

# Left-Right and Institutional preferences? EP Roll-Call Votes in the Codecision Procedure \*

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## Abstract

The study of how Members of the European Parliament vote in roll-call votes have substantively enhanced our knowledge of day-to-day politics in the European Parliament. But as most roll calls are taken on resolutions that may have only a minimal impact on European public policy, findings from research that pools voting decisions across all procedures might be misleading due to the large number of "unimportant" votes dominating the sample.

Does this subset reveal a similar pattern as research based on voting decisions pooled across all procedures? This paper estimates the position of individual MEPs on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading codecision votes and compare them with pooled estimates. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of the codecision procedure the parliament vote on proposed changes to the Common Position adopted by the Council. These votes must be considered important, as they have a direct impact on EU public policy. The main finding is that roll-call voting is predominantly explained by left-right policies. A second dimension can be interpreted as the institutional interest of both the main party groups to meet the absolute majority requirement in order to influence EU policies. It is however clear that a one-dimensional model of left-right politics is able to correctly predict MEPs individual voting decisions equally well.

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The legislative powers of the European Parliament has increased substantively through successive treaty reforms since the 1980s (Pollack, 2003). The European Parliament has become an important actor in most policy areas, with the exception of agriculture and foreign affairs. It is hence important to understand how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) vote. An influential research, drawing on all recorded voting decisions of all MEPs between 1979 and 2004, show that transnational party groups have been much more successful than member states in structuring MEPs voting behavior (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2006*a*). Defections from the transnational party group line can be explained in terms of national party positions and the ability of national parties to sanction disloyal members through the nomination process. MEPs personal preferences seem to matter less (see Hix, 2004, 694-6). However, most of these studies make inferences based on estimated from votes taken from a range of different procedures. When voting decisions are pooled across different institutional rules, these effect may disappear, or perhaps worse, be different in the aggregate than within each subset. Carrubba et al. (2006) shows that roll call votes in the EP are called on an unrepresentative sample of all the votes, and disproportionately called more frequently by some of the smaller party groups. Hence, we can nether be confident that the results from the study of all roll call votes are representative of all voting behavior in the EP, nor that it capture the dynamics in the subset of roll call votes that matters, ie. when MEPs can influence European level legislation.

Furthermore, the European Parliament is amongst those parliaments that only record individual voting decisions on a subset of the votes (Hug, 2006). If the decision to ask for a vote to be recorded has behavioral implications, e.i. influences how representatives cast their votes, roll-call votes may not

be representative of the whole population of votes. Evidence from roll call votes may hence be problematic if the purpose is to infer something about the whole population of votes (Carrubba and Gabel, 1999).

The contribution of this paper is to empirically evaluate the extent of the first of these two problems. The concern over pooling effects is addressed by comparing the estimates of MEPs' voting behavior in roll call votes on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading Co-decision amendments with roll-call votes across all other procedures. In the second reading of the codecision procedure, MEPs vote on amendments to the common position adopted by the Council of Ministers. At this stage of the procedure, the position of the Council will be adopted *unless* the Parliament have an absolute majority of its members in favor of amending this position<sup>1</sup>. It is important for the legislative power of the EP as an institution to be seen to be able to amend the common position of the Council. It may also be in the interest of the governments to see "their" MEPs defend or promote their interest in the EP at this stage, as MEPs voting decisions at this stage feed directly into EU policies (Hoyland and Hagemann, 2006). If the pattern from this subset of roll-call votes is substantively different from the pooled estimates, it may be the case that the latter estimates fail to capture the logics operating when MEPs voting decisions matter.

The next section summarizes the main findings from studies of voting behavior in the European Parliament. The second section discusses the use of item response models to identify the ideal points of Members of the European Parliament. The estimation of ideal points is an important step towards empirical tests of the spatial model of legislative politics. The third

section describes the roll-call votes taken on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading codecision amendments during the 1999-2004 parliament. The fourth section discusses the results. The key finding is that the main dimension is left-right. A second dimension can be identified as the institutional interest of the main party groups to meet the absolute majority requirement for amending the common position of the Council. There might exist a trade-off between political preferences and institutional interest. The first dimension pits PES against the EPP while the second dimension pits the PES and EPP against everyone else. It is however not clear that the second dimension is necessary. The results show that the much simple one-dimensional model of left-right politics explains individual voting decisions equally well.

## **Roll-Call Voting in the EP: Findings and Problems**

This section provides an overview of the literature on roll-call voting in the European Parliament. The key finding is that party groups in the EP have a surprisingly high level of cohesiveness, given their limited ability to sanction and reward behavior. Cohesion seems to be higher on own initiative resolutions than on budgetary and legislative acts (Attina, 1990). Also, the biggest problem facing party groups in the plenary sessions may not voting cohesion, but voting participation (Brzinski, 1995). A longitudinal study covering all roll call votes between 1979 and 2001 shows that party group size increases voting cohesion. Furthermore, the cohesion has increased over time. The number of national delegations in a group does not seem to decrease voting cohesion. Instead, the results showed that increased ideological diversity inside a party group is responsible for decreasing cohesion. The percentage of parties in government has a significant positive effect on voting cohesion of a party group. This may be because national governments put

pressure on their MEPs to ensure that legislation adopted in the Council is not amended in the EP (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2005).

A common argument is that the two biggest party groups, the EPP and PES, forms a grand coalition. They do it in response to the need to present a united front against the Council (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2000; Hosli, 1997; Raunio, 1997; Westlake, 1994). This may be in order to ensure that its points are taken or to meet the absolute majority requirement given the high level of absenteeism during the plenary sessions. The EPP and PES collude more than they compete at the aggregate level (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2005). This may be because of ideological similarity, technical reasons, collective institutional interests, or in order to prevent smaller party groups from being influential. Hix, Kreppel and Noury (2003, 318-21) find support for the first three reasons, but not the fourth. EPP and PES do not seem to vote together in order to keep the smaller parties out. Also, the two big party groups compete more often as turnout increases. Turnout is highest on votes on issues where the EP has more power relative to the other institutions (Noury, 2002; Scully, 1997). Hence, the EPP and PES are more likely to compete on issues that matter.

The party system has grown more competitive as the powers of the EP have increased (Kreppel and Hix, 2003). The nature of competition and coalition formation differs by policy area (Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999). Amendments are more likely to be included in the adopted text if it has cross-party support from the two main party groups in the EP, the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the European Peoples' Party(EPP). Different coalitions are able to accomplish different tasks at the various stages of the coopera-

tion procedure. The grand coalition between PES and EPP is able to pass amendments at both the first and the second reading, while other coalitions are only successful at passing amendments in the first reading (Kreppel, 1999). Some of the other coalitions were however able to block amendments from being passed in the second reading (Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999).

The claim that the majority requirement, simple or absolute, dictates MEPs voting behavior, is contested. Hix (2001) argues that coalitions form along partisan lines. Most of the time one major party group proposes an amendment the other major party group rejects it. The EPP and the PES are, however, more likely to vote together when an absolute majority is required, compared to when only a simple majority is needed (Hix, Kreppel and Noury, 2003). MEPs behavior is more responsive to the preferences of the principals responsible for the selection process to the EP, than the principal responsible for allocating the spoils inside the parliament (Hix, 2002).

Overall party group cohesion can be explained by the proportion of national parties defecting from the party group line. National parties are able to ensure that their MEPs vote together against the party group on issues where their opinions differ (Faas, 2003). In high-profile votes, MEPs from national parties represented in the Council seem to be more supportive of the joint text than the rest of the EP (Ringe, 2005). Informal accounts suggest that parties in government are more interested in controlling the behavior of their MEPs than opposition parties, in particular the behavior in the codecision procedure (Messmer, 2003; Whitaker, 2005).

Carrubba et al. (2006) questions the reliability of these findings. The use

of roll-call votes to study legislative behavior in the EP is subject to two sources of selection bias. The first source of bias is due to pooling of votes across different procedures and types of votes. The problem is that the importance, as well as the incentive-structure guiding MEPs voting behavior, may vary systematically with the type of procedure and vote. If the ability of the transnational party leadership to control voting behavior differ across the different sorts of votes, then the assessment of the average influence of the party group leadership may not be a good indication of its actual influence. The problem in statistical terms is that the sample of votes is not drawn from one population. If the logic of behavior differ across the different types of votes, taking the average might not be a good measurement of neither of the subsets of votes.

The suggestion from Carrubba et al. (2006) is to distinguish between the different types of votes. Most roll call votes in the EP are taken on resolutions, where the EP's opinions are merely symbolic. Hence, if evidence from roll-call votes are pooled across all procedure, it might not correctly estimate the influence of the transnational party groups. As resolutions are merely symbolic, the transnational party leadership may choose not to invest much resources in maximizing cohesiveness in the majority of votes, instead saving their influence for when it matters. On the other hand, if the party group leadership is only able to coordinate MEPs behavior on resolutions and other "unimportant" votes, the power of the party groups may be overestimated, as resolutions makes up the majority of the roll-call votes. Either way, the population of roll call votes is made up by both "important" and "unimportant" votes of different strategic roles. Pooling across different types of votes may result in a contaminated sample.

The second problem is a selection effect. Carrubba and Gabel (1999) argue that roll call votes may be called strategically. They present a formal model of when the party group leadership ask for a roll-call vote. The party group leadership should only ask for a roll-call vote if it is able to swing a losing vote to a winning vote by doing so. Several additional reasons for calling a roll call vote has been suggested in the literature, ranging from the desire to influence the legislative outcome to signalling considerations or posturing (Kreppel, 2002).

Carrubba et al. (2006) show that the practice of asking for roll-call votes is not proportional across procedures or party groups. Roll-call votes may hence not provide an accurate picture of voting behavior in the European Parliament on votes that are not recorded. It is nevertheless open to debate to what extent the act of asking for a roll call vote is sufficient to make or break voting coalitions. It only takes a handful of representatives<sup>2</sup>, or a leader of one of the transnational party-groups, to demand voting decisions to be recorded. It is hence unlikely that actors are willing to invest heavily in negotiating coalition that will only hold if individual voting decisions are keep secret.

Some cross-party coalitions may for sure be more politically costly if the voting records are public. For example, The French CPNT, (Hunting, Fishing, Nature, Tradition), may be less inclined to vote with the French socialist party, PS, in roll-call votes than on ordinary votes. Roll call votes could perhaps be understood as a insurance device to test whether agreements between voting coalition partners are possible to implement if the voting decisions are made public. Hence roll call votes may be asked for by both the winning and the losing side<sup>3</sup>.

This problem is important to keep in mind. One need to be careful when inferring from study of roll-call votes to the wider population of votes. However, as this paper focuses on the former problem, the selection effects on the revealed dimensions of the policy space and the representatives revealed positions within this space is left for further research.

This section presented a summary of the key insights from research research on roll call voting in the European Parliament. The systematic collection of roll-call data and the import of sophisticated statistical methods from recent research on the US Congress has brought the field into a new era. But some of the findings are contested. This is not only due to the fact that roll-call votes are called on a subset of all votes, and may represent a biased sample, unsuitable for generalization to the whole population of votes. The contestation is also due to the choice of most researchers to pool votes from different procedures. Although this is the norm amongst legislative scholars, it is not necessarily unproblematic, as pointed out by Carrubba et al. (2006). The next section discusses ways around the problem of biased estimates due to pooling across procedures, when estimating legislators ideal points.

## **Estimation of legislators ideal points**

The theoretical rationale for applying item-response models to understand legislative behavior is the simple low-dimensional spatial model of politics (Black, 1958; Hinich and Munger, 1997; Schofield, 1976; Riker, 1962). The theory is very parsimonious. Legislators are sincere. They vote for the policy-alternative closest to their ideal policy.

Estimates of the location of legislators ideal points in the policy space is vital if we want to test predictions based on the spatial theory of politics. The existing effort to operationalize this theory in the case of the European

Parliament use the Nominat technique to estimate MEPs location in the policy-space (e.g Hix, 2001). It has, together with closely related methods like optimal classification and DW-Nominat, become the most widely used technique of ideal point estimation in the literature (Poole, 2005). There is however some concern that theoretical foundation behind Nominat is an in-accurate model of the legislators behavior in roll-call votes. If representatives do not vote for the alternative that is closest to them, for strategic, party pressure or other reasons, the estimated Nominat score may be an inaccurate estimate of the representatives' ideal point in the policy space. There has been several attempts to deal with this problem. One suggestion has been to compare lopsided votes with close votes (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2001; Snyder and Groseclose, 2000, 2001). Others have suggested to only use roll-call votes on days when the order of business is contested (Patty, 2005; Sinclair, 1995), as these votes are likely to be more contested than votes on other days. I use votes on amendments to common position of the Council in EP 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of the codecision procedure. At this stage, the common position of the Council will be adopted unless an absolute majority of the MEPs vote to amend. There is hence a clear incentive for party groups of different ideological pervasion to collude rather than compete in order to strengthen the power of the institution vis-a-vis the Council. There is a clear tradeoff in these votes. Competition reduces the chance of legislative influence as it makes it less likely that an amendment will meet the absolute majority requirement. Collusion increases the risk of depoliticize the European Parliament.

The ability of the political leadership of the transnational party group control its members is contested in the literature. Members owe their nomi-

nation to their national party, not their transnational party. Furthermore, many MEPs have gone to Brussels towards the end of their career, either as a reward for long service or as a "discharge" following intra-party conflicts. These MEPs may have few incentives to listen to the transnational party group leadership, as it cannot ensure their renomination. Nor do they have any reason to conform to the wishes of their national party. They are already on their way out of the party. Hence, the simple model of MEPs as policy-seeking individual actors may not be unreasonable. There is however a growing sub-group of MEPs who see the European Parliament as their primary political career. For these MEPs, the simple model may not be completely adequate as they may be swayed by instructions from one of their two principals (Hix, 2002; Scarrow, 1997).

Before I move on to discuss the data, it is necessary to highlight a problematic aspect of Nominat, the lack of estimates of the uncertainty around the ideal points estimates. This leads to estimates that are more precise than the evidence for in the data. Bayesian estimation of item response models might offer an attractive alternative to the marginal maximum likelihood based approaches of the NOMINATE family. Marginal maximum likelihood enables the researcher to solve problems that are too complex for traditional maximizing likelihood. While these techniques identify the ideal points of the legislators, uncertainty estimates of these estimates are only available by post-estimation bootstrapping and related post-estimation simulations of the uncertainty (Lewis and Poole, 2004). It is common to report these estimates as if they are without uncertainty. When these estimates are subsequently used as a dependent variable in a continuous regression model, the standard errors are likely to be heteroscedastic (see Jackman, 2000*a*, 323 for

a presentation of the problem and Lewis and Linzer (2005) for a discussion of possible solutions).

The Bayesian approach draws samples from the posterior distribution (see Jackman, 2000*b*, for an accessible introduction to Bayesian Simulation for political scientists). This approach makes it straightforward to calculate the precision of the estimates, or any other quantity of interest. The Bayesian approach also offer a straightforward methods of determine the dimensionality of the policy space as it allows the researcher to investigate to what extent individual votes were able to distinguish between different MEPs. This allows the researcher to determine the policy content of the votes that discriminate between MEPs on the different dimensions. Until now, analysts of roll call voting in the European Parliament have been forced to determine the dimensionality of the EP policy-space using the classical "eye-ball" test, i.e. informally investigating the revealed dimensionality of the spatial map and present their interpretation to the reader. An other alternative has been to use the estimated ideal points on the different dimensions as the dependent variable, usually ignoring the heteroscedastic problem pointed out by Jackman (2000*a*).

This section has discussed the use of item response models to estimate the ideal points of MEPs. A key research question for scholars interested in voting behavior of members of the European Parliament has been whether transnational parties has been able to influence voting behavior. The key claim is that European Party Groups have been able to structure the main dimension of contestation along the left-right policy dimension, preventing behavior in the EP to driven by national interests. To test the limit of the ability of transnational party groups to structure the dimension of contest

observed in roll call votes primarily along the left right dimension rather than along national lines, I use votes on amendments to the common position adopted by the Council of Ministers in EP's second reading in the codecision procedure. This is the type of votes where we would expect that the MEPs are under most cross-pressure and having the highest risk of being monitored of actors outside the European Parliament, e.g. interest groups or national party leadership (Whitaker, 2001). This data is presented in the next section.

## Data

The dependent variable is individual voting decisions in roll call votes on amendments in the second reading of the codecision procedure. The data-set consists of all these votes taken during the 5<sup>th</sup> European Parliament, July 1999 - May 2004. To reduce the risk of including other types of votes, the vote-characteristics are double checked against both EP legislative database, and Council minutes. MEPs who participated in fewer than 50 votes are defined as non-participating. There is in total 326 roll-call votes by 568 MEPs once non-participating MEPS and lopsided votes are dropped. Lopsided votes are defined as votes where less than 5% of the MEPs supported the losing side.

The overall composition of codecision legislation considered by the EP during fifth parliament is reports in the official EP activity report (Dimi-trakopoulos, Cedershiold and Imbeni, 2004). The activity report from the European Parliament shows that a total of 403 legislative acts were adopted under the codecision procedure during the 5<sup>th</sup> EP. 28%, 115 dossiers, were adopted in the first reading. This means that the Council accepted the

initial proposal from the Parliament. 10% of all codecision proposals from the Commission was adopted without neither the Parliament nor the Council amending. 18% was only amended by the Parliament. 200 dossiers, or 50% of all legislation was adopted in the second reading. These were evenly split between Parliament accepting the first reading common position of the Council, and the Council accepting second reading amendments proposed by Parliament. 22% of all codecision legislation was adopted following an agreement in the conciliation committee. 2 pieces of legislation was not accepted by the EP plenary following an agreement in the conciliation committee.

The environment committee was responsible for 29% of the completed dossiers, the Regional committee for 18%, Legal Affairs 12%, Industry 10%. The Economic and Monetary affairs committee was responsible for 8%. These committees accounted for 76% of the codecision legislation. Four additional committees wrote more than 10 codecision reports. These were the Culture, Employment, Agriculture and Development committees.

24 of the 67 pieces of codecision legislation second reading votes, about  $\frac{1}{3}$ , were environmental legislation. 10 dossier, 14%, were regional policy. 9 dossier, or 12.5%, dealt with economic issues or market related aspects. The rest of the roll call votes were on legislation related to transport (5), agriculture (5), public health (5), research (3), trade (2) and justice (1). Of those dossier voted on by roll call votes, the number of such votes ranged from 1 to 24. A total of 190 roll call votes were taken on environmental legislation, this amounts to 48.5% of all second reading codecision roll call votes. 35 votes, 9%, were taken on market related legislation, 32 on social and employment legislation, 31 on economic issues, 25 on external trade, 23

on research, 22 on public health, 18 on agriculture, 12 on transport and 5 on justice related legislation.

The number of legislation voted on and the number of roll call votes are broadly comparable and does not suggest that roll-call votes are predominantly called on a particular type of legislation at this stage within the codecision procedure. It is however clear that more votes are taken on environmental legislation than its proportion of the total number of codecision legislation would indicate. The over-representation of roll-call votes on second reading amendments on environmental legislation is mainly due to the fact that 2 environmental policy dossiers saw more than 20 roll call votes each.

## Results

The analysis proceeds in two steps. The first step presents the estimates from a one-dimensional model without any covariates. This model will serve as a baseline. This model has the advantage of being parsimonious. If it provides an adequate fit to MEPs voting behavior in roll call votes on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading codecision amendments, it may suggest that the party groups are able to keep issues that do not map into this dimension off the agenda.

To identify the dimensionality of voting in 2<sup>nd</sup> reading codecision votes, I investigate the discrimination parameters. Close votes, defined as up to a 60-40 split between yea and nay, with discrimination parameters not significantly different from zero can be seen as indicators of a second dimension. these are the same criteria as those used by Jackman (2001) to investigate the dimensionality of voting in the 105<sup>th</sup> US Senate. No votes qualified by these criteria. This may suggest that the policy-space is one-dimensional. An

alternative approach is to estimate an unidentified two-dimensional model, and impose identifying restrictions ex post (Rivers, 2003). This allow us to evaluate to what extent the pooled estimates give an accurate picture of the dimensionality of roll call voting in the EP in the codecision procedure. The results presented here are the summary of 1000 relatively independent draws from one million MCMC iterations preformed in the `pscl` package in R (Jackman, 2006). The model is identified by restricting the position of Corbett (PES) to  $-1$  and the position of Zimmerling (EPP) to  $1$ .

### **Codecision amendments: A One-dimensional model**

52% of the remaining voting decisions were in supportive of proposed amendment, while 48% were non-supportive. The one-dimensional model fits the data quite well. It distinguishes well between the main party groups. There is hardly any overlap in the 95% credibility intervals of MEPs from different party groups. But there is some overlap between the Green and the Left. 93% of the votes have discrimination parameters sign different from 0. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the estimated ideal points and the associated credibility intervals.

[Figure 1 about here.]

The figure shows the estimated mean location of MEPs on codecision amendments organized by party group affiliation. The lineup of parties is along the traditional left-right dimension except the rightist party group that seem to be located within the EPP, and slightly to the left of the center of the EPP. We also see that the Euro-sceptic party group is located within the same subset of the policy-spectrum as the liberals. There might be reasons to doubt to what extent one dimension suffice as a meaningful description of

dimensionality on second reading codecision votes, even if no vote qualified as close and unable to distinguish along the first dimension. If the criteria for close is extended to a 30-70 split, several votes qualify. If the two main party groups share the same preferences on the second dimension, we would not be able to capture it by restricting over attention of very close votes.

The model does a fairly good job at predicting voting behavior. It correctly predicts about 85% of all voting decisions. Less than 7% of the votes failed to distinguish between the MEPs along the one-dimensional policy-space. The mean prediction rate by party group varies somewhat. The party average is around 90% for the PES, EPP and the Left. It is in the about 84% for the Greens and 77% for the ELDR. In contrast, it only explains on average 65 percent of the voting decisions of the right and the non-attached. The party average for the Euro-sceptics is below 60 percent.

This subsection has shown that the two main party groups differ in their voting behavior on roll call votes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of the codecision procedure. The first dimension Nominat scores estimated by Hix, Noury and Roland (2006*b*) and the Bayesian estimates presented in this paper are very similar. Methodologically, the section showed one advantage of the Bayesian approach compared to traditional Nominat scores. They provide measures of uncertainty around the estimated position. It is clear that the the no MEP from the two main parties have ideal points that overlap, even after the uncertainty around the estimates are taken into consideration. The section further highlighted the challenge of estimating the position of "extremists" at either ends of the policy spectrum. The large uncertainty regions around the estimated position of these MEPs calls for caution when using these

data as proxy measures of revealed policy position in subsequent analysis. The next subsection will further reveal some of the advantages of the Bayesian approach to ideal point estimation in a legislative setting. In particular, it allows for a rigorous methods of identifying the dimensionality of the EP policy space in the codecision procedure.

### **Codecision Amendments: A 2-dimensional Model**

The dimensions of the EP policy space is a contested area of research. Hix and Lord (1997) present a two dimensional policy-space, where the main dimension is left right politics and the second dimension is pro-anti integration. Hooghe and Marks (1999) see liberalism versus regulated capitalism as the key policy dimension. Recently, Hix, Noury and Roland (2006*b,a*) have argued that the second dimension is a mix between pro-anti integration and national government-opposition dynamics. Their analysis is based on a visual investigation of the spatial maps as well as regression analysis of the ideal point scores of the second dimension on a set of explanatory variables. The Bayesian approach allows for the identification of both the votes that do map well into the first dimension and those that do not.

The model is then re-estimated in two dimensions, setting the prior on some of the votes that do not discriminate on the first dimension to zero on that dimension and different from zero on the second dimension (See Jackman, 2001, for a presentation of this approach). Rivers (2003) show that a multidimensional spatial voting model, where  $d$  defines the number of dimensions, requires  $d(d + 1)$  independent restrictions to be identified. A one-dimensional model is hence identified by assigning fixed point locations the two legislators furthest away from each other. An alternative approach is to set the mean of the ideal points to zero with a standard deviation of one. The latter approach is sufficient for local, but not global identification,

as it is possible to change the sign, i.e. making the most leftward legislator become the most rightward by multiplying the vector of ideal point by  $-1$ . A two-dimensional model requires five independent constraints to be identified. In order to ensure that the identification of the dimensions are not driven by the prior constraints, an unconstrained two-dimensional model is first estimated. I then investigated the plot and identified the position of 3 legislators whose position differed in the two dimensions. I used Casaca (PES, Portugal), Arvidsson (EPP, Sweden) and Staes (Green, Belgium) to identify the two dimensions. Casaca was assigned the position  $-1,0$ , Arvidsson  $1,0$  and Staes  $-.5,-1$ . These constraints are sufficient for identification of the model.

Figure 2 clearly illustrates that a second dimension is able to better capture the difference between the Euro-sceptics, the Right and the ELDR. It also makes us slightly better able to distinguish between MEPs from the left and the Green. The overall correctly predicted votes only increase by a few percentages, from 85.5% to 88%. The party average hardly change for any of the parties. The two-dimensional model is able to explain more of the votes. Only 4 out of the 326 votes have discrimination parameters indistinguishable from zero on both dimensions. This means that almost 99% of the votes distinguishes between the legislators on either one or both of these dimensions. 18% of the votes, or 60 out of the 326 are indistinguishable from 0 on the 1<sup>st</sup> dimension. 21% of the fail to distinguish on the second dimension.

[Figure 2 about here.]

The lower part of figure 2 identifies two partly overlapping dimensions of conflict. The main set of cutting lines distinguishes between the EPP and the right on the one side against the PES, Green and Left of the other. The

ELDR seem to side more often with the EPP than with the PES on these votes. The non-attached and the Euro-sceptics are also located between the two blocks. A second set of cutting lines exists. There seem to be a coalition between the EPP, ELDR most of the PES and some of the non-attached. On these votes, the Left and the Greens vote together with some of the non-attached, the right and the Euro-sceptic. It does not look like this dissension is pro-anti integration. If it was, the Euro-sceptics should not be centrally located. This is not due to the way the model is identified. There is no simple transformation of the policy-space that would make the Euro-sceptics the most extreme on these codecision votes.

Figure 3 plots the posterior mean of the ideal point against the voting decisions correctly predicted along both dimensions. It is clear that the model does very well when predicting the voting behavior of members of the main transnational party groups, with the exception of the ELDR. The plot looks like a Y in both dimensions. The model predicts both ends of the policy spectrum quite well, but makes more mistakes when predicting the voting behavior of centrally located MEPs. It is not surprising that the prediction rate is lower for centrally located MEPs. It is well known that the ELDR form coalitions with both the EPP and the PES (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2006*b*). The fact that voting behavior of Euro-sceptics is equally poorly predicted on both dimensions, suggests that pro-anti EU is not a dimension in these roll call votes.

[Figure 3 about here.]

Although Carrubba et al. (2006) show that the Green party calls for a disproportional number of roll-call votes, it does not look like a pro-anti environment dimension is present either. One interpretation of the second

dimension could be the grand-coalition of the EPP and PES. In order to meet the absolute majority requirement for amending the common position of the Council, the EPP and PES might put left-right politics aside and vote through compromise amendments (Kreppel, 1999). There are 55 votes that only distinguish on the 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension. 41 of these votes, 75%, have at least an absolute majority of the votes on one side. Roll-call voting in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of the codecision procedure can hence be understood as a tradeoff between left-right politics and institutional interests. However, as the two-dimensional model does not explain more individual voting decisions. The one dimensional model is more parsimonious. Behavior in roll-call votes in the second reading of the codecision procedure is perhaps adequately explained by reference to the left-right policy dimension.

In order to compare to what extent pooling across all procedures leads to different results, figure 4 compares the ideal points estimated by Hix, Noury and Roland (2006*b*) with the estimates presented in this paper. The upper figure plots the estimates of the first dimension against each other. The nominate scores is on the y-axis while the Bayesian estimates is on the x-axis. The lower figure plots the second dimension.

[Figure 4 about here.]

The correlation between the Nominat scores and the Bayesian estimates is over .86 on the 1<sup>st</sup> dimension. There are some differences in the at the lower end of the spectrum, where the Nominat scores better distinguish between MEPs from the Green and the Left party-groups. The nominate scores also identifies the British Conservatives as more extreme than the rest of the EPP. The Bayesian scores place them at the upper end of the EPP together with Spanish and French MEPS.

The correlation is much weaker on the 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension, only .57. This may suggest that the 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension does not exist in the case of roll-call votes on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading codecision amendments. An other possibility is that the second dimension is institutional interest in the case of codecision votes, and something else, e.g. pro-anti integration in the case of resolutions and other less important votes.

## Conclusion

The statistical analysis of parliamentary roll call voting has received increased attention amongst political scientists recently. These studies have several attractive features. The statistical model is directly derived from the spatial model of legislative politics. The key assumption behind this model is that legislators have preferences over policies in a Euclidian policy space. These legislators vote for the policy alternative closest to their ideal point. By statistically estimating the ideal points of the legislators as a function of their vote choices, this theoretical assumption allows us to draw spatial maps, by generating a ideal points for each individual legislator.

In an influential paper, Carrubba et al. (2006) argue that the conclusions based on roll call votes in the European Parliament might suffer from two different sources of bias. First, individual voting decisions are pooled across different procedures. Pooling across different procedures may result in an aggregated picture that are substantively different from the picture that would emerge if only important votes, i.e. votes where the EP can actually influence European public policy. Their empirical finding that most roll-call votes are on "insignificant" votes leading them to question the face validity of the existing results rom studies of roll call voting. They also find that roll-call votes are unrepresentative of the population of votes taken in the

EP. They cannot be said to be a representative sample of MEPs voting behavior.

This paper have addressed the first of these two concerns. I compared voting behavior on "important" 2<sup>nd</sup> reading codecision roll call votes, with all other roll call votes taken during the 5<sup>th</sup> European Parliament. The method used is new in the context of roll call voting in the European Parliament, where Nominat has been the dominant approach (Poole, 2005; Hix, 2001). There are 2 main advantages of the Bayesian approach. First, it is easy to report the uncertainty around the ideal point estimates. Second, it is possible to simultaneous estimate both the location of the bill parameters as well as the position of the individual representatives. These bills allow a more sophisticated route towards identifying the policy dimensions, moving being the classical "eye-balling" test.

In line with earlier studies, the paper found that the estimated ideal points of MEPs seem to be clustered around national parties inside transnational party groups. The existing research takes this as evidence of powerful transnational party groups/ powerful national parties (e.g. Hix, Noury and Roland, 2005; Hix, 2002). Although plausible, the problem with this claim is that the theoretical model behind the statistical ideal point models assume that individuals vote for their most preferred policy outcome. It is hence unable to take party pressure or strategic voting into account. There are three alternative solutions to the problem. One can argue that party pressure or strategic voting is minimal in the European Parliament. This does not square well with the "power to the parties" claim (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2005). Alternatively, one can argue that the spatial maps are just summary statistics of MEPs voting patterns. The ideal points represents the "revealed preferences" once all factors influencing MEPs voting

decisions are accounted for. This approach makes it problematic to use these revealed preferences as a measure of ideological position of individual representatives in subsequent analysis. Nominate scores have been used to evaluate the power of transnational party groups loyalty vis-a-vis the effect of nationality, either by visually examine the spatial maps produced by these scores, or as independent variables in the regression models where also party group, countries and national party policy preferences may figure. As this paper has shown a substantive clustering of ideal points around transnational party group, the next challenge for researchers interested in ideal points estimates of MEPs ideological position would be to control for party- and agenda-specific effects. If these variables enter as factors into a legislator's utility calculation from her voting decisions, the error-structure of these variables may correlate, resulting in inefficient estimates (Jackman, 2000*a*). The alternative would be to statistically estimate the effect of the parameters associated with the representatives and the votes, drawing on explanatory item response models (Chiou, 2005; De Boeck and Wilson, 2004; Clinton, Jackman and Rivers, 2004; Lu and Wang, 2006).

The paper was also able to shed new light on the dimensionality question. By investigating how well the dimensions predicted the voting behavior of MEPs, it became apparent that the second dimension in EP voting is not pro-anti integration, but institutional interest. In line with Kreppel (1999); Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999) the main findings of this paper is that MEPs needs to trade off left-right policy preferences against the need to defend the invitational interest of the EP in its bargains with the Council. This trade-off can be problematic as it may force the only directly elected institution in the EU to become de-politicized in order to obtain institutional power. Removing the absolute majority requirement at this stage could lessen the

need for cross-party compromise. It is only if the EP is seen as powerful *and* politicized it can the help reduce EU's democratic deficit (Follesdal and Hix, 2006).

Nevertheless, a simple one-dimensional model of left-right politics is able to explain just as many of the individual voting decisions as the much more complex two dimensional model. Even if there is a second dimension in EP politics, its explanatory power does not guide MEPs voting decisions to a sufficient extent to warrant the the added complexity. The EP has evolved towards a system where most of the issues that reached the floor discriminates between the legislators in on the left-right ideological dimension.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Article 251 of the Amsterdam Treaty.

<sup>2</sup>32 individual members a in the period under investigation.

<sup>3</sup>I would like to thank party officials at the European Parliament for elaborating on the practical considerations involved when asking for a vote to be recorded.

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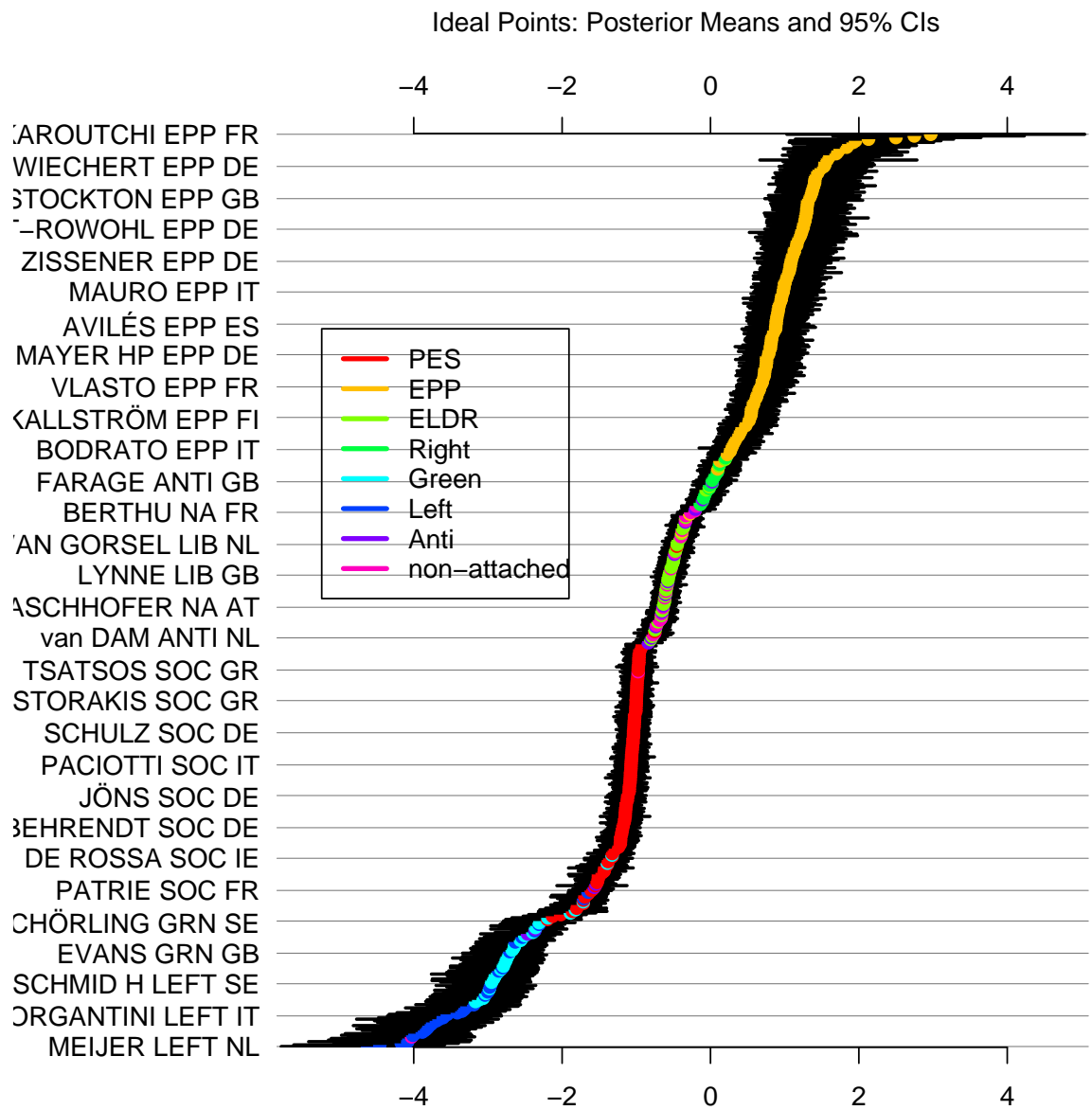
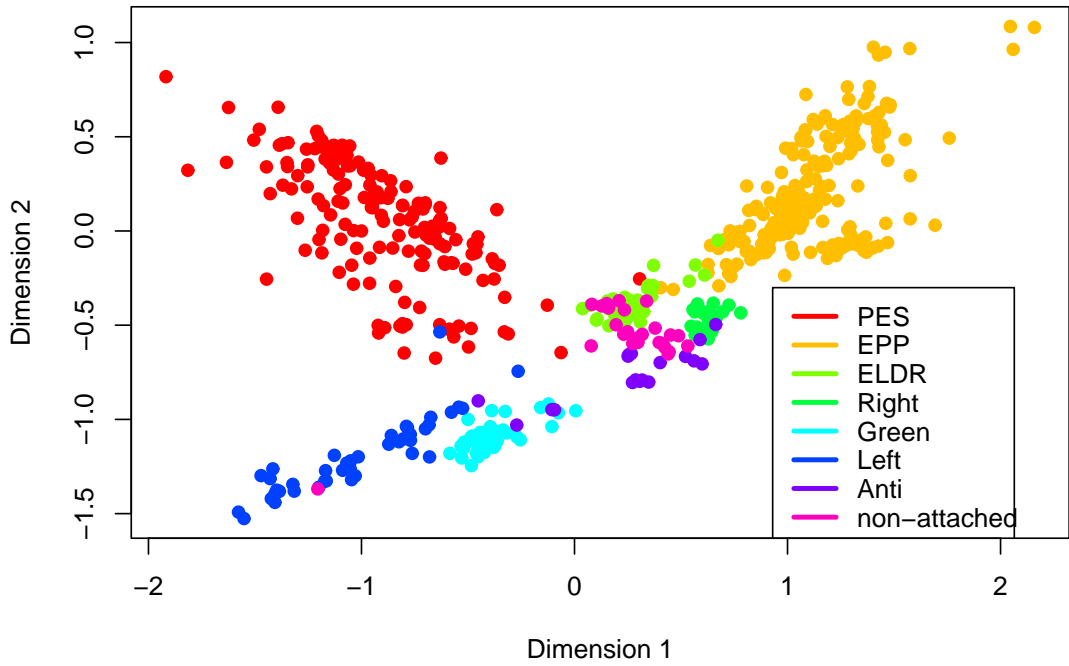


Figure 1: The mean location of MEPs in a one-dimensional policy space. The dark horizontal lines indicate the 95% confidence interval around estimates

**2nd reading codecision amendments  
Ideal Points: Posterior Means**



**2nd reading codecision amendments  
Ideal Points: Posterior Means**

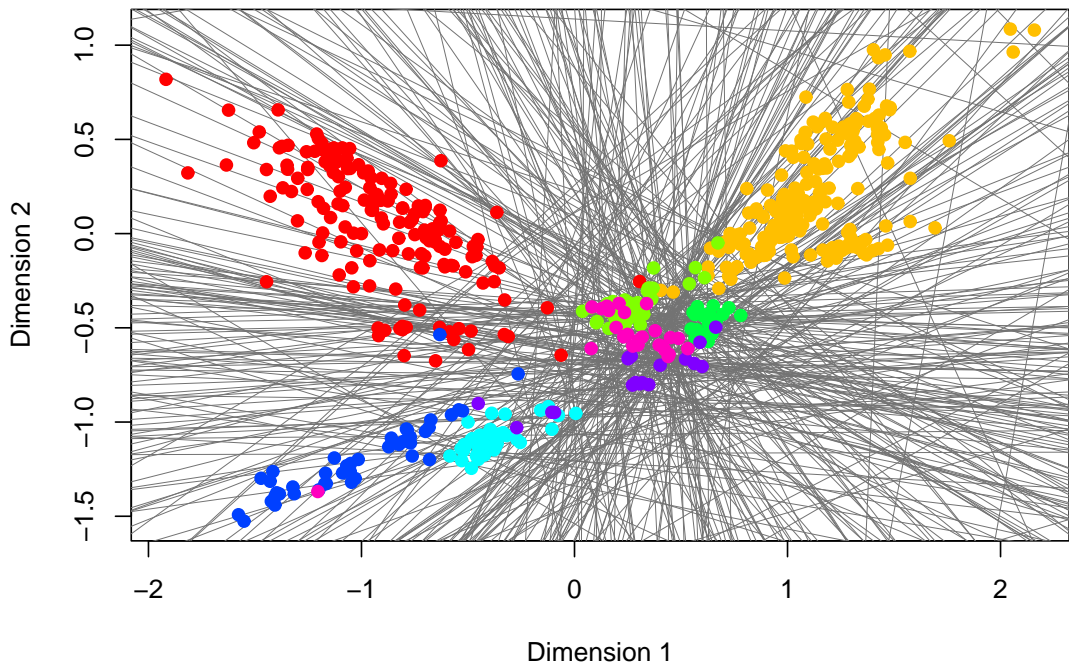
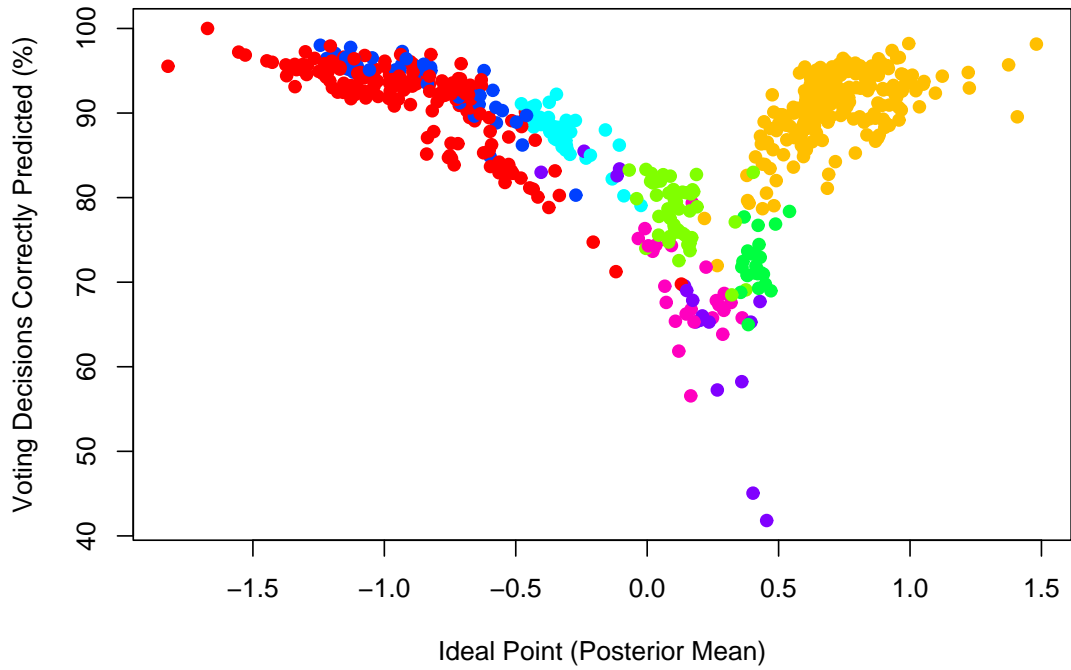


Figure 2: The top figure shows the mean position of the individual legislators. The lower figure adds cutting lines to the figure.

**Percent Correctly Predicted, by Legislator's Ideal Point (Dimension 1 )**



**Percent Correctly Predicted, by Legislator's Ideal Point (Dimension 2 )**

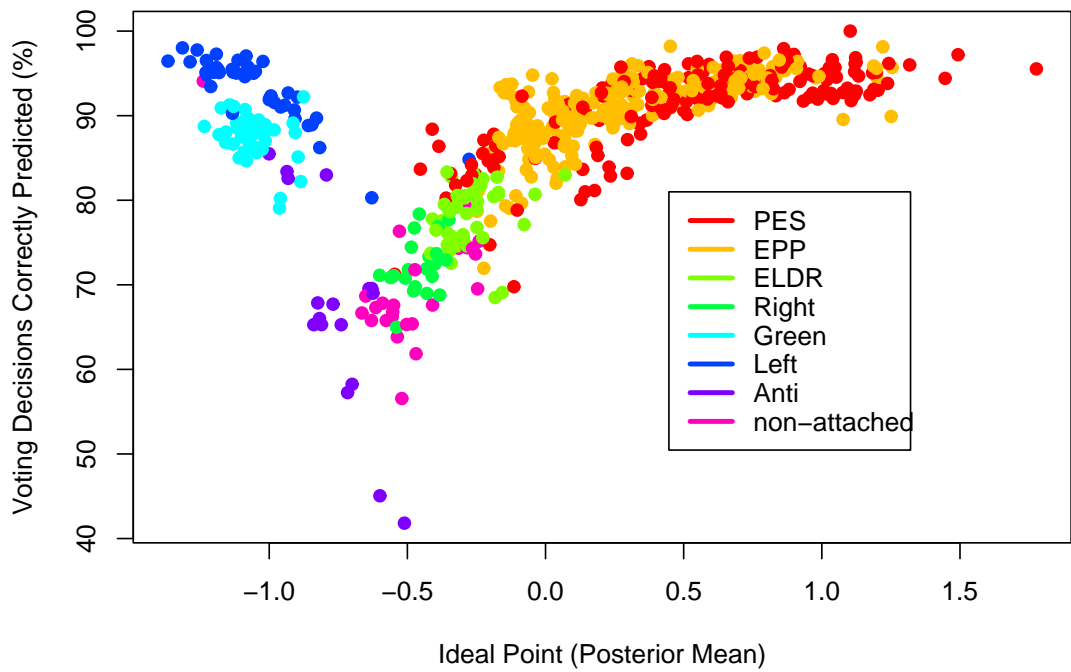


Figure 3: The figure show the percentage of correctly predicted voting decisions as a function of location in the policy space.

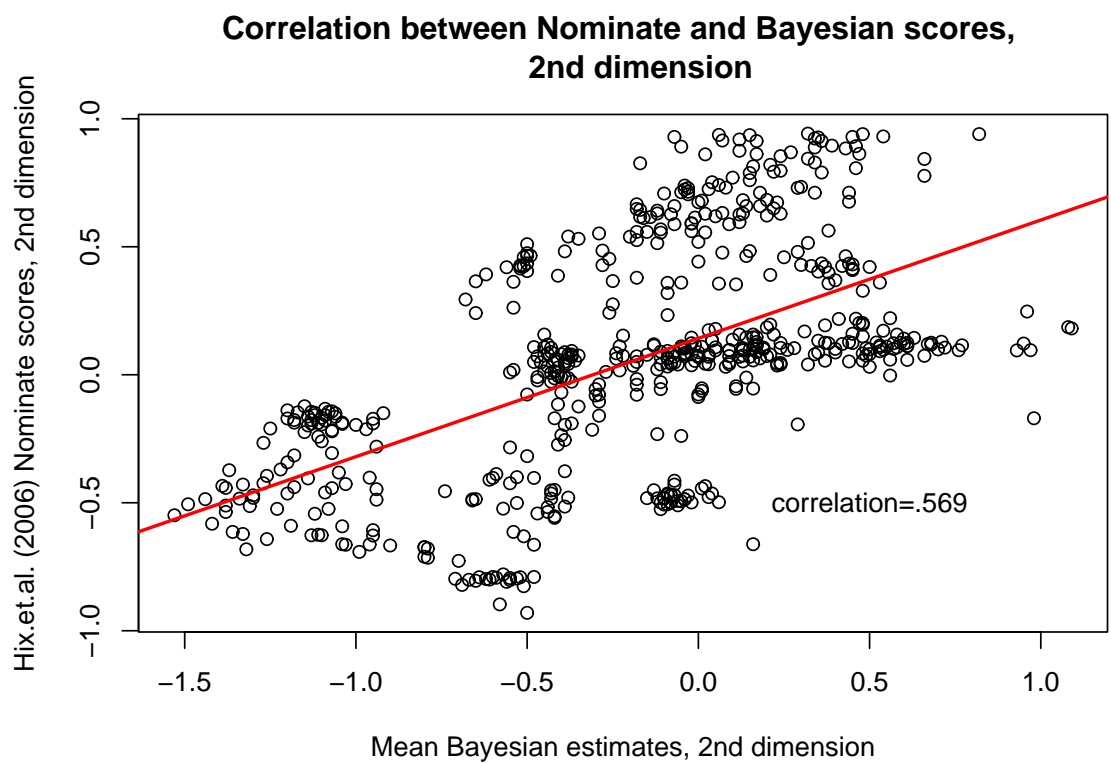
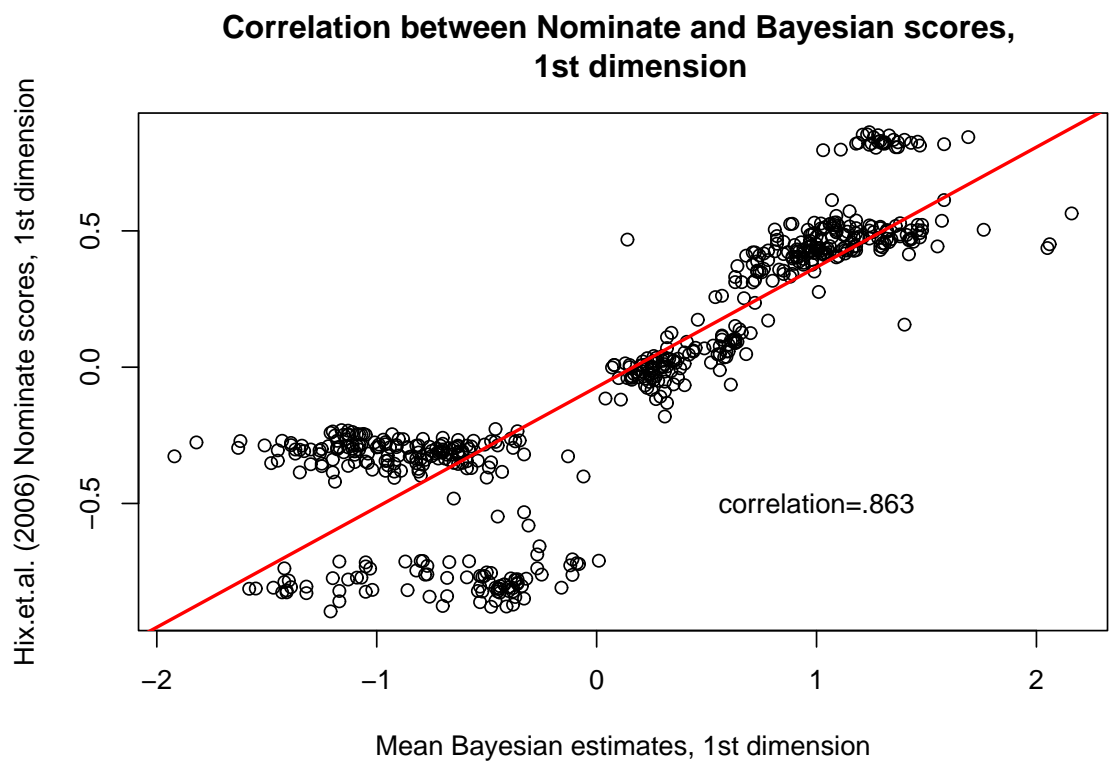


Figure 4: The figure show the percentage of correctly predicted voting decisions as a function of location in the policy space.