

The Quality of Representation in European Elections

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Abstract

Research shows that European parties and electorates fulfil structural preconditions for democratic representation. Little is known, however, about how well voters are represented in the European Parliament. With the aim to explore the quality of representation in European elections, this paper firstly looks into how attitudes of voters and EP representatives are structured and whether the emerging attitude structure is comparable across elites and voters. Secondly, it explores individual-, party- and system-level characteristics that affect how well opinions are represented. We estimate these effects by means of hierarchical modelling, based on the 2009 European Election Study and Candidate Survey. The analyses show that only highly sophisticated voters have a chance for their attitudes to be represented in European elections. In addition to the level of sophistication, the degree to which voters have been mobilized in the course of EP election campaign matters for the quality of representation. Parties with more experienced candidates and radical right parties represent their voters better. Better mass-elite issue congruence can be observed in countries which have adopted the open and ordered ballot systems for the EP elections. We find a considerable representation gap for voters with economically left-wing and authoritarian attitudes. The final model, which contains characteristics at three levels, accounts for the differences between established democracies of Western Europe and consolidating democracies of East Central Europe.

Keywords: European Parliament, representation, attitudes, Western Europe, East Central Europe

1. Introduction

European parties and electorates fulfill structural preconditions for democratic representation as set out in the Responsible Party Model (Thomassen, 1994, 1999, 2009). Parties in the European Parliament (EP) are as ideologically distinctive and cohesive as national parties (Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999). Voters are able to recognize ideological differences among parties and consider them while making up their mind which party to choose at the ballot box in the EP elections (Van der Brug and Van der Eijk, 1999; Rosema and De Vries, 2011). The party space in the EP reflects the national political space, where the left/right dimension is the main dimension of competition, next to the pro-EU/anti-EU dimension (Hix and Lord, 1997; Hix, 1999; Schmitt and Thomassen, 2000; Hix et al., 2006; Schmitt and Thomassen, 2009). The dimensionality of the party space has not changed since the accession of the consolidating democracies of East Central Europe to the European Union (Schmitt and Thomassen, 2009). This left/right dimension of competition, which is common to the national and European elections, provides a straightforward means of political communication between elites and voters. Scholarly literature teaches us that on the left/right dimension voters, at least those from Western Europe, are well represented by candidates to the EP (Dalton, 1985; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1997, 1999). However, little is known about how well voters are represented in the European Parliament beyond the traditional left/right dimension.

The left/right dimension serves as a short-cut and does not necessarily encompass all issues which are relevant in a party system. It constitutes an “ideological super-issue” (Pierce, 1999; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990; Marks and Steenbergen, 2002), which may take a different meaning across various countries. Scholarly literature points to at least two dimensions which structure attitudes in contemporary European countries – one is related to socio-economic issues, another to socio-cultural issues and a further one to attitudes towards European integration. No research exists so far into how well voters are represented in the EP on these specific attitude dimensions. We expect to find differences in the quality of representation, since we know that significant variation exists in mass-elite congruence on the issue of immigration or the role of ethnic minorities in a society (Thomassen, 1999). Furthermore, we know very little about factors that determine how well voters are represented in the European Parliament. The scarce literature that exists on the determinants of the quality of representation is constrained to the national level, with very few studies (e.g. Dalton, 1985; Thomassen, 1999) devoted to the EP. This literature mostly takes party voters and party representatives as units of analysis and focuses on party characteristics as determinants of representation. Since cross-national research on the quality of representation is scarce, we know little about how characteristics of political systems affect the quality of representation. There may be significant differences in representation across regions of the European Union, which we currently know nothing about. The enlargements of 2004 and 2007 broadened the EU by post-communist countries that have a short history of representative democracy. How well voters from the consolidating democracies, which have only been EU members since very recently, are represented in the EP may differ from the more established democracies.

This paper has two major aims. Firstly, it takes a descriptive approach to analyse how attitudes of voters and representatives to the European Parliament are structured and whether the emerging attitude structure is comparable across elites and voters. This question is of major importance for the quality of representation as a lack of congruence between attitudinal structures of representatives and the electorates may weaken, or lead to the failure of, representation (Luttberg, 1974). As the responsible party literature suggests, representation through democratic elections can be effective if the political elite and mass publics share a common belief system (Thomassen, 1994, 1999). Secondly, the paper employs causal analysis to look into the quality of representation in the EP. It explores which individuals are best represented and which party- and system-level characteristics account for the best representation. An analysis of 27 member states of the European Union, which encompass both established and consolidating democracies, offers a significant variation which allows us to explore the degree to which party- and system-level characteristics affect how well voters are represented in the European Parliament.

2. Theoretical discussion

2.1. Representation in a multidimensional space

The first aim of this paper is to explore the dimensionality of attitudes at the level of voters and representatives to the European Parliament. Scholarly literature suggests that at least two dimensions structure attitudes of citizens in European countries. The first one is related to the traditional division of attitudes towards free market and the role of the state in the economy, which we call the socio-economic dimension. The second one encompasses attitudes regarding the individual and the society, namely personal freedoms, equality, participation in democratic structures and life-style concerns. This dimension distinguishes green, alternative and libertarian attitudes from traditional, authoritarian and nationalist attitudes (GAL/TAN) (Inglehart, 1984; Hooghe et al., 2002), which we call a libertarian-authoritarian dimension. Another dimension suggested in the literature is related to attitudes towards European integration. However, recent scholarly work claims that attitudes towards European integration and immigration have been assimilated by the libertarian-authoritarian dimension (Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008). The responsible party literature suggests that voters can be effectively represented only if political elites share the same belief system as the mass public (Thomassen, 1994, 1999). The crucial question that arises here is whether we will find the same attitude structure at the level of voters and candidates to the European Parliament.

In our quest to uncover the dimensionality of attitudes, we look at voters with different levels of political sophistication. Literature suggests that more sophisticated voters display clearer and more constrained attitudes, while less sophisticated voters hold opinions which are much less constrained or even ambivalent (e.g. Converse, 1964; Alvarez and Brehm, 2002). Moreover, we conduct separate analysis for the established democracies of Western Europe and consolidating democracies of East Central Europe. We are guided here by research which shows that attitude dimensions are correlated differently in the West than in the East. In Western Europe, left-wing socio-economic attitudes are associated with libertarian attitudes (GAL), while right-wing socio-economic attitudes go together with authoritarian attitudes (TAN). In East Central Europe, in turn, there is an affinity between left-wing socio-economic and TAN attitudes, while right-wing socio-economic attitudes are associated with GAL (e.g. Kitschelt, 1992; Kostelecky, 2002; Marks et al., 2006; Vachudova and Hooghe, 2009). Against this background, we expect that attitudes of voters and EP candidates are structured by at least two attitude dimensions. However, in the West and East we will find a different positioning of voters and EP representatives in the dimensional space. How well voters are represented by candidates to the European Parliament will depend on their individual characteristics, as well as on party- and country-level factors, which we explore below.

2.2. Quality of representation

2.2.1. Individual-level characteristics

The second aim of the paper is to look into the quality of representation in the European Parliament. European elections, just as any other national elections, will function as a representative process as long as voters have some awareness of the political stances and record of candidates and parties (Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). It is well established that voters differ with regard to their cognitive capacities and knowledge about politics (e.g. Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Particularly important for studying political outcomes are political sophistication and mobilization of voters. Research in political psychology has shown that political information reduces voters' uncertainty about their attitudes, which leads to stronger and more accessible opinions that voters are more likely to act upon (eg. Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Lavine et al., 1996; Basinger and Lavine, 2005). Recently, De Vries et al. (2011) have demonstrated that more sophisticated voters are more likely to act upon their attitudes towards European integration while casting a ballot in the EP

elections. Furthermore, more sophisticated voters are more able to recognize which ideological profiles parties have and which positions they take on a number of issues (Van der Brug and Van der Eijk, 1999). As more sophisticated voters are more aware of where parties stand and are more likely to vote upon their attitudes, we can expect that the party they choose will best reflect their preferences, which will have repercussions for the quality of representation. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (Sophistication): Highly sophisticated voters will be better represented in the EP elections than other voters.

Political mobilization may also play a role for the quality of representation in the European arena. It is well-established that EP elections are less important than national elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). As a result, turnout in these elections depends strongly on how mobilized voters are to cast a ballot (Franklin, 2004; Franklin and Wessels). However, the degree to which voters are mobilized may not only affect whether they turn out in the EP elections, but also, for those who vote, how well represented they are. In the context of the EP election campaign, parties attempt to mobilize supporters in order to acquire votes. Parties reach out to voters by conveying electoral messages and informing them where they stand on issues important for the election. The more receptive voters are to these messages, the more they will be able to orient themselves on the party system in their country and thus to assess which party best suits their preferences. Thus, the degree to which voters have become mobilized in the course of the EP campaign may affect how well they are represented by the party they choose at the ballot box. We hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 2 (Mobilization): Highly mobilized voters will be better represented in the EP elections than other voters.

Furthermore, it is of interests to us whether there are differences in how well various groups of voters, stratified by socio-structural indicators, are represented in the EP elections. We look here at gender, social class, religion, education, and area of residence. We also examine cross-generational differences in the quality of representation by looking at seven consecutive generations of voters.

2.2.2. Party-level characteristics

Scholarly literature outlines that the quality of representation depends to a large extent on the clarity of party positions (Dalton, 1985; Holmberg, 1999; Pierce, 1999; Mattila and Raunio, 2006). Political parties with a clear ideological profile – either programmatic mass parties (e.g. Social Democratic Party in Germany) or parties that are further away from the ideological center - are more likely to project clear party cues and are more responsive to voters. This literature seems to assume that ideological clarity is automatically given for mass parties and non-centrist parties. However, from the perspective of voters this may be far from true. Within a party system, the ideological position of a centrist party may be much clearer for voters than that of a non-centrist party. This can be a function of many factors e.g. how many elections these parties have contested. Furthermore, we can expect a significant variation across party systems with regard to how clear the ideological position of parties is for voters. It is in general less clear for voters in consolidating democracies of East Central Europe what the ideological profiles of parties are as the party systems are young and fluid (Van der Brug et al., 2008, Tavits, 2008). Given the variation within and across party systems, we rephrase the clarity assumption and hypothesize that the congruence between attitudes of voters and EP candidates of a party will be better the clearer it is for voters in a party system where this party stands in ideological terms. If it is clear for voters what is the ideological profile of the party, voters are more able to assess whether this party can best represent their attitudes. We suggest the following:

Hypothesis 3 (Ideological clarity): The clearer it is for voters in a party system where a party stands in ideological terms, the better attitude congruence we will observe between EP candidates and voters of this party.

As we mention above, literature on party clarity suggests that parties with a distinctive ideological profile represent voters better than other parties. This may be particularly true in the context of EP elections. In such second order elections, smaller, new and more radical parties gain more votes than in national elections, while big established parties tend to lose votes (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Reif, 1984; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Hix and Marsh, 2007). This phenomenon arises as in EP elections voters have a higher incentive to cast a sincere vote because no government formation process takes place in the European arena. As strategic considerations are of a lesser importance in the EP elections, voters tend to vote more “with their heart”. They choose more often for smaller, newer or more extreme parties, among them niche parties, which better represent their attitudes (Schuessler, 2000; Hobolt and Spoon). Meguid (2005, 2008) defines niche parties as those with clear stances on a narrow set of policies, such as immigration or environment, which are distinct from the traditional dimension of competition. This category includes green, radical right and ethno-territorial parties. Ezrow (2010) extends this definition by including parties that take non-centrist stance on the traditional left/right dimension and brings extreme left parties into the picture. As we are interested here in parties with a clear ideological profile, either related to the traditional or new dimensions of competition, we opt here for the wider definition. Literature on second order elections lets us expect that niche parties will better represent voter attitudes than mainstream parties.¹ However, some parties may be representing voter attitudes better on some issues than on others. We contend that green and radical right parties will be better in representing voters on socio-cultural issues i.e. these concerning society, life-style and immigration. In turn, radical left parties will represent voters better on traditional socio-economic issues. We hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 4 (Green and Radical Right Parties): Congruence between voters and EP representatives on socio-cultural issues will be better for green and radical right parties than for other parties.

Hypothesis 5 (Radical Left Parties): Congruence between voters and EP representatives on socio-economic issues will be better for radical left parties than for other parties.

Another party-level factor which may affect the quality of representation is the level of experience that candidates have in fulfilling representative functions. Candidates will be able to represent their voters well if they have a good knowledge of their voters’ opinions. We know so far that experience in office is associated with a good knowledge of voter opinions (Converse and Pierce, 1986; Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996). In spite of considerable differences among EP candidates in terms of background and experience (Scarrow, 1997; Wessels, 1999), recent literature shows that the more experienced EP candidates attach greater importance to fulfilling parliamentary activities (Farrell and Scully, 2007). We also know that parties which choose experienced candidates to stand in EP elections are awarded by voters (Hobolt and Høyland, 2011). This shows that candidate experience matters for voters, but we do not know whether it matters for the quality of representation. As the literature suggests that more experienced candidates know more about their voters and perceive parliamentary activities as more important, we expect that parties with more experienced candidates will represent their voters better.

Hypothesis 6 (Experience of Party Candidates): The more experienced EP candidates of a party are in fulfilling representational functions, the more congruent will be their attitudes with attitudes of their voters.

2.2.3. System-level characteristics

Scholarly research has shown that the type of electoral system affects the quality of representation (e.g. Huber and Powell, 1994; Marsh and Wessels, 1997; Wessels, 1999; Holmberg, 1999; Powell, 2000; Farrell, 2001). In

¹ However, second order literature recognizes that citizens may vote for niche parties in EP elections as they want to send a signal to the governing parties that they are dissatisfied with government performance (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Oppenhuis et al., 1996). For those voters the congruence with attitudes of party representatives will be much smaller than for sincere niche party voters. As these considerations regarding protest vote may skew our results regarding the general hypothesis on niche parties, we account in this analysis for voter dissatisfaction with government’s performance. We expect that our hypotheses regarding niche parties will hold.

2002, the EU passed legislation establishing Uniform Electoral Procedures for election to the European Parliament. However, the uniformity of electoral rules remains only in the name as the legislation puts up a number of general guidelines allowing for substantial variance among the Member States. Currently, the electoral systems used for EP elections vary with regard to the type of the ballot structure (open, ordered or closed) and the average district magnitude (Farrell and Scully, 2005; 2007; 2010; Hix and Hagemann, 2009). So far, research has shown that electoral system determines the style of the EP elections campaign and the time candidates devote to campaign activities (Bowler and Farrell, 2011). There are also significant differences across types of electoral systems with regard to how EP candidates view the fulfillment of their duties both in the EP and back in their constituencies (Farrell and Scully, 2007, 2010). However, what we know little about is whether electoral rules applied to the EP elections affect the quality of representation. Based on the scholarly literature, we can outline two different scenarios.

In the first scenario we expect that congruence between attitudes of voters and EP candidates will be better in an open ballot system, and in particular in an open system with a high district magnitude. The underlying logic is that, in an open system, candidates campaign more on a personal rather than party reputation. Such personal vote-seeking increases with the rising district magnitude (Carey and Shugart, 1995). In electoral systems with a high district magnitude, candidates have a higher incentive to cultivate personal vote as they need to differentiate themselves from other candidates (of their own party as well as competing parties). Through such personal vote-seeking candidates send cues to voters with regard to where they stand in terms of attitudes towards issues and policy. As a result, voters will be more capable of choosing a candidate that best represents their own attitudes. Indeed, research shows that in open ballot systems the number of citizens contacted by candidates is higher than in other types of systems. In such a system citizens also feel more informed about EP elections (Hix and Hagemann, 2009). Furthermore, in an open system voters directly choose the candidates that they think represent them best. Here, the number of individual votes each candidate receives has a direct influence on which candidates are elected for each party. This ensures that the chosen representatives directly reflect the preferences of the electorate. In contrast, in closed electoral systems candidates choose between party lists with no influence who will be their EP representative. In ordered electoral systems such influence is limited. As the position on a party list reflects intra-party politics, candidates on the list that get elected to the EP may not necessarily represent the attitudes of their voters. Therefore, we hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 7a (Electoral system): In an open ballot system, the congruence between issue attitudes of voters and EP candidates will be better than in ordered and closed ballot systems.

Hypothesis 7b (District Magnitude): The higher the district magnitude in an open ballot system, the better the voter-candidate attitude congruence will be.

In the second scenario we expect that attitude congruence between voters and EP candidates will be worse in an open ballot system. This scenario sees the party as the major actor in a political system. Political parties develop distinctive policy programmes and compete by mobilizing supporters on the appeal of these programmes. Only internally cohesive parties can send a clear message to the electorate before elections and implement their policy proposals after elections. Indeed, research shows that both national parties as well as European party groups are internally cohesive (Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999). As the party as a whole is the major point of reference for both voters and candidates, we can expect that mass-elite congruence will be stronger if candidates campaign on the platform of their political party. Personal vote seeking in an open ballot system involves taking positions or actions that conflict with the party platform. This may dilute the programmatic message of the party and introduce personal aspects related to the representative which may constitute a departure from the cohesive party line. As the district magnitude increases the incentive for personal vote-seeking, the party message may be even more diluted in larger districts. In turn, in a closed or ordered ballot system, representatives have the least incentive to pursue personal vote-seeking and care more about party reputation and party programme, because their electoral prospects depend on the votes cast for

their party (Carey and Shugart, 1995). We could, thus, expect that in ordered and closed ballot systems parties are able to send a clear, undiluted, signal to voters regarding their stances on a range of issues. Here, the congruence between attitudes of candidates and voters will be better than in an open ballot system. This leads us to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 8a (Electoral system): In an open ballot system, the congruence between issue attitudes of voters and EP candidates will be worse than in ordered and closed ballot systems.

Hypothesis 8b (District Magnitude): The higher the district magnitude in an open ballot system, the worse the voter-candidate attitude congruence will be.

Beside the type of electoral system, two system-level characteristics – party-system fragmentation and ideological range - have been presumed to affect the quality of representation. Scholars have shown that a greater diversification in a party system leads to a greater mass-elite congruence on a number of issues (Dalton, 1985; Wessels, 1999; Mattila and Raunio, 2006). In a higher number of parties in a party system voters are more likely to find a party which offers the best match on issues that they consider important. Similarly, a stronger polarization in a party system leads to a more differentiated offer among which voters can choose. We include these system-level characteristics in order to properly estimate the effect of other factors of interest to us. In addition, we control for the number of years that have passed in a country since the first legislative elections took place after WWII as we expect to find differences in representation among countries with a longer democratic tradition and those which democratized in the last 25 years.

3. Operationalization

We use the 2009 European Election Study (EES 2009; Van Egmond et al. 2009) and the European Election Candidate Survey (EES 2009; Giebler et al. 2010). The voter study (EES) was fielded immediately following the EP elections of June 2009, with independently drawn samples of over 1000 respondents in each of EU's 27 member states. The candidate survey (EECS) was carried out shortly before and after the EP elections on more than 6500 candidates and 260 parties running in the elections.

The first aim of our paper is to explore the dimensionality of attitudes at the level of voters and EP candidates. Here, we employ factor analysis and cross-validate our results with non-parametric Mokken scaling (Mokken, 1971; Van Schuur, 2003). We use here a number of attitude questions which are common to both surveys. Both voters and EP candidates were asked to express whether they agree or disagree (on the scale from 1 to 5) with the following statements: "Private enterprise is the best way to solve your country's economic problems" (we call this item *Enterprise*), "Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership" (*Ownership*), "Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy" (*Intervention*), "Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people" (*Redistribution*), "Same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law" (*Same-sex marriage*), "Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion" (*Abortion*), "People who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days" (*Law & Order*), "Schools must teach children to obey authority" (*Authority*), "EU treaty changes should be decided by referendum" (*Referendum*), "A woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family" (*Family*), "Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of (country of respondent)" (*Adaptation of Immigrants*) and "Immigration to (country of respondent) should be decreased significantly" (*Decrease of Immigration*). Attitudes towards EU integration are measured with the question whether EU unification should be pushed further or whether it has already gone too far (*EU Integration*). We explored the dimensionality of attitudes for voters stratified according to the level of political sophistication. We measure political sophistication with the degree of political interest and political knowledge that voters display. Political interest is operationalized with a question in which respondents report their level of interest in politics, ranging from 1 ('very interested') to 4 ('not at all interested'). Political knowledge is measured with respondents' answers to 8 factual questions about national and EU politics. In order to assess whether the questions on political interest and knowledge relate to a single latent dimension, responses to these items have been analysed for each country separately by

means of Mokken scaling.² We created an index consisting of 3 levels of political sophistication by adding the responses of voters to the political interest and political knowledge questions.³ In order to depict the positioning of voters and EP candidates on attitude dimensions, we compute for voters and EP candidates of each party their mean position on items which constitute a dimension.⁴ To make these dimensions comparable, we use issue items which are common to dimensions emerging at the level of voters and candidates. The scales for attitude dimensions range from 1 to 5. In exploring the dimensionality of attitudes, we look separately at Western European and East Central European countries.⁵

The second aim of our paper is to analyze the quality of representation in the European Parliament. We construct our outcome variable as the absolute value of the difference between a stance of an individual voter on an issue and the positioning of the party that the voter voted for in the EP elections on this issue. In order to establish where the party stands on an issue, we take the mean of stances of party candidates to the EP on this issue. We look here at representation on each of the attitude dimensions separately and on all issues combined. For representation on a dimension, we average across the differences (in absolute terms) between a voter and EP candidates of the party she voted for on issues forming this dimension. Although we might find attitude dimensions only for voters with the highest level of sophistication, we include all voters in the analysis. For respondents whose attitudes do not form a dimension means of these differences will be more centrist. For representation on all issues, we take the mean of differences between a voter and party representatives to the EP on all issues. Finally, we take the negative value of the means as we want lower scores to reflect worse and higher scores to reflect better representation.

Our individual-level explanatory variables are *Political sophistication* and *Mobilization*. *Political sophistication* is a composite variable of political interest and political knowledge questions. By means of Mokken scaling we created an index, as explained above, which stratifies voters into 3 levels of sophistication. To construct the *Mobilization* variable we perform Mokken scaling on questions regarding the frequency of performing the following tasks during four weeks before the EP election: watching a program about the election on television, reading about the election in a newspaper, talking to friends or family about the election, attending a public meeting or rally about the election, and looking into a website concerned with the election. We create an index out of three questions which scale in Western and East Central European countries.⁶ Further explanatory variables are *Female* - a dummy for female respondents. *Social class* uses the subjective measure of self-assessed belonging to a particular class location.⁷ *Area of residence* reflects whether respondents live in a rural area or village, small or middle-sized town, suburbs of large town or city, or large town or city. *Religiosity* is an index variable created from questions how often respondents attend religious services and how religious respondents would say they are, with high values indicating high values of religiosity. *Education* is measured on a 3-point scale comparable across countries, where 1 reflects the lowest and 3 the highest level of education. Moreover, we include 7 generational cohorts where each cohort represents respondents born in 10 consecutive years. The oldest cohort gathers voters born before 1939, while the youngest stands for voters

² In all countries, we were able to construct a satisfactory political sophistication scale, including at least two items. Finland is the only country where two questions form a common latent scale. In most of the countries, three, four or five questions form a common scale. In Italy and Slovenia a scale is formed out of 6 items, while in Cyprus, Malta and Portugal it is formed out of 7 items.

³ The correct answers to political knowledge questions have been coded with 1, 0 otherwise. The political interest question has been collapsed into a binary one, where 1 stands for 'very' and 'somewhat' interested in politics and 0 otherwise. We grouped respondents as highly sophisticated if they scored 1 on at least 75% of items. The least sophisticated voters are those who scored 1 on fewer than 25% of items.

⁴ In order to obtain the party position from the mean of candidate positions we have included only these parties for which we have information on at least two candidates.

⁵ We count Cyprus and Malta to established democracies as their party systems are more consolidated and their electorates have been socialized to electoral rules since these countries gathered independence in the 1960s.

⁶ These questions encompass the frequency of watching a program on elections, reading about elections in a newspaper and attending a public meeting about the election.

⁷ This categorical variable is coded as: 0 for working class, 1 for lower middle class, 2 for middle class, 3 for upper middle class and 4 for upper class.

born in and after 1989. Moreover, we include a dummy for voters that disapprove of the government's record to date (*Disapproval of government performance*), which serves as a control variable.

At the system level, we operationalize *Ideological clarity* as a measure of perceptual agreement among voters regarding where political parties in their party system stand in left/right terms. To measure the perceptual agreement among voters, we use a question where respondents were asked to place each political party in their party system on the left/right scale ranging from 0 to 10 (see Van der Eijk, 2001). The value of this coefficient runs from -1 (maximum disagreement) to +1 (maximum agreement). *Green parties*, *Radical right* and *Radical left parties* are a dummy for parties from each party family respectively, according to the classification of the 2006 Chapel Hill Expert Survey. *Experience of party candidates* is measured with an index of political experience included in the candidate survey. This index is created with questions whether the candidate used to be a member of local, regional or national representative body, member of the EP or a member of local, regional or national government. For a measure of candidate experience per party we create a mean of experience index of all candidates from this party. At country level, we create a dummy for an open and ordered ballot system respectively (*Open ballot system*, *Ordered ballot system*). *District Magnitude* is a continuous variable with the number of districts used for EP elections. We adapted the classification of district magnitude and ballot systems from Farrell and Scully (2007). *Party system fragmentation* is measured with the effective number of parties, which takes account of the voting support received by parties rather than being a simple count of parties in a party system (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979). We adopted the measure of the effective number of parties per country from Gallagher and Mitchell (2006). *Ideological range* is operationalized as the absolute distance between left-most and right-most party on the left/right continuum in a political system. In order to establish where a party stands in left/right terms, we used the interpolated median of voters' perception of party positioning on an ideological scale ranging from 0 to 10.⁸ Finally, *Democratic experience* stands for the number of years since the first legislative elections in a country.

We use multilevel analysis as our model has a hierarchical structure: individuals are nested in parties according to their choice in the EP elections, and parties are nested in political systems. Our three-level fixed effects model takes the following form:

$$Y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_a X_{ijk} + \beta_b Y_{jk} + \beta_c Z_k + R_{ijk}$$

Our outcome variable Y_{ijk} depends on explanatory variables at the individual level ($\beta_a X_{ijk}$), party level ($\beta_b Y_{jk}$) and at the level of political systems ($\beta_c Z_k$). Multilevel model is appropriate for our analysis as it corrects for the dependence of observations (Snijders and Bosker, 1999; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002) as our analysis includes 160 parties and 28 political systems.⁹ We include only these parties for which we have observations at the level of both EP candidates and voters (for the list of parties see Appendix I). As the candidate survey lacks observations for a substantive number of parties, the exclusion of voters of such parties from our analysis leads to a reduction in the number of observations at the individual level. Our analysis includes over 12 000 respondents and 160 parties for which these respondents voted in the EP elections. Still, this provides us with a significant variation for a multilevel analysis.¹⁰ The problem of missing data in our explanatory variables has been dealt with by multiple imputation.¹¹

⁸ In addition, we used party placements on the left/right scale from the 2006 Chapel Hill Expert Survey to obtain the Ideological range variable. This operationalization did not change the substantive results of our analysis. We decided to report the results using the interpolated medians obtained from the EES 2009 as the 2006 Expert Survey does not include a number of parties, which contested the 2009 EP elections.

⁹ Belgium is effectively a two-system country as it is not possible for voters in the Flemish region to cast a ballot for Wallonian parties and vice versa. For this reason, Flanders and Wallonia are treated as two separate systems.

¹⁰ We conduct our analysis in Stata 11 using the xtmixed command.

¹¹ We used Amelia II which imputes missing values based on the relevant information in the rest of observations (King et al. 2001).

4. Results

4.1 How are attitudes of voters and politicians structured?

Our first research question pertains to how attitudes of voters and EP candidates are structured in Western and East Central Europe. We expected that attitudes of voters and candidates will be structured by at least two dimensions. In fact, we find a clear two-dimensional structure of attitudes only at the level of candidates and highly sophisticated voters, which include only 20% of voters in our dataset. The dimensions that emerge here resemble those labelled in the literature as libertarian-authoritarian and socio-economic. Attitudes towards European integration have been assimilated by the libertarian-authoritarian dimension only in Western Europe, while it is not the case in East Central Europe. As our intention is to show how well voters are represented in the dimensional space, we graph the positioning of parties and voters of these parties in both regions. However, the graphs only depict the positioning of highly sophisticated voters as only their attitudes are structured by two dimensions. In the graphs we indicate to which party family parties belong.¹² The horizontal axis depicts the socio-economic attitudes, where 1 stands for economically left-wing attitudes (support of state ownership of public services and industries, state control of the economy and redistribution of income towards ordinary people) and 5 for economically right-wing attitudes. The vertical axis stands for the libertarian-authoritarian dimension, where 1 indicates libertarian attitudes (e.g. acceptance of same-sex marriages, freedom of women to decide on abortion and a lax stance on immigration) and 5 stands for authoritarian attitudes indicating the opposite.

The first major finding that we can draw from our analysis is that only 20% of voters have a chance to have their attitudes represented by political parties. It is only for highly sophisticated voters in established and consolidating democracies that attitudes are structured in the same way as it is the case for EP candidates. In turn, for voters with a medium and low level of sophistication attitudes are structured by one dimension, as it is the case in Western Europe, or attitudes are very weakly correlated, as we observe in East Central Europe.¹³ This shows that for the overwhelming majority of voters the party they choose at the ballot box will not represent the entirety of their attitudes, but rather attitudes towards a few issues.

Secondly, we notice that parties are more polarized on both dimensions than voters are. In Western Europe, the standard deviation of party positions on each dimension (at the aggregate level) is around .9, while for party voters it amounts to .5. In East Central Europe, in turn, voters vary little with regard to their attitudes towards socio-economic issues. For party voters, the standard deviation for the socio-economic dimension is .35, while for the libertarian-authoritarian dimension is .54. Parties are here much more polarized, with the standard deviation on each dimension of .8. As expected, we find a difference between established and consolidating democracies in the way both dimensions are correlated. In Western Europe, we find a positive correlation between the socio-economic and libertarian-authoritarian dimension for EP candidates (.5 at the aggregate level). For voters this correlation is weaker (.3).¹⁴ In turn, in East Central Europe, both dimensions are very weakly correlated. At the level of parties the correlation is -.1, which suggests, as we have expected, that

¹² In order to compare the position of parties and voters, we used only these items for scale creation which structure attitudes of both EP candidates and voters. In Western Europe, items forming the socio-economic dimension are *Enterprise, Ownership and Redistribution*. For the libertarian-authoritarian dimension these items are: *Adaptation of Immigrants, Same-Sex Marriage, Law & Order, Authority, Women, Decrease of Immigration and EU integration*. In East Central Europe, *Enterprise, Ownership and Redistribution* structure the socio-economic attitudes of both voters and candidates, while the libertarian-authoritarian dimension encompasses *Same-Sex Marriage, Women and Decrease of Immigration*.

¹³ In Western Europe, the following items scale for voters with medium level of sophistication: *Women, Marriage, Authority, Adaptation of Immigrants, Law & Order, and Decrease of Immigration*. For the least sophisticated voters, *Authority, Order, Adaptation of Immigrants and Decrease of Immigration* form a dimension. In East Central Europe, *Law & Order* and *Authority* are correlated for voters with a medium level of sophistication, while for least sophisticated voters we find that *Marriage and Ownership* form a scale and *Adaptation of Immigrants and Decrease of Immigration* form another scale.

¹⁴ After removing the outliers, the correlation settles at .2.

economically left-wing attitudes go together with authoritarian attitudes, and vice versa. At the level of voters, both dimensions are practically orthogonal (correlation of $-.03$).¹⁵

Thirdly, we find significant differences regarding the location of parties and voters in the two-dimensional space. Graph 1 shows that most parties in Western Europe are located in the bottom-left quadrant, which represents left-wing economic and libertarian attitudes (41.51% of parties). At the lowest part of the scales in this quadrant we find radical left parties, while social democratic and green parties occupy less extreme positions in this corner. We find fewer parties in the bottom-right corner, which stands for economically right-wing and libertarian attitudes (25.47%). Most of the parties in this quadrant belong to liberal and Christian Democratic families. Slightly fewer parties, among these Christian democratic, conservative and radical right, are located in the upper-right quadrant with economically right-wing and authoritarian attitudes (23.58%). When it comes to voters in Western Europe, most of them have economically right-wing and authoritarian attitudes – 38% of all voters and 37% of the highly sophisticated voters are located in the upper right quadrant. What is striking is that the second biggest group of voters is located in the upper-left quadrant, which combines economically left-wing and authoritarian attitudes (30.71% of all and 24.68% of the most sophisticated voters). Here, we find only 9.43% of parties in Western Europe. Moreover, in the bottom-left quadrant, where most of the parties are located, we find the smallest number of voters (14% of all and 17.11% of the most sophisticated voters). These findings show that in Western Europe the overwhelming majority of voters have authoritarian attitudes (around 78%), while the majority of parties display libertarian stances on socio-cultural issues (around 66%). A particularly big gap exists for the numerous voters with economically left-wing and authoritarian attitudes, as there are few parties present on the supply side to represent their attitudes.

We observe similar disparities in the positioning of parties and voters in East Central Europe. Here, the majority of parties combine economically right-wing and libertarian attitudes (bottom-right quadrant with 41.27% of parties). Fewer parties can be found in the upper-right (25.4%) and the bottom-left quadrant (22.22%). The upper-left corner, with economically left-wing and authoritarian attitudes, is the least populated with only around 11% of parties. Most voters in consolidating democracies, however, combine economically right-wing and authoritarian attitudes (upper-right corner with 59.05% of all and 52.91% of highly sophisticated voters). The second most populated quadrant is the one with economically right-wing and libertarian attitudes (bottom-right with 15.83% of all and 19.37% of most sophisticated voters). This shows that in consolidating democracies the majority of voters and parties display economically right-wing attitudes, but there are significant differences regarding socio-cultural issues – most voters are authoritarian, while most representatives are libertarian. Just as in Western Europe, we see here that the upper-left quadrant with economically left-wing and authoritarian attitudes has the fewest number of parties, but a substantial number of voters (17% of all and 17.09% of highly sophisticated voters). Although this representation gap is substantive, it is not as pronounced as in Western Europe. Unlike in the West, however, it is very difficult to indicate which party families predominate in each quadrant as they are much less cohesive in terms of their positioning on both dimensions than their Western European counterparts.

GRAPH 1 AND 2

4.2 Which factors account for the quality of democratic representation?

In the second part of our study we examined which voters are better represented and which party- and country-level factors account for the quality of representation in the EP elections. The results are presented in Table 1, where the outcome variable in Model I is voter-EP candidate congruence on socio-cultural issues, in Model II – on socio-economic issues and in Model III on all issues combined. As we have taken the negative

¹⁵ We find substantive differences across countries in how socio-economic and libertarian-authoritarian dimensions correlate at the aggregate level for candidates and voters. We present these aggregate-level correlations in Appendix II.

value of the distance between a voter and EP representatives of the party she voted for in the EP elections on issues of interest, the positive coefficient of an explanatory variable means that this factor contributes to narrowing the distance on issues between voters and representatives, and thus to better representation.

From Table 1 we can infer that the more politically sophisticated and mobilized voters are, the better they are represented by parties in the EP. The coefficient of both individual-level factors is positive and statistically significant in all models, except for the effect of mobilization on voter-elite congruence on socio-cultural issues. Thus, we can confirm our hypotheses H1 and H2. Furthermore, we see that voters with a higher level of education are better represented. This pattern also emerges for voters belonging to the middle class – respondents from lower middle class, middle class and upper middle class are better represented by their party of choice in the EP elections than working class voters. In turn, upper class voters are just as well represented as the working class. We can also infer from Table 1 that more religious voters are less well represented on both socio-cultural and socio-economic issues, while women are better represented than men on socio-cultural issues. Moreover, we can see that younger generations of voters are better represented on socio-cultural issues when compared to the oldest cohort of voters born before 1939. However, we do not see this pattern for socio-economic issues. Once we treat all issues together, the generational pattern emerges again. Finally, we do not observe differences between voters stratified according to their area of residence in how well they are represented. All these individual characteristics of voters explain at the individual level 12 per cent of variance in Model I, 7.5 per cent of variance in Model II and 13 per cent of variance in Model III.

With regard to party characteristics, we obtain rather mixed results. We hypothesized that for parties with an ideologically clear stance we will observe better congruence between voters and EP representatives. Indeed, we obtain positive coefficients of ideological clarity for socio-economic, socio-cultural and all issues combined, although only for socio-economic issues the coefficient is statistically significant. These findings provide some evidence, although weak, for our hypothesis H3. Furthermore, we expected that radical right and green parties will represent voters better on socio-cultural issues, while for radical left parties we expected better voter-elite congruence on socio-economic issues. Our results unambiguously show that radical right parties represent their voters better than other parties on socio-cultural issues. Interestingly, they represent voters less well on socio-economic issues (although here the coefficient is not significant). If we take all issues into account, we also see that radical right parties represent their voters better than all other party families. For green parties we observe a higher congruence on socio-cultural, socio-economic and all issues combined, but the effects are not significant. These results hold when we control for voters' assessment of government performance. Our findings lead us to confirm our hypothesis H4 only partly, as we see better representation on socio-cultural issues only for radical right parties. In turn, for radical left parties we have to reject our hypothesis H5 as these parties represent their voters less well on socio-economic issues. Our last party-level hypothesis concerns experience of party candidates. The results are ambiguous here – it seems that candidate experience matters for the quality of representation on socio-economic issues, as the coefficient is here positive and significant. However, candidate experience does not affect the quality of representation on socio-cultural issues (coefficient takes a non-significant value with an unexpectedly negative direction). When we consider all issues, greater experience of party candidates is related to better representation, although the coefficient turns out not to be significant. These findings provide some, although weak, support for our hypothesis H6. Our party-level explanatory variables account for 16 per cent of variance in Model I, 6 per cent of variance in Model II and 13 per cent of variance in Model III.

We now turn to system-level factors. All models in Table 1 point to a better congruence between issue attitudes of voters and EP candidates in open and ordered ballot systems than in closed systems. In each model the coefficient for open ballot systems is positive, but it does not reach the levels of conventional statistical significance. In turn, we see a significant positive effect for the ordered ballot system regarding socio-cultural issues and all issues combined. Furthermore, we see that the quality of representation is better with the higher district magnitude (significant effect for socio-cultural and all issues combined). The interaction term of open ballot system and district magnitude is positive, but not statistically significant. This offers some evidence for

our expectation that the higher the district magnitude is in an open ballot system, the better voter attitudes are represented. What our findings point to is that voter attitudes are better represented in open and ordered ballot systems than in closed ballot systems, which is magnified by the size of the district. However, the lack of statistical significance does not allow us to draw strong conclusions.¹⁶ With regard to other country-level factors, the results show that the stronger ideological polarization of parties leads to better representation, but the effects of ideological range are not significant in all models. Surprisingly, a higher number of parties results in lower attitude congruence. Again, the effects are not significant. However, we observe a clear pattern for democratic experience – in countries with longer democratic experience the quality of representation is better than in newly democratized countries. Our party-system level variables account for 3 per cent of variance in Model I, 5 per cent of variance in Model II and 6 per cent of variance in Model III.

TABLE 1

5. Conclusion

Which picture of the quality of representation in the European Parliament emerges from this analysis? Our results show that a rather small percentage of the electorate stands a chance to have the entirety of their attitudes towards socio-economic and socio-cultural issues represented in the European Parliament. Only voters with the highest level of sophistication, which constitute around 20 per cent of the population, display a dimensionality of attitudes which corresponds to the one found at the level of candidates. The remaining 80 per cent of the electorate may be represented at most on a few issues, as their issue attitudes are constrained only by one dimension (as in Western Europe) or are very weakly correlated (as in East Central Europe). If the presence of a shared belief system between mass publics and EP representatives is a precondition for effective representation, as scholarly literature has assumed, we show that this precondition is not fulfilled for the majority of the population. In terms of attitude representation, our results suggest a considerable mismatch between attitudes of EP representatives and the European electorates. There is a significant representation gap for voters with economically-left with and authoritarian attitudes (see also, Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). In Western Europe over 30 per cent of voters hold these attitudes, while there are very few parties representing this attitude combination. The same pattern emerges in East Central European countries, although it is not as pronounced as in the West. Authoritarian attitudes, which predominate among the European electorates from both regions, are not adequately represented in the European Parliament as the majority of parties take libertarian stances. The analytical part of our study shows that more sophisticated and mobilized voters are better represented. Parties with a clear ideological profile and these with experienced candidates represent their voters better than other parties, while radical right parties fulfil the representation function much better when it comes to socio-cultural issues. Finally, in countries which have adopted open and ordered ballot systems for EP elections the quality of representation on issue attitudes seems to be better.

These findings contribute to our understanding of representation in the European Parliament. We draw attention to the combination of individual-, party-, and system-level factors which account for the quality of representation. European citizens are not equally represented in the European Parliament, but attitudes of younger, more educated, more sophisticated middle-class voters are better represented by their political parties than other voters. Whether it is a particularity of the European Parliament or a pattern that can be observed also in national parliaments deserves further study. Our findings have implications for what we know about the policy-making process in the legislative body. As the overwhelming majority of voters will not see all their issue stances represented and certain groups of voters are better represented than others, this may have repercussions for the direction of legislative proposals undertaken in the European Parliament. As a follow-up

¹⁶ As an additional test, we included in our analysis an index of intra-party efficiency, which assumes a non-linear relationship between district magnitude and representatives' personal vote-seeking activities based on the degree of openness of the ballot system (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Shugart, 2001). The index, adopted from Farrell and Scully (2009: 130) assumes that representatives' personal reputation is worth more as district magnitude rises in open systems and less when magnitude rises in closed systems. Also here, we obtain a non-significant effect in all models.

to our findings regarding the attitude congruence between voters and their representatives the question emerges whether representation in this legislative body can be considered effective. In other words, do EP representatives influence legislative outcomes in a way that is preferred by their voters? Further research should seek to establish whether EP representatives act upon their attitudes in the legislative process in order to guarantee that attitudes of their constituents are reflected in policy outcomes adopted by the European Parliament. The attitude proximity which we focused on in this paper is a condition for such an effective representation.

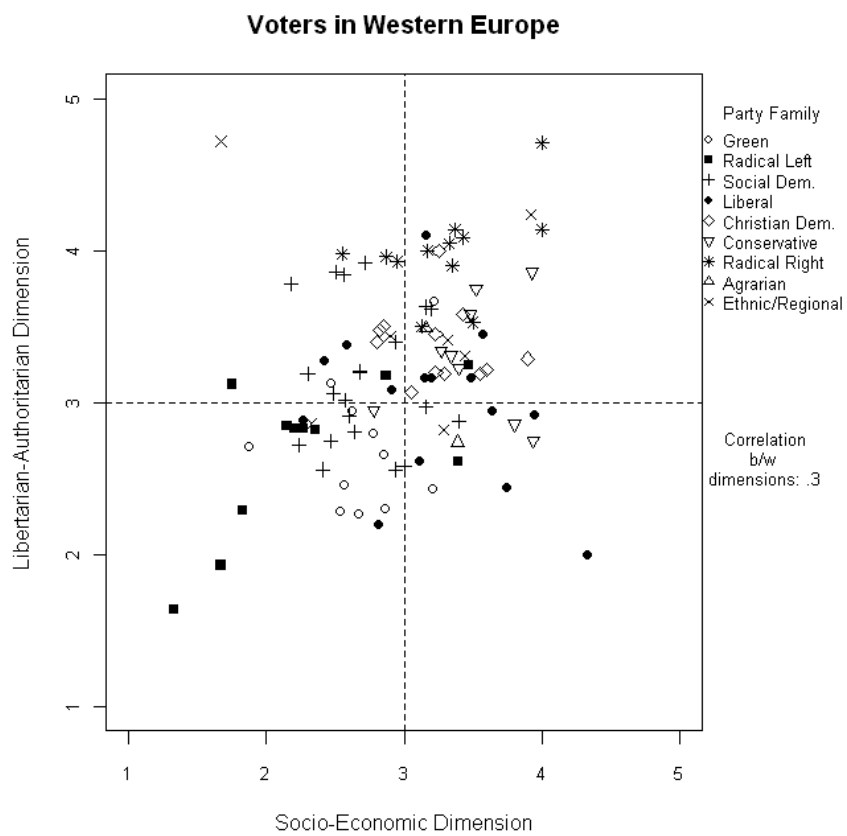
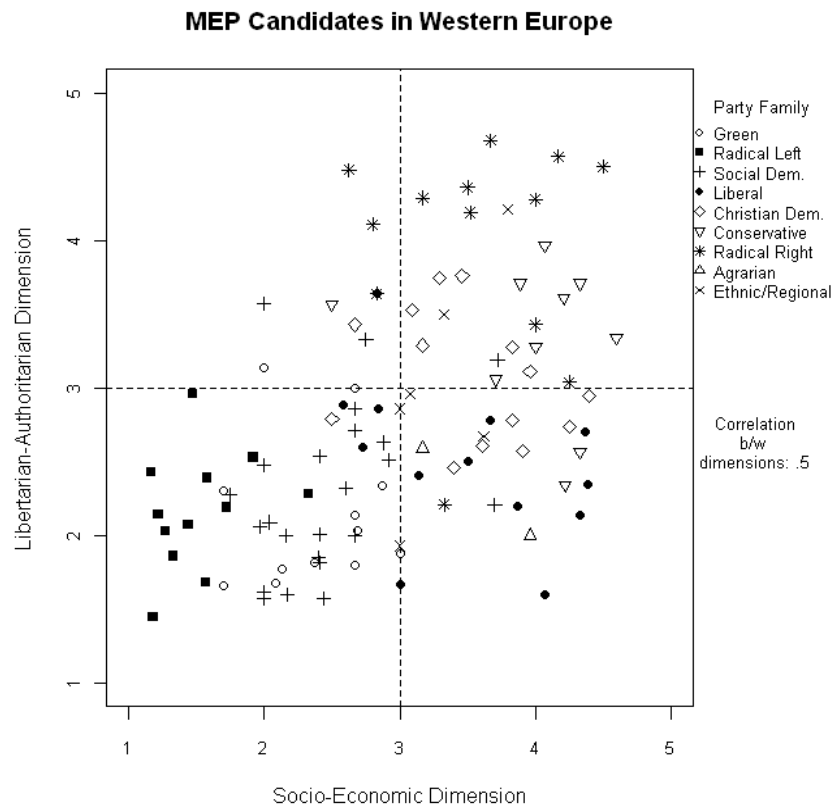
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Graph 1



Graph 2

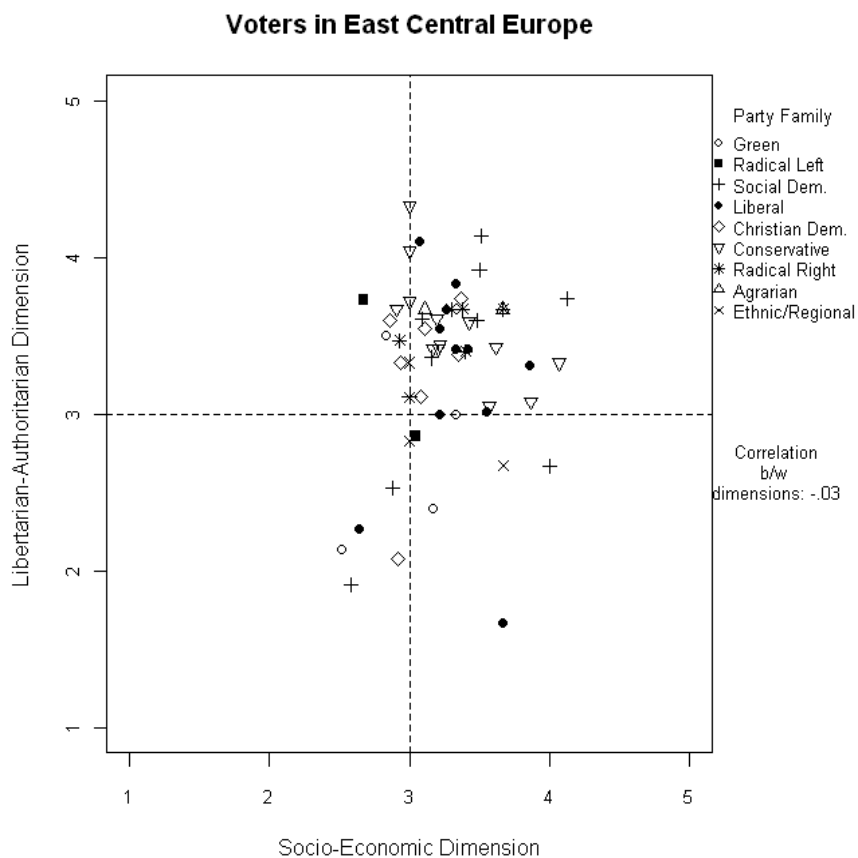
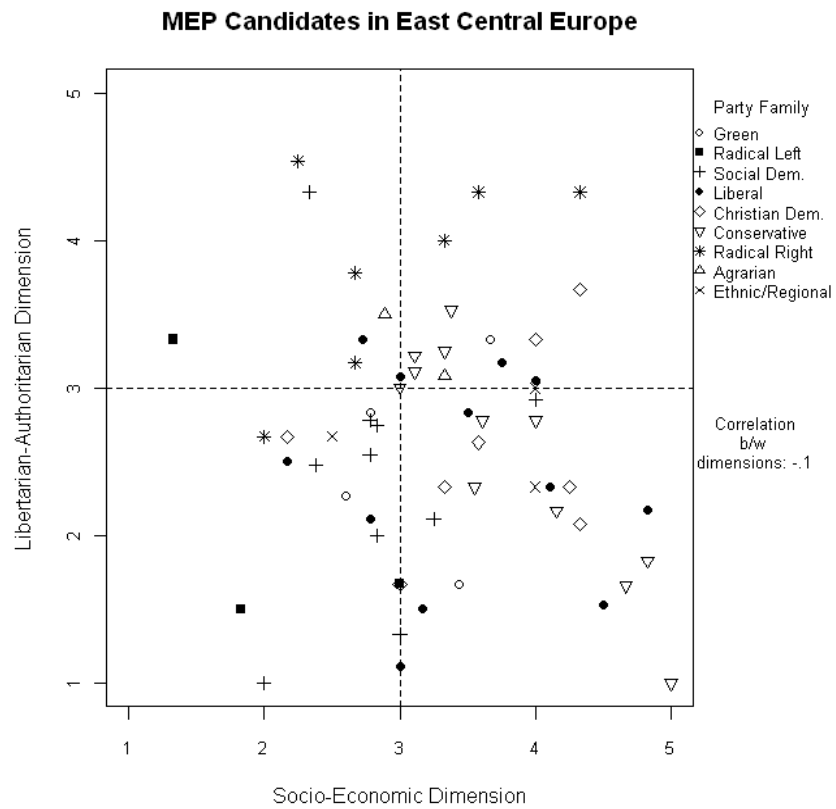


Table 1 Multilevel Analysis of the Quality of Representation in the EP Elections

	Model I (Socio-cultural issues)	Model II (Socio-economic issues)	Model III (All issues)
Political sophistication	.05 (.006)***	.03 (.007)***	.08 (.01) ***
Mobilization	.01 (.01)	.02 (.01)**	.04 (.02)**
Female	.02 (.009)***	-.008 (.009)	.01 (.01)
Social class			
Lower middle class	.06 (.01)***	.04 (.02)***	.1 (.02)***
Middle class	.05 (.01)***	.06 (.01)***	.1 (.02)***
Upper middle class	.05 (.02)***	.07 (.02)***	.1 (.03)***
Upper class	-.02 (.03)	.01 (.04)	-.005 (.05)
Area of residence			
Small or middle-sized town	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.02 (.02)
Suburbs of large town or city	-.002 (.01)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Large town or city	.01 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.03 (.02)
Religiosity	-.02 (.002)***	-.006 (.002)**	-.02 (.003)***
Education	.06 (.006)***	.03 (.007)***	.1 (.01)***
Generations			
Born b/w 1939 & 1949	.06 (.01)***	.008 (.01)	.07 (.02)***
Born b/w 1949 & 1959	.1 (.01)***	.004 (.02)	.1 (.02)***
Born b/w 1959 & 1969	.13 (.01)***	.003 (.02)	.13 (.02)***
Born b/w 1969 & 1979	.15 (.01)***	.01 (.01)	.17 (.03) ***
Born b/w 1979 & 1989	.15 (.02)***	.002 (.02)	.15 (.03) ***
Born in & after 1989	.18 (.03)***	.03 (.03)	.2 (.04) ***
Disapproval of government performance	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.02 (.02)
Ideological clarity	.1 (.17)	.22 (.13)*	.3 (.2)
Green parties	.06 (.09)	.07 (.06)	.13 (.11)
Radical right parties	.3 (.08)***	-.05 (.06)	.23 (.1)**
Radical left parties	-.13 (.08)	-.12 (.06)**	-.26 (.11)**
Experience of party candidates	-.004 (.1)	.29 (.13)**	.3 (.24)
Open ballot system	.1 (.09)	.0006 (.09)	.06 (.1)
Ordered ballot system	.17 (.09)*	.06 (.08)	.21 (.14)*
District magnitude	.004 (.001)***	.002 (.001)	.006 (.002)**
Open*District magnitude	.0004 (.003)	.0006 (.002)	.001 (.004)
Party system fragmentation	-.02 (.01)	-.002 (.01)	-.02 (.03)
Ideological range	.001 (.02)	.001 (.02)	.008 (.003)
Democratic experience	.003 (.001)**	.003 (.001)**	.006 (.002) ***
Intercept	-1.93 (.16)***	-1.63 (.16)***	-3.55 (.29) ***
Random effects			
Intercept for political systems	.06 (.04)***	.09 (.02)***	.18 (.04)***
Party intercept	.26 (.02)***	.18 (.01)***	.32 (.02)***
Residual	.47 (.003)***	.51 (.003)***	.75 (.004)***
AIC	16 843	18 624	28 093
BIC	17 080	18 861	28 330
No of political systems	28	28	28
No of parties	160	160	160
N	12 188	12 180	12 180

Notes: *** significant at $p < 0.01$, ** significant at $p < .05$, * significant at $p < .1$