

Campaign Effects on Political Representation: European Elections in a Top-Down Model of the Electoral Cycle

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Abstract

Second-order elections theory explains cyclical losses of national government parties at European elections by strategic protest voting due to performance deficits in policy-making. This paper confronts the conventional bottom-up view with a top-down approach to second-order elections. Based on survey data from the European Election Studies, first-order campaign mobilization is shown to determine the extent of electoral defection from government parties. Mobilization itself depends on the quality of spatial representation in terms of distinct programmatic alternatives. While this process can be traced on the left-right dimension, parties prevent it with regard to integration issues by systematic demobilization.

1. Introduction¹

At the 2004 European Elections, the German SPD polled mere 21.5% – the worst result for the party in a nation-wide election since the Second World War. Did the social democratic MEPs do such a bad job in the European Parliament that voters defected in droves? Or are there other factors that could account for this severe defeat? Electoral research has provided us with a clear answer to these questions:

Since Reif and Schmitt presented their 1980 paper on second-order elections, most scholars have agreed that voting behaviour in European Elections is motivated by national rather than European concerns. In particular voters use European Elections to voice dissatisfaction with the government's performance by strategic protest voting. As this behaviour is said to reflect the curves of government popularity, it explains the typical second-order effect. The results of European Elections follow the national electoral cycles, with government parties losing support in a systematic manner.

Unlike ongoing debates within the overall framework (Eijk and Franklin 1996), this paper questions the widely accepted foundations of second-order elections theory. While the second-order thesis itself remains undisputed, the conventional bottom-up view focussing on voting behaviour is confronted with a top-down model of the electoral cycle where party competition is of crucial importance. The central argument is two-fold:

First of all, voters do not produce second-order cycles at their discretion. Rather, their behaviour is animated by first-order campaign effects. While parties mobilize their voters in the run-up to national elections by means of information and persuasion, the mobilization deficit at midterm provokes higher defection rates. Secondly, mobilization itself depends on the quality of spatial representation in terms of distinct programmatic alternatives. Only if parties fulfil this leadership function are voters willing to follow them.

In the following these arguments will be further elaborated. *Section 2* describes the conventional second-order theory as well as our alternative approach in detail. *Section 3* sets up a model accounting for mobilization effects with regard to left-right and integration issues as the two main dimension of the European political space and develops according hypotheses. *Section 4* tests these hypotheses with survey data from the European Election Studies (EES) which were conducted right after the European Elections of 1999 and 2004 all across the EU.² *Section 5* concludes.

2.1 Theory I – The conventional second-order elections theory

Right after the first direct Elections to the European Parliament in 1979, Reif and Schmitt (1980) published their seminal article “Nine second-order national elections”. This title captures most of our present knowledge about the specific logic of European Elections.

First of all, although they are held concurrently across the European Union every five years to give rise to a common legislative body, European Elections are primarily of national character. National parties stand for election, the elections are held under national electoral

¹ I would like to thank Bernhard Weßels for helpful discussions and access to the EES data while I was part of his research group at the Social Science Research Center Berlin in summer 2005. Additional thanks go to the participants of the colloquium on political economy at Freie Universität Berlin – directed by Michael Bolle and Thilo Bodenstein – for comments on an earlier version of this paper, to Mark Furness for proof-reading, and to Robert Dömke for pointing out the difference between robust standard errors and erroneous robust standards.

² Only Malta was not covered in 2004. Furthermore, important variables are missing for Northern Ireland (both elections) and Belgium, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Sweden (2004). These countries had to be dropped. The datasets were pooled to obtain a sufficient number of cases to test for a typical quadratic/cyclical effect.

laws, news coverage is done by national media systems, and national issues dominate the campaigns.

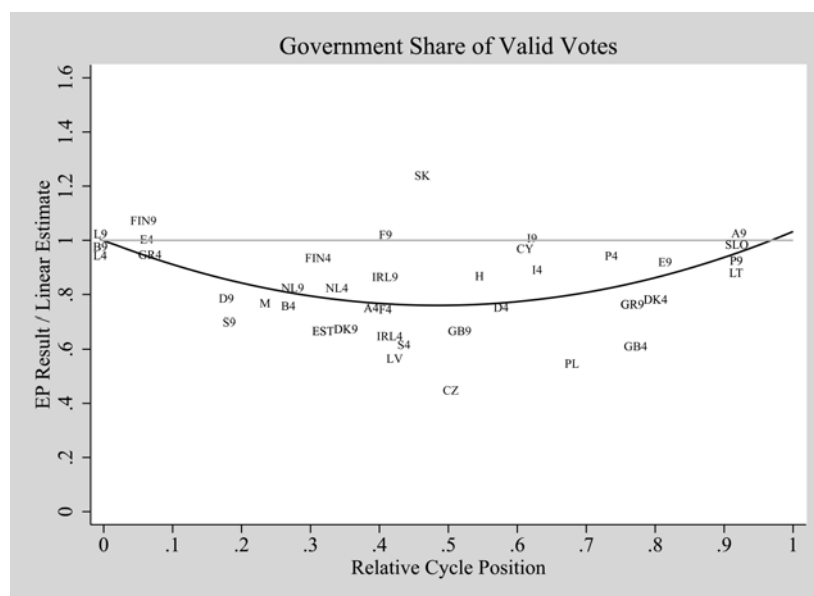
Although they resemble national parliamentary elections in these points, European Elections cannot be assumed to function in the same way. While Reif and Schmitt provided a set of differences, the main one lies in the restricted powers of the European Parliament. Unlike national parliaments, it cannot generate a government, and its legislative competencies are not (yet) comparable to its national counterparts.³

As European Elections are dominated by national political actors and issues, but are considered less important than national parliamentary elections, Reif and Schmitt classify them as “second-order elections”. Hence, European Elections are comparable to sub-national elections of various kinds. From the point of view of electoral research, the European Union is a common subsystem of its national states (Reif 1984: 245). According to Reif and Schmitt, this peculiarity implies four main effects on election outcomes in comparison to first-order elections:

- Turnout decreases because public interest is low.
- Small and new parties gain by attracting voters who use to cast their ballot strategically for big parties in first-order elections.
- The share of invalid votes increases because voters can articulate protest motives without strategic considerations.
- National government parties lose because some former government voters express dissatisfaction with the government’s performance by supporting an opposition party. They follow a “voice” strategy according to Hirschman (1970).

The last point has since attracted the highest scholarly attention. As Reif and Schmitt proposed, the government losses can be modelled as a function of the timing of the European Elections in the national legislative period. Losses should be highest around midterm and fade towards the beginning and the end of the period, therefore leading to a classical electoral cycle (Goodhart and Bhansali 1970; Miller and Mackie 1973; Stimson 1976; Tufté 1975). *Figure 1* shows this cyclical development combined for the European Elections of 1999 and 2004.

Figure 1 The electoral cycle for 1999 and 2004



Horizontal axis following Reif (1984): number of days between first national and European election divided by number of days between the two national elections. estimate of legal length if second election is still to occur.
Vertical axis following Dinkel (1977): government share at European elections divided by its hypothetical share at a concurrent national election, estimated by the linear trend value between the two national elections. only first result if second election is still to occur.
Fitted line: quadratic function estimated with OLS regression. $\text{adj. } R^2 = 0.19$, parameters significant at $p = 0.01$.

³ Meanwhile the President and his Commission must be supported by the Parliament, but the Parliament cannot generate a government on its own rights.

This model once more confirms the conventional second-order elections theory on empirical grounds. But what can be said about the theoretical foundation of the cycle approach? Why should strategic protest voting against the government happen mostly at midterm? European Election results follow the national popularity curves, this is the hardly instructive argument in Reif and Schmitt (1980: 9f.).

The search for a truly theoretical argument explaining the drop in governmental popularity identified performance problems in policy-making as the central variable. Either governments maximize economic performance only towards election day (Nordhaus 1975) or they simply fail due to problems of “overload” (King 1975).

Thus, the conventional second-order elections theory generally proposes:

- (a) The second-order elections cycle is driven by strategic electoral behaviour.
- (b) This strategic behaviour is a reaction to performance deficits of the government.

2.2 Theory II – An alternative approach

Whatever the source of the above-mentioned performance deficits, the conventional second-order theory explains European Election results according to a populist or bottom-up model of the electoral process. Voters intentionally produce a second-order cycle, and it is upon them alone to “switch off” government losses towards the end of the period. This view falls short of two main insights from electoral research:

Firstly, a purely populist model may be accommodating on normative grounds, but it is hardly helpful for understanding the actual dynamics of electoral processes. As some of the most influential theories of mass politics argue, democracy is best understood as a reciprocal dependency of elites and voters, or even as a unidirectional exertion of influence from the “elitist” top to the “popular” bottom (Deutsch 1968; Edelman 1964; Key 1966; Schumpeter 1942).

With the notable exception of Tóka (2006), this perspective is completely missing in second-order elections research. This is astonishing because an elitist approach allows for an almost self-evident interpretation of the cyclical government losses. Obviously, the cycle closely follows the campaign efforts parties undertake in their national political arenas. These are highest during the months leading up to election day and the period after, and decline during midterm. By timing things in this way parties try to bring their own voters to the polls at the right time and to convince undecided and formerly opposed voters of the merits of their respective political programs.

According to this reformulation, second-order effects result from a systematic mobilization deficit at midterm. With regard to differences in turnout, this logic is intuitively appealing: the higher the first-order mobilization in a nation state, the higher the second-order turnout at European Elections occurring “incidentally” during a first-order campaign. But why should a mobilization deficit lead to losses in government support?

To answer this question, we are forced to acknowledge a bottom-up restriction on mobilization efforts. At midterm, government parties suffer a strategic disadvantage, because their platforms are evaluated primarily on the basis of their actual (non)achievements (in terms of retrospective voting: Fiorina 1978). Meanwhile opposition parties are less restricted in their programmatic flexibility. However, once the first-order campaign has started, both government and opposition parties advertise future policies (in terms of prospective voting:

Kuklinski and West 1981).⁴ On that account the chances for mobilization are structured by the specific logic of voting behaviour.

Secondly, the conventional second-order elections theory is mainly apolitical. What matters for vote choice are the at best somewhat obscure shortcomings of government performance. The actual independent variable is policy effectiveness, while other major determinants of voting behaviour are neglected. Of course, the parsimony of the model is intended. It is exactly the credo of large parts of electoral research that European Elections simply mirror national elections (Schmitt and Mannheimer 1991) – except for the reactions to the government’s failure. But do government parties only fail in one dimension – the mere implementation of their promises?

We employed the term “apolitical” to second-order research to make clear a vote on governmental performance does not imply a choice between competing policy alternatives. To overstate the point, the theory assumes all parties actually offer the same product and differ only to the extent that voters believe they could really deliver. Again it must be said, this is intended, but by this intention the theory misses an important point: As research on political representation shows, it is exactly the distinction between political platforms that makes the democratic process effective (Miller et al. 1999; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).

According to these considerations, the second-order model should be amended by adding policy positions or ideological orientations as independent variables. Of course, the immediate counter-argument from conventional second-order theory reads: It has repeatedly been shown that the democratic process at European Elections can be called anything but effective (Franklin, Eijk and Marsh 1996). But does that mean model-based, analytical approaches can leave all related conditions to normative accounts? We propose quite the opposite: Of course democracy at the European level suffers from the second-order nature of its elections. But political representation may not solely be the victim in this drama – it may very well be the culprit, too.

To be more precise, if democratic representation fails at European Elections, then the cause lies with the first-order arenas and not with the European arena itself. But this cause is to be found in the first-order process of representation itself, not in the government’s performance deficit. Interestingly, this argument distances itself from conventional second-order theory simply by taking the logic of the theory to its extremes. But how exactly should national representation processes affect the outcome of European Elections?

The answer to this question links our two arguments on mobilization and representation. According to the Responsible Party Model of political representation developed by Schattschneider (1942), competition via policy alternatives is the central prerequisite of an effective democratic process. In Schattschneider’s own words: “Democracy is a competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process” (1960: 141). Schattschneider does not allege that parties are interested in representation itself. Rather he assumes that a working representational system emerges as a by-product of the partisan struggle for power.

In this context it is important to note the parallel to our argument on campaign effects. The definition of distinct policy alternatives which allow the people to make a meaningful choice is an important element of every election campaign. If voters are motivated by the quality of

⁴ This clear distinction between retro- and prospective voting is drawn on purpose. Without doubt things are more complicated: As Downs (1957) already postulated, retrospective evaluation may be the basis for prospective voting, and also opposition parties could be evaluated retrospectively with regard to their earlier performance. However, for our purpose it is enough to point out a *relative* difference in the conditions for mobilization between government and opposition.

representation parties offer, the electoral connection at European Elections should work best close to or concurrent with national elections. On the other hand, if first-order campaign effects are mainly absent (the situation at midterm) European Elections cannot profit from them. From this point of view, a working democratic process relies on the leadership aspect of political representation already elaborated by Dalton (1985) and tellingly referred to as “representation from above” by Esaiasson and Holmberg (1996).

And, finally, the interaction of campaign mobilization with democratic representation gives an answer to the theoretical problem of cyclical government losses. We have argued that the government’s strategic flexibility is severely restricted during midterm due to prevailing retrospective evaluations of its policy. We have also argued that campaigning effectively means providing the public with distinct policy alternatives. As a result, government losses can be explained by its limited ability to mobilize voters via appealing political positions during midterm.

From this discussion we can formulate counter-versions to the propositions derived from the conventional second-order elections theory above:

- ad (a) The second-order elections cycle is driven by changes in the level of political mobilization contingent on the periodicity of first-order campaigning.
- ad (b) Mobilization does not (only) depend on performance, but (also) on the quality of democratic representation in terms of distinct programmatic alternatives.

The first counter-proposition is very much in line with the recent contribution by Tóka (2006), although we employ a different research strategy. To the best of our knowledge, the second counter-proposition is a new contribution to the field. Both propositions are tested in the following sections.

3.1 Setting up the model I – Information flow and persuasion effects

Testing the effect of first-order campaigning on voting behaviour at European Elections requires a general model of opinion formation. As will be seen, Zaller’s (1992) theory of mass opinion lends itself to our purpose:

Zaller describes opinion formation as top-down process, going beyond Converse’s (1962) landmark article on information flow in election campaigns. Parties (or political actors in general) communicate their campaign messages to the voters. Zaller distinguishes *persuasive messages* and *cueing messages*. Persuasive messages contain the statements parties want their voters to believe. Cueing messages provide context information which allows voters to link a persuasive message to their political *predispositions*. Calling for higher welfare payments is a persuasive message, referring to values of fundamental equality is a cueing message. Both types of messages are handled by voters in a two-step process, *reception* and *acceptance*. Of course, a message must be received before it can become relevant. But voters won’t be persuaded until they actually accept the message.

Opinion formation in election campaigns can be understood in these terms, although things are a bit more complicated here. First of all, parties send messages on political issues to the voters. These positions then constitute the party platforms. Hence, the initial task for parties is to make sure voters receive information on their platforms. But that is not the full story. In the case of party platforms especially, persuasion is involved even at this early stage. Positions must be communicated in a credible way, so that voters actually believe the party is serious

about its promises. Only then begins the “real” business of persuasion: Parties try to make voters accept their messages, i.e. to adopt the party positions.⁵

Up to that point Zaller’s account does not go much beyond a helpful heuristic concept. But which factors actually determine the probability of message reception and acceptance? Here, Zaller distinguishes properties of the potential receptors from those of the message itself.

On the voters’ side, reception depends on the level of *cognitive engagement (awareness)* with the issue in question. The higher the voters’ awareness, the higher is the probability they will be exposed to and comprehend political messages. With regard to acceptance, the relationship is reversed: Voters with higher awareness tend to resist attempts at persuasion more often. This is because voters need information to link the content of a message to their political predispositions. If they lack this information, they are more likely to accept messages even if they are incongruent with their predispositions.⁶

The consequences of this basic mechanism differ according to the political constellation among the elite. If there is a mainstream position among the major parties, agreement will be high in the electorate as well. Additionally, higher awareness supports agreement because the probability of reception rises while alternative cueing messages – the basis of potential resistance – are largely absent. On the contrary, if parties are divided over an issue and communicate opposing messages, mass opinion will be polarized along the lines of political predispositions. Higher awareness now leads to a more pronounced polarization because contextual information allows voters to evaluate messages in light of their predispositions.

Concerning the properties of the messages themselves, *intensity* and *familiarity* both enhance the probability of reception.⁷ At the next stage however, intensity implies higher and familiarity lower probability of acceptance. Familiarity means people are well prepared to resist a message, while intensity may overcome this resistance. Furthermore, intensity should be more effective among the less aware who have little means to offer resistance, and – almost exceptionally – the same applies for familiarity: Although familiarity gives less-aware voters a relative advantage to resist, this is overcompensated by their relatively higher probability of receiving the message in the first instance.

3.2 Setting up the model II – Two dimensions of party competition

Although the above account of the Zaller model generated some precise expectations of general campaign effects, we can’t draft specific hypotheses unless the concrete sets of issues are known, including their central properties (intensity and familiarity). This section discusses the two dimensions of party competition which are dominant in European electoral research: the traditional left-right dimension and the EU-specific integration dimension.

According to the classic macro-sociological theory of political conflict (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), voters are aligned along social cleavages which are transferred into the party system. Today the left-right dimension is considered as the main survivor of the historic cleavage

⁵ In the strict sense Zaller describes attitude change as an alteration of the long-term response probability. This is because persuasion only changes the pool of considerations in a voter’s head, but it never replaces the considerations themselves.

⁶ Consequently Zaller distinguishes *partisan resistance* (due to incongruent predispositions) and *inertial resistance* (due to the prior mass of considerations). A third type is *countervailing resistance* (due to the neutralizing effect of opposing messages).

⁷ Intensity of a message depends on the initial knowledge among the electorate on the one hand and on the extent of news coverage on the other. Familiarity depends on the mass of prior considerations. Although both concepts bear traits of the individual-level properties discussed above, but they clearly relate to units of messages or issues.

system. Although Converse (1964) was initially sceptic about its powers, later research praised its extensive applicability and structural properties (Bobbio 1996; Laponce 1981).

A systematic elaboration was finally provided by Fuchs and Klingemann (1989). Following Luhmann (1975; 1981) they regard the left-right dimension as a generalized medium of communication. For individuals it serves an orientation function, allowing them to relate a range of issue positions to a single dimension. For the political system it serves a communication function, facilitating communication although the involved persons might possess different notions of the concrete meaning. This is because “individual left-right schemata can be seen as incomplete reflections of the collective schema of left and right.” (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989: 207).

Apart from its prevalence among Western mass publics, the left-right dimension offers advantageous conditions for political mobilization. Of course parties do not proclaim a left-right position *per se*. Rather they communicate a specific selection from the elements of the collective schema of left and right, thus preparing the menu for their voters. Again, our argument suggests understanding mobilization as top-down definition of distinct policy alternatives. The logic of party competition does not concur with a Downsian notion of median adaptation. In fact the election campaigns we observe reflect the struggle for the *definition* of the median position via manipulation of the meaning of ‘left’ and ‘right’.

While we expect strong campaign effects on the left-right dimension, the picture is different with regard to the integration dimension. First of all, the integration dimension lacks the structural properties described for left-right above. Thomassen and Schmitt (1999) find that MEPs’ positions on integration issues are only weakly related to the traditional ideological differences between party federations while nation is a much more important factor. This suggests to regard the integration dimension as a non-structural issue as compared to the structural issues constrained by left-right (Thomassen 1999). However, this is not the main reason for cautious expectations of campaign effects on the integration dimension.

Although one might expect that European Elections especially should deal with European integration, this dimension has always been the problem child of electoral research. Only when the European integration process began as an elite project was it assumed to be legitimized by a “permissive consensus” of the people (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). Although mass opinion has diversified since, the major parties stuck by their pro-European positions (Eijk and Franklin 2004). The political supply side in questions of integration resembles a cartel.

This peculiarity is explained by Hix and Lord (1997) with a pattern of strategic assimilation of the major parties. Hix and Lord argue that the traditional parties find their identity on the left-right dimension, while the integration dimension runs orthogonal to this basic alignment. Therefore these parties (as well as the European party federations) hold a potential source of internal conflict. To avoid negative electoral consequences parties converge to a common pro-European position, so conflict and competition are prevented. Although it has been shown that parties are able to update voter support in matters of integration (Weßels 1995), their mobilization capacities should be restrained by the risk of internal dissent.

This view is not uncontested. Hooghe and Marks (1999) suggest the two dimensions do not run orthogonal to each other but are strongly related in certain policy fields, and Gabel and Anderson (2004) even see the two dimensions merged in one single dimension. However, as Gabel and Hix (2002: 954) argue, mapping the dimensions of conflict *between* parties does not tell us anything about the initial problem of conflict *within* parties or party federations. On the contrary, it is exactly the process of strategic assimilation that may conceal this troublesome feature of European party systems. At least there seem to be increasing signs of

real consequences (Ferrara and Weishaupt 2004; Ray 2003; Steenbergen, Edwards and Netjes forthcoming; Steenbergen and Scott 2004).

3.3 Setting up the model III – Hypotheses

After this discussion of the European political space, we can identify the Zallerian properties of the two dimensions of party competition. On the left-right dimension with its broad range of topics and its favourable structural properties we assume high intensity and high familiarity. On the integration dimension with its lack of structural identity and its potential for intra-party dissent we assume low intensity and low familiarity. Accordingly our hypotheses read as follows:

- H1 Left-Right: Campaign effects mainly occur close to national elections.
- H2 Integration: Campaign effects are largely absent.
- H3 Left-Right: Higher awareness leads to weaker campaign effects.
- H4 Integration: Higher awareness leads to stronger campaign effects.
- H5 Left-Right: Campaign effects polarize mass opinion.
- H6 Integration: Campaign effects streamline mass opinion.

Additionally, we consider the size of the competing parties. Bigger parties should get more news coverage, which raises intensity. On the other hand, intensity might suffer because big parties must design their messages for a broad electorate (following Kirchheimer's (1966) "catch-all" logic). Given the above discussion, we expect this logic on left-right only. However, the same net effect might result on the integration dimension because small parties are less affected by the risk of internal divisions. For this reason the following analysis deals with an open empirical question on both dimensions:⁸

- H7a both dimensions: Party size enhances campaign effects.
- H7b both dimensions: Party size reduces campaign effects.

Apart from electoral size, parties are characterized by the size of their issue set. As campaign effects are measured on generalized dimensions, single-issue parties should do poorly:

- H8 both dimensions: Single-issues parties generate weaker campaign effects than ideological platform parties.

To test these hypotheses, we employ a two-step procedure. The first step is concerned with the communication of party positions, the second one with attitude change among the electorate.

4.1 Results I – Communication of party positions

As explained in section 3.1, even the mere communication of party positions involves a process of persuasion, so Zaller's propositions concerning both reception and acceptance must be considered at this level. Voters will only assign a certain position to a party if they are convinced the party is going for these policies. Hence, our initial task is to measure voters' certainty about party positions. However, unlike positions themselves, the degree of certainty is not included in the EES questionnaires (nor would we consider such a measure as overly reliable).

⁸ The third logical possibility is a quadratic relation with medium-sized parties doing best. As there were no signs of non-linearity, things are kept simple here.

Another approach to measure certainty is to look at deviations from “objective” values obtained from manifesto analysis or expert judgements. Unfortunately this is not very helpful for studies of political competition where party positions are assumed to be endogenous to the communication process. If one takes this assumption seriously, the only way out is to define certainty itself as an endogenous feature of mass opinion. A suitable measure has been developed by Eijk (2001).

Eijk’s measure is designed to record the agreement among voters on the exact party positions. Instead of estimating the certainty of individual voters, the measure of agreement reflects the level of certainty of the whole electorate. The relation to our hypotheses is clear: If parties advertise their platforms intensively, agreement among voters is supposed to rise. If campaign efforts slow down, opinion should diffuse. This should not be confused with the hypothesis on opinion polarization. Perceptions of party positions are expected to converge during a campaign, while mass opinion – i.e. voters’ own policy positions – should diverge across but not within parties.

The measure of agreement is applicable to ordered rating scales such as the left-right and integration dimensions represented by ten-point scales in the EES datasets. As it is insensitive to the location of the mean, it is superior to standard deviations or related measures.⁹ In spite of some other favourable properties, the measure has one flaw: It does not take missing values into account. Especially in case of questions referring to knowledge this is an important point. Response could be subject to self-selection so uncertain respondents simply produce missing values and agreement is finally overestimated. Our last hypothesis controls for this effect:

H9 both dimensions: Higher agreement is associated with a higher share of missing values.

We calculated Eijk’s measure for all the parties included in the respective EES-questions on left-right and integration positions.¹⁰ An initial inspection supports the general assumption of differences between the two dimensions of party competition: Mean agreement on the left-right dimension (0.45) is higher than on the integration dimension (0.31). However the dynamics involved in our hypotheses can be only tested in a multivariate regression design.

The relative cycle position (see *Figure 1*) is considered in its simple and squared form to check for the expected cyclical course of campaign effects. The simple term represents the initial (supposedly downward) course of the cycle while the squared term should raise the curve towards the end of the period. Political awareness is represented by a four-point interest scale, averaged per country and election year.¹¹ Single-issue parties are denoted by a dummy variable.¹² Party size is operationalized as the share of valid votes at the last national election.¹³ Just like party size, the share of missing values for the dependent variable is scaled

⁹ The measure is constructed by decomposing the empirical distribution into weighted layers and assessing the degree of unimodality on the basis of triples of categories. Complete agreement is represented by 1, perfect polarization by -1 and an even distribution by 0. For details see Eijk (2001). Here and in the following, individual-level cases were double-weighted so each country has the same weight and party support reflects the official results of the European Elections. The EES weight had to be corrected on several occasions.

¹⁰ 264 parties for left-right, 258 for integration (difference due to extensive left-right set in Italy 1999).

¹¹ For Zaller, measures of knowledge are superior to measures of interest for representing awareness. Unfortunately the EES dataset for 1999 contains only a very limited, binary knowledge item, and the dataset for 2004 contains none at all. Therefore we have to be satisfied with the “limited” but still related effect of political interest (Zaller 1992: 43).

¹² The “single-issues” identified are: ethnical or regional minority concerns, ethnocentric nationalism, immigration, religion, corruption, pensions, hunting, and anti-EU protest. Of course the latter is not included for the integration dimension.

¹³ If a party did not run at the last national election, it is assigned its result at the European Election. This seems preferable to zero-size.

0 to 1.¹⁴ Due to outlier bias we used robust regression (Huber-bisquare transformation). Essentially, this is nothing but a compromise between dropping the outliers and violating OLS-assumptions. As the national datasets differ with regard to the number of parties included, cases are inversely weighted by the number of parties per country and election year while overall n is kept constant. *Table 1* shows the results:

Table 1 Perceptual agreement through the electoral cycle

	Left-Right	Integration
Cycle position (simple)	-0.322** (0.117)	0.251** (0.085)
Cycle position (squared)	0.311** (0.120)	-0.384** (0.087)
Political awareness	-0.159** (0.035)	0.061* (0.027)
Party size	-0.222** (0.073)	0.040 (0.052)
Single-issue party	-0.206** (0.027)	0.032 (0.021)
Share of missing values (dimension-specific)	-0.561** (0.082)	0.045 (0.052)
Constant	1.065** (0.101)	0.128 (0.084)
Observations	264	258
Adjusted R-squared	0.343	0.140

Standard errors in parentheses.

* significant at 0.05; ** significant at 0.01

Dependent variable is Eijk's (2001) measure of perceptual agreement.

Given are robust regression estimates (Huber-bisquare transformation).

Party-level cases are inversely weighted by parties per country and year while n is kept constant.

The regression table shows many expected effects, but also a big surprise. First of all, the campaign cycle runs as expected on the left-right dimension (H1). Parties succeed in forming a relatively uniform mass opinion about their platforms at election time, while midterm is characterized by an information deficit (see also Alvarez and Glasgow 1997; Andersen, Tilley and Heath 2005). This finding can account for the second-order effect at European Elections.

Looking at the campaign cycle on the integration dimension, one finds the surprise promised above: Not only does the cycle not follow the left-right pattern (H2), it even runs in the opposite direction! Parties do not mobilize, they *de*-mobilize voters at election time by taking vague and ambiguous positions on integration issues. This takes the Hix-Lord argument to its extremes: Parties are so afraid of internal conflict over European integration that they try to neutralize this issue whenever elections are approaching. Only at midterm voters are granted a rest from this sorry spectacle.

The effect of political awareness conforms with our hypotheses. The intense campaign information on left-right gets through especially to unaware voters with little means to resist,

¹⁴ The share of missing values for Belgium (1999) and Great Britain (2004) is calculated on the basis of regional samples.

so awareness is negatively related to agreement (H3). The reverse is true on the integration dimension (H4). It probably needs quite some awareness to cope with strategic disinformation.

Party size negatively affects agreement on left-right (H7). Obviously big parties have to obey the rules of “catch-all” politics while small parties can mobilize their voters with precise policy announcements. As expected, single-issue parties do poorly on the highly generalized left-right dimension (H8). However, neither party size nor the single-issue dummy show noteworthy effects on the integration dimension. Not really counter-intuitively, “catch-all” politics do not matter with regard to integration issues, and – rather ironically – the big platform parties do not do any better than marginal single-issue parties (nor, arguably, do they want to).

On the integration dimension, the influence of the share of missing values tends to support our hypothesis (H9), but it is far from significant. On left-right, the expected effect is even reversed. Here, a high share of missing values simply reflects general uncertainty. Although that does not mean there is no self-selection at work at all, the opposite effect is stronger.

4.2 Results II – Spatial representation

Recapitulating the last section, there is considerable evidence of cyclical campaign effects. During a campaign voters learn about party positions, so the foundation stone for “enlightened preferences” (Gelman and King 1993) is laid. However, when talking about preferences, it becomes clear that as yet not much is said about the representation of voters’ own positions by the parties. While all the above results refer to counter-proposition (a), we now turn to counter-proposition (b).

The question is whether campaign mobilization affects not only perceptions but also preferences themselves. And if it does, will mass opinion polarize on left-right as expected? It is tempting to approach these questions by simply running the above regression model again, but replacing perceptual agreement by preferential agreement. There is one major obstacle: While perceptual agreement can be dealt with in terms of Zaller’s model of political communication, preferential agreement is largely determined by systemic and structural factors. The attempt to control for all effects of cleavage development, social structure, party systems etc. seems rather unreasonable.

To avoid these problems, actual voting behaviour is taken into account. After all cyclical government losses are provoked by voters turning from government to opposition parties at European Elections. Accordingly we can distinguish core voters (who stick with their party) and defectors (who turn to another party) and compare the policy positions of the two groups. The basic assumption is that core voters are in a state of partisan mobilization at any time during the election period while the behaviour of defectors reflects a mobilization deficit. Therefore the core voters’ positions provide the baseline which would be almost impossible to define in the model of preferential agreement discussed above.

According to the conventional second-order elections theory, the form of defection responsible for the second-order effect is strategic protest voting against the government. Based on a comprehensive voter typology incorporating measures of behaviour, preference and attitude, this view can be rejected.¹⁵ Government losses are induced instead by true changes of party preference (vote switching) and alienation from the political system (abstention). We consider these types in addition to core and protest voters.

¹⁵ A detailed table can be found in the annex. A corresponding article on the voter types and their second-order behaviour is in preparation. For the meantime, further information can be obtained by request from the author.

Based on Schattschneider’s Responsible Party Model we have argued that mobilization depends on the quality of democratic representation. If this is correct core voters should be better represented than any of the defecting groups. Following Achen (1977; 1978) we measure representation by the distances between parties and voters on the two ten-point scales, averaged per party in the dataset.¹⁶ Additionally, representation is evaluated for three elections: the European Election (EE), the preceding national election (NE1), and a hypothetical national election the day after the interviews (NE2). The following figures always refer to the party a respondent voted for at the respective election.

Table 2 Mean distances between parties and their voters

	Left-Right			Integration		
	NE1	EE	NE2	NE1	EE	NE2
Core Voters	1.09	1.11	1.08	1.76	1.75	1.74
Strategic Protest Voters	1.31	1.89	1.37	1.92	2.15	1.86
True Preference Changers	2.18	1.57	1.66	2.40	2.08	2.08
Politically Alienated	1.60			2.26		

The first result from *Table 2* is clear: In all cases representation on left-right is better than on the integration dimension. Even at European Elections this pattern does not change. Furthermore, core voters are better represented than the other groups. For core voters the quality of representation is sufficient to mobilize them for at least three elections in a row.¹⁷ By contrast protest voters are farther away from their NE1 party. They react to this deficit by strategically supporting a party they actually dislike at the EE, which is reflected by the distance measure. For preference changers the initial representation deficit is much more pronounced. It leads them to abandon their NE1 party and support a closer party in the long run. The NE1 distance for alienated voters is higher compared to protest voters but lower compared to preference changers. Obviously protest voting is no longer a reasonable option, but long-term change reaches too far.

We draw two conclusions from this analysis: Firstly, the distinction between the two dimensions is confirmed. Ironically a distance measure producing alienation on left-right is still better than the maximum core voters achieve on the integration dimension! Secondly, second-order voting behaviour is determined by the quality of representation by national parties. As preference change and alienation strike government parties harder than opposition parties, government losses can be ascribed to a representation deficit.

4.3 Results III – Persuasion and polarization

In spite of everything, counter-proposition (b) is not exhausted yet. According to Schattschneider congruence between parties and voters depends on *distinct* programmatic alternatives. A related argument can be made with Zaller: As the careful reader will have noticed, hypotheses 5 and 6 have been passed over without comment. However it is exactly the polarization of mass opinion (at least on left-right) in reaction to diverging party positions

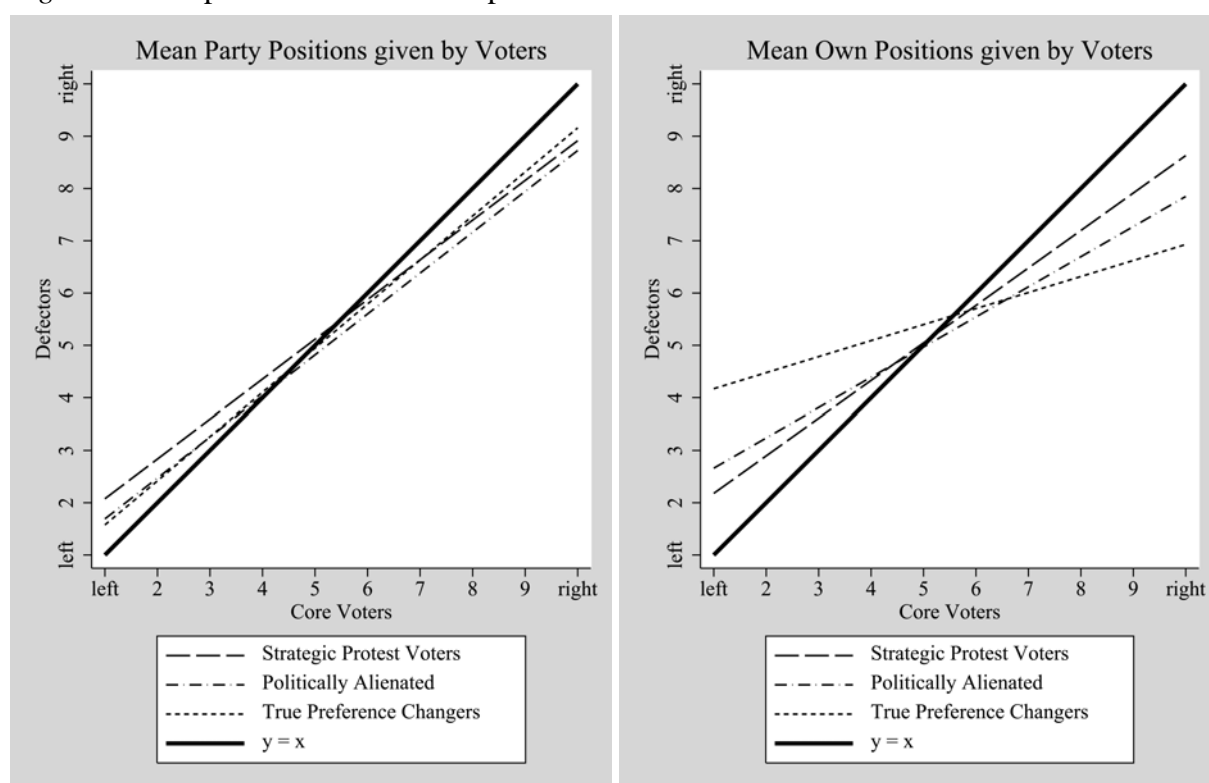
¹⁶ Achen shows that the mean is preferable to correlational measures. Unlike Achen, we do not use squared values what would add to the sensitivity of the mean to extreme values, and we consider party-voter dyads instead of representative-constituency dyads what suits the reality of European party systems better than the US-centred representative model (Esaiasson 1999).

¹⁷ There are slight differences between elections because intra-government and intra-opposition switching is allowed. Obviously the consequences are irrelevant.

that would complete our picture. So far we have shown parties can change both mass perception of their positions and the quality of spatial representation. But do parties only move themselves, or do they move their voters as well? Only if the latter can be shown is there reason to assume persuasion effects.

Needless to say, tracking opinion change with cross-sectional data is no easy task. While time-series data have been shown to be useful in this context (Abramowitz 1978; Page and Shapiro 1984) we have to find another way to pinpoint change. Fortunately we can go back to the baseline measure discussed in the previous section: With core voters showing no sign of declining mobilization, their positions can be contrasted with the dynamics in the other groups. As the size of these groups varies in a cyclical manner, opinion change can be derived logically. *Figure 2* compares the mean NE1 party and own positions of core voter and defector groups.¹⁸

Figure 2 The polarization of mass opinion



Regression and weighting as described for *Table 1*. All parameters significant at $p = 0.01$.

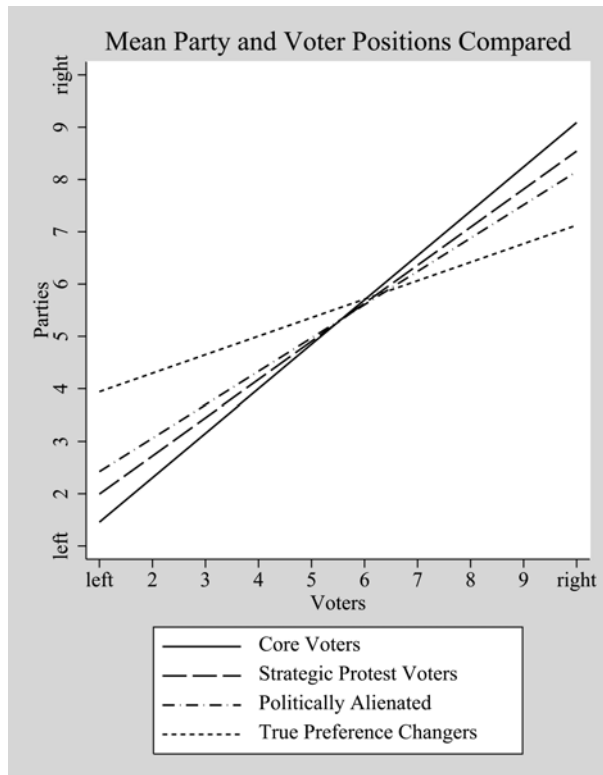
To begin with party positions, we find the expected phenomenon: The more extreme core voters see their parties, the more moderate is the perception of the defector groups *in relative terms*. Hence parties mobilize their voters by updating a public image of distinct, diverging platforms. This strategy has profound consequences for voters' own positions. Again, the more extreme core voters assess their own preferences, the more moderate are the self-assessments of the defector groups *in relative terms*. Voters follow their parties towards the extremes of the political space when confronted with effective campaign mobilization (H5). If the latter is missing, voters swing back to their original positions at the centre.¹⁹

¹⁸ As competition on the integration dimension is characterized by *de*-mobilization, whatever result could not be attributed to mobilization effects. Therefore the following procedure is applied to the left-right dimension only (H6 is dropped).

¹⁹ One might object to this argument because the distance between voters and parties could be affected by ex-post rationalization. That means voters project their own positions onto the party they have voted for and seek a contrast to the other parties (Brug 1996; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Krosnick 1990; Merrill, Grofman and

Concerning the differences between groups, the pattern found above is confirmed. The largest swing-back is associated with preference change, followed by alienation and protest voting. *Figure 3* shows how this line-up is translated into the congruence deficit discussed in the previous section. Instead of comparing groups of voters, voters' perceptions of party positions are plotted against their self-assessments.

Figure 3 Polarization and representation



Regression and weighting as described for *Table 1*. All parameters significant at $p = 0.01$.

While core voters are appropriately represented by their NE1 parties, protest voters, alienated voters and preference changers depart from this ideal bit by bit. This goes so far that preference changers see their former party always at the centre of the space, almost independently of their own position!

As the four regression lines make clear, the congruence deficit cannot be explained simply by random variation of party and voter positions in defector groups. Rather, there is a systematic relation between voter positions and congruence: The more extreme a defector, the higher is the distance to the former party. The conclusion is clear: If voters are not provided with distinct policy platforms, they are not willing to stick with their parties.²⁰ Typical second-order voting behaviour can be traced back to this mobilization deficit.

5. Conclusion

Irrespective of all the theoretical and methodological divergences, this paper joins a long line of European electoral research. The characteristics of European Elections, and especially cyclical government losses, can be explained by the logic of second-order elections. However, while the conventional second-order theory emphasizes strategic protest voting due to governmental performance deficits, it could be shown that first-order campaign mobilization accounts for the second-order effect. In doing so, mobilization depends on the quality of democratic representation in terms of voter-party congruence on distinct programmatic positions.

Adams 2001). However, if voters take relatively moderate positions at midterm and parties go for more extreme positions during a campaign, then why do voters not continue to project their positions onto parties? Instead voters follow their parties if and only if the latter embark on extreme strategies. This must be a process of persuasion, projection can be ruled out logically.

²⁰ In the strict sense there are two processes at work: The own positions of extreme voters are rather stable, but they are confronted with a relatively moderate perception of party positions at midterm. For moderate voters both own positions and perceptions are subject to swing-back. Interestingly, defection occurs although a new congruence position emerges at the centre of the space. This confirms our assumption that effective representation means congruence induced by mobilization via distinct policy alternatives, not just any form of congruence.

For democracy at the national level this is good news. As the pressure of political competition prompts parties to promote programmatic choice, representation can be said to function effectively. By contrast the European arena may only benefit indirectly from national campaigns, but even these mere by-products are missing in most cases. Without the orientation guide provided by political competition, voters are generally lost with regard to European Union politics. Accordingly, systematic government losses can be ascribed to the restricted capacities of government parties for successful mobilization.

Furthermore, the virtues of campaign effects can only be found in connection with traditional socio-economic issues. In contrast, questions of European integration are systematically kept out of political competition. As the major parties are plagued by internal dissent about integration, they do not only avoid the issue but actually try to de-mobilize voters at election time by taking vague and ambiguous positions with regard to EU-specific affairs.

The implications for democracy in the European Union are rather depressing: Political representation by the European Parliament is dominated by a systematic bias which finds its roots in the logic of party competition in the national arenas. Therefore, minor institutional reform may not serve as a remedy for the 'democratic deficit'. However, major reform strategies aiming at the full parliamentarization of the European Union would turn the basic logic upside down: If Europe became the first-order arena, mobilization deficits would necessarily emerge in the nation states. Second-order effects are adaptable.

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Annex: A Voter Typology

Type	Voting Decisions			Qualification Criteria		Interest	Satisfaction	Dissociation from
	NP1	EP	NP2	basic	PTVs			
Core Voters	GOV NV	GOV GOV	GOV GOV					
Strategic Protest Voters	GOV GOV GOV NV NV NV	OPP OPP NV OPP OPP NV	GOV NV GOV GOV NV GOV	GOV > OPP GOV > OPP OPP < MAX	GOV = MAX ; OPP < MAX GOV = MAX ; OPP < MAX	EU ≥ GEN EU ≥ GEN	EU ≥ NAT EU ≥ NAT	Sincere Euro-Switchers & Indifferent Disinterested & Dissatisfied Sincere Euro-Switchers & Indifferent Inconsistent Disinterested & Dissatisfied
Sincere Euro-Switchers	GOV NV	OPP OPP	GOV GOV	OPP > GOV OPP > GOV	GOV < MAX ; OPP = MAX GOV < MAX ; OPP = MAX			Strategic Protest Voters & Indifferent Strategic Protest Voters & Indifferent
True Preference Changers	GOV GOV	OPP NV	OPP OPP					
Politically Alienated	GOV	NV	NV	MAX = 1 GOV < MAX GOV ≠ MAX(OPP)				Indifferent
Indifferent	GOV GOV GOV NV	GOV OPP NV OPP	OPP GOV NV GOV	GOV = OPP GOV = OPP GOV = MAX = MAX(OPP) > 1 GOV = OPP				Inconsistent Strategic Protest Voters & Sincere Euro-Switchers Alienated Strategic Protest Voters & Sincere Euro-Switchers
Disinterested	GOV NV	NV NV	GOV GOV			GEN > EU GEN > EU	EU ≥ NAT EU ≥ NAT	Strategic Protest Voters & Dissatisfied Strategic Protest Voters & Dissatisfied
Dissatisfied	GOV NV	NV NV	GOV GOV				NAT > EU NAT > EU	Strategic Protest Voters & Disinterested Strategic Protest Voters & Disinterested
Never-Voters (indifferent)	NV	NV	NV	MAX(GOV) = MAX(OPP) > 1				Never-Voters (alienated)
Never-Voters (alienated)	NV	NV	NV	MAX = 1 MAX(GOV) ≠ MAX(OPP)				Never-Voters (indifferent)

Intra-government or intra-opposition switching is not considered.

This table applies for government parties. An equivalent table for opposition parties can be obtained by simply exchanging “GOV” and “OPP”.

Key

NP1	Preceding (real) election to national parliament
NP2	Following (hypothetical) election to national parliament
EP	Election to European Parliament
PTVs	Probabilities to vote (for a certain party)
GOV	Vote for a government party
OPP	Vote for an opposition party
NV	Not voted
MAX	Maximum
GEN	General
EU	Specifically European
NAT	Specifically national