters at the extreme ends of the left/right ideology spectrum are more likely to vote for the party closest to themselves on the left/right scale.

Figure 4. Effect of LR attitudes

a. Probability of “EU” vs. LR



b. Probability of “Neither” vs LR



Looking at the information variables, our results confirm the hypothesis that political sophisticates are better able to reconcile the cross-pressures of EU and LR concerns and vote for the party closest to themselves on both dimensions. There is not a significant difference in political sophistication between citizens who vote on the EU versus LR dimension, and high sophisticates are 6 percentage points less likely to choose a party who is not close on either scale.

Moving on to the direct effects at the country level, we see the anticipated relationship between party polarization and vote choice. In contexts highly polarized on the left/right dimension, individuals are more likely to vote on the basis of LR concerns. Similarly, voters in party systems that are highly polarized on the EU dimension are more likely to vote for the party closest to themselves on the EU dimension or both dimensions.

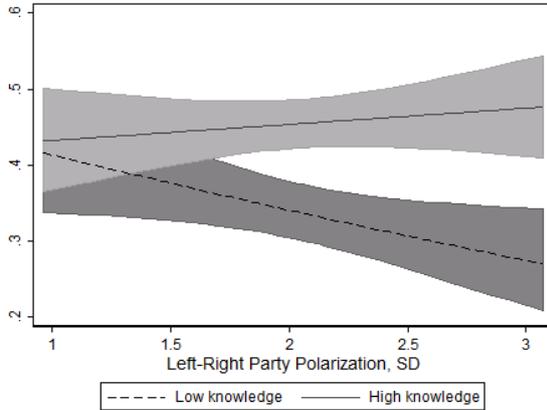
For the moderation hypothesis, we find strong support that left-right party polarization moderates the effect of political sophistication. However, the interaction EU party polarization with political sophistication was not substantively or statistically significant, so it has been removed from the final model shown here. Figure 5 shows the interactive effect of political sophistication and left-right

party polarization. There are nuanced differences in the interpretation of each binary relationship. In general, the effect of increasing party polarization is stronger on low sophisticates than on high sophisticates. In Figure 5a, there is little difference between high and low sophisticates in low polarized systems, but as LR party polarization increases, low sophisticates are more likely to vote on the basis of LR concerns. This could indicate that there are more cues and information available in the political context, so the saliency of LR concerns increases for low sophisticates who are generally more reliant on political cues. We see a similar effect in EU versus LR – the probability for political sophisticates to vote on the basis of EU versus LR issues does not vary much over levels of polarization, but low sophisticates become much more likely to vote on the LR dimension.

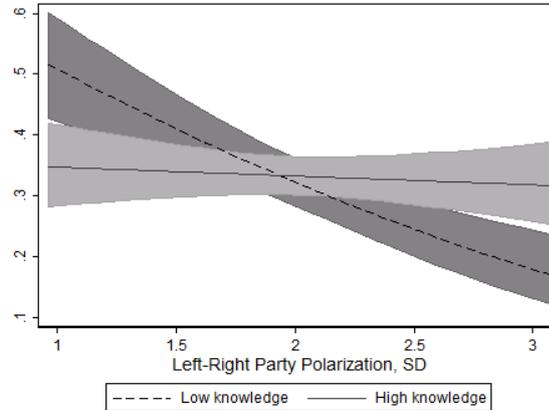
Figure 5c is perhaps the most interesting as it demonstrates how party polarization helps low knowledge voters to behave as though they were politically sophisticated. In systems where there is little party polarization in the LR issue space, low knowledge voters are much more likely to vote for a party that is not close to them on either LR or EU dimensions. As LR polarization increases, the probability that they will vote on the basis of LR dimension increases, and they become indistinguishable from the high sophisticates in the most polarized environments. When polarization decreases, political sophisticates are better able to navigate the issue space and find parties closest to themselves on the left-right scale, whereas the unsophisticated are less able to do so. This supports the claim that party polarization increases saliency and the amount of information available to voters.

Figure 5: LR Party Polarization and Political Sophistication

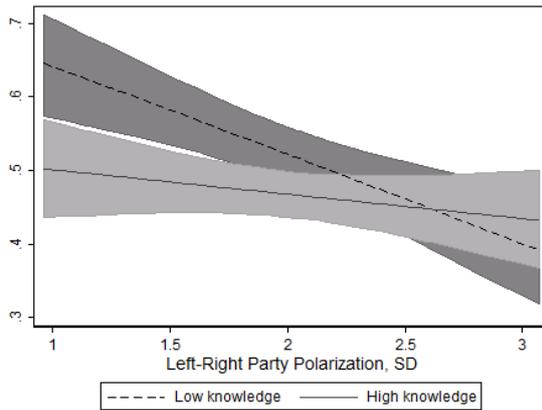
a: Probability of “Both” vs. LR



b: Probability of “EU” vs. LR



c: Probability of “Neither” vs. LR



Conclusion

In European Parliament elections, citizens face competing considerations when choosing a party. Often, voters’ EU and LR preferences are not compatible with the platform of a single party, and this has been demonstrated by our novel dependent variable. It is clear that EP party choice is not simply a matter of choosing domestic concerns or European matters – a vote along left/right or EU ideologies can represent a sincere vote for different individuals. To that end, this paper sought to link the SOE and “Europe Matters” literatures by conceptualizing a utility function where voters “weight”

left/right or EU concerns more heavily depending on the salience of and information about these dimensions. The findings suggest that people vote on the basis of left-right versus EU ideology when one is more salient than the other, or they have more information about one. Information also allows individuals to reconcile these two ideologies and select a party that is closest on both dimensions. It is important to note here that we cannot know the specific motivations of voters, for example, we cannot know if a citizen voted for the party closest on left-right due to concerns over domestic issues or due to a belief that this was the best way to be represented at the European level. However, by controlling for several different factors including attitudes, partisanship, and government approval, we could make reasoned assessments of various motivations.

From the covariates analyzed in this study, EU attitudes, perhaps not surprisingly, seem to have the strongest effect on the decision to vote in EP elections. In addition, we did not find any evidence that Euroskeptics are more likely to vote; in fact, the results suggest the opposite: as attitudes towards European integration become more positive, the more likely a person is to vote in EP elections. This should be reassuring to those who worry that European elections serve only as a protest vote for those against the European integration project. In the models comparing party choice, attitude extremity was also shown to increase the relative salience of the LR or EU dimension, with extremists weighting that dimension more heavily in their vote choice..

Future studies could expand this research to include multiple European Parliament elections, or to test a directional model of vote choice. Perhaps in situations where a voter chose a party closest on one dimension but not the other, he was motivated by a desire to move policy in a certain direction, rather than maintaining the status quo with the closest party.

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