Political Party Responses to European Parliamentary Election Results

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Abstract:

Political parties change their positions to increase their vote shares and to achieve their main goals, whether it is gaining office or implementing their policies. Yet, change is risky. Parties do not know how voters, party supporters, or activists would react to change. Therefore, parties seek information about public preferences to determine whether or how much they need to change their policies. We argue that European parliamentary elections provide information to political parties and especially to governing parties about their electoral prospects in national elections. If parties lost votes at the European level this would mean a change in public preferences away from the party, and require change. Basing our theory on the *second-order model* for the European elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980), we test whether and how political parties respond to the European election results as they change their left-right positions in their manifestos for the next national election. Empirical results using the Comparative Manifesto Project data from fourteen European Union member countries since the first European elections they participated until 2010 show that political parties use European election results as signals for their electoral prospects and change their positions if they lost votes. These results are especially relevant for governing parties that have been in power for a long period of time and when the upcoming national election is not too distant in the future. These findings have important implications for our understanding of party change as well as for the literature on European elections and their domestic consequences.

"Europe does not matter" has been a general verdict among scholars who study European parliamentary elections. Voters do not perceive these elections as relevant. Turnout is low, and has been declining since the first elections in 1979.[1] Scholars have shown that those who go to the voting booths vote more likely with an eye to the national political performance of parties rather than to express their preferences for the European Union policies (see, e.g., Gabel, 2000; Hix and Marsh, 2007).

Yet, it is exactly because of the latter *national* character of these elections that they have had important effects on national politics. As van der Eijk et al. state: "[B]ecause of the fact that European elections have no direct European consequences, they are able to carry a baggage of quite unanticipated national consequences instead" (1996, p.159). European elections indeed matter for national politics. The European Parliamentary Elections of 2009 were a blow for center-leftist parties across Europe. The ruling Labour Party in Britain gained only 15.7% of the votes, the worst election result since the early 20th century. Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Party, was quick to announce the end of the Labour Party rule: "Whether Labour holds a leadership election, holds a General Election, or defers it by a few months, I think there is now a very clear sense - and it has been building up for some time, it has just accelerated recently - that Labour is finished. It's on its last legs in many respects" (Telegraph, June 8, 2009). It was only a year later the Labour Party handed over the government to the coalition government of the Tories and the Liberals.

Elsewhere in Germany, the Social Democrats faced a devastating defeat in the same European election, less than four months before the next federal election. "European elections are rarely about Europe (…) And the results could hardly have been more revealing. Whereas last week there was still some talk about Germany's Social Democrats using the European

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[1] The turnout rates fell steadily from 63% in the 1979 election to 43% in 2009.

elections as a springboard to autumn success, it now seems clearer than ever that Chancellor Angela Merkel is likely headed for re-election as Germany's head of government" (Spiegel, June 8, 2009).

The European election results of 2009 might be peculiar for the devastation they brought to the center-left parties across Europe but they are not special for their national consequences. Spanish PM Felipe González Márquez called for an early election after the strong showing in the 1989 European elections to consolidate his mandate. "European electoral success played a role in the rise of the Front National in France and was important to the early success of the German Greens" (van der Eijk et al., 1996, 159).

Despite all this evidence of national consequences of European elections, there has not been any systematic cross-national study of the effects of these elections on national party manifestos. In rare analyses, scholars have examined the Europeanization of national parties and their programmes (see, e.g., Ladrech, 2002). Yet, most of these works have been on single country cases (see, e.g., Raunio, 1999 and Marliere, 2001). In one of the rare cross-national works on the topic, Pennings (2006) skillfully examines the general impact of the European Union membership on national election manifestos. Nevertheless, our paper is the first and only work examining *the effect of European election results* on *party policy change*, and more particularly on how political parties use these election results to inform themselves about public preferences and change their left-right positions in their election manifestos.

Following Budge (1994) and Somer-Topcu (2009), we argue that parties seek information about public preferences in an uncertain political environment. European parliamentary election results provide information about parties' national standing and especially about citizens' evaluations of governing parties' performances. Building on the second-order

model for the European elections (see below; Reif and Schmitt, 1980), which argues that voters do not hesitate to show their preferences and their dissatisfactions with political parties, and particularly with governing parties in European elections, we examine whether political parties, and especially governing parties take any lessons from these election results as they stake out their positions for the upcoming national elections.

We test the effect of European election results on national party manifestos in fourteen West European democracies. We show that there is some evidence that political parties in general change their national manifesto positions following a loss in the European election. On the other hand, we show that governing parties receive the strongest signal and change their positions significantly if they lost votes in the European election. This is particularly true if they had been in power for a long time, and if the national election was not too distant in the future following the European election.

These results, therefore, have important implications for the extant European elections literature, especially for the growing literature examining the national consequences of European elections and for our understanding of party policy changes in established democracies. In what follows, we discuss this literature and state our theory and expectations. We then discuss our research design, and show our findings. We conclude with a discussion of our results and of possible future directions for this research.

Theory:

Reif and Schmitt (1980) stated in their seminal work that European parliamentary elections are "second-order" elections, a term which has been widely tested and confirmed in the European elections literature (see, e.g., Hix and Marsh, 2007 and 2011). The second-order model

considers the European elections as "national" contests. The parties run in these European elections with their national issue priorities, and voters cast their votes to punish or award the national performances of political parties. They are also second-order elections because they are secondary to the national electoral contest. Even today, almost two years since the codecision legislative procedure between the Council and the Parliament has been fully implemented with the Lisbon Treaty, national executives still have the upper hand in European policy-making instead of the directly elected members of the European Parliament. There is also no European government that is formed following these elections.

This second-order model led scholars to argue that European elections do not matter for EU politics. Indeed, they might be right if we were solely interested in the making of *European* politics; however, because of their second-order character, these elections have had significant influence on national politics. They may not directly affect the structure of the party system (Mair, 2000), or may have weak effects on party organizations (Poguntke et al., 2007), but as Mair (2000) says the European election is "a stage on which national politics is rehearsed" (38). Indeed, Marsh and Franklin (1996) show that the outcomes of national elections are systematically related to the outcomes of European elections, "suggesting that European elections might actually be better leading indicators of subsequent national elections than they are consequences of prior ones and validating to some extent the use of such elections as markers for the standing of parties in the national political arena" (van der Eijk et al., 1996, 159). This has important implications for political parties, whose goal is to use as much information about public preferences as possible to improve their standing in national elections.

Parties, Their Goals, and Uncertainty They Face

Political parties compete in free and fair elections to increase their political power. Some

parties are primarily office-seekers (e.g., the Dutch Labour Party in 1981 and in 1989);[2] and

some parties are primarily policy-seekers (e.g., the German Greens in the 1980s).[3] However both

objectives are predicated on winning sufficient electoral support, and this is only possible if

parties respond to public opinion by shifting their policy positions in accordance with public

preferences. Party elites thereby must inform themselves about the demands and preferences of

different groups of voters, package themselves accordingly, and eventually justify their policy

positions to voters (Poguntke, 2002).

On the other hand, political parties have certain policy ideals. Any movement away from

these policy preferences should increase uncertainty and risks about the outcomes of change

because parties do not know how voters, activists, or donors would react to change, or whether

the party would lose its credibility in the eyes of voters. These possible risks increase

apprehension within the party toward policy change away from the stated policy preferences. As

a result, parties seek to keep their policy as intact as possible because of the concern over losing

their core constituents and causing uneasiness within their party organization.

This dilemma between changing party positions in response to changing public

preferences to gain votes and of keeping the policy as intact as possible to reduce risks associated

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[2] Before the 1981 election, the Dutch Labour Party experienced internal divisions about whether to moderate its policy positions to ensure cabinet posts, as opposed to maintaining its strict anti-nuclear policies. The party finally agreed to compromise. Before the 1989 election, the party had similar internal debates. After seven years in opposition, the party decided to publish a moderate manifesto to be able to take part in coalition agreements with the Christian Democrats (Hillebrand and Irwin, 1999).

[3] When the German Greens won their first seats in the Bundestag in 1983, they were identifying themselves as an "anti-party party." Even though they soon started joining coalitions at the local/land level, they eschewed governing coalitions at the federal level. As Lees (2000) states, even before the 1998 elections, after which the party became the coalition partner of the SPD for the first time, the supporters of the party "preferred the purity of perpetual opposition to the compromise and horsetrading of government" (p.1).

with change can only be overcome with information on public opinion. If political parties knew for certain where public preferences lay, and how a certain change in policy positions would help or hurt them, they would not experience this dilemma. Yet, "uncertainty is a pervasive feature of political activity" (Budge, 1994, 443). Parties can only act based on the limited information they gather from only a few sources.

In the literature, scholars have been examining the effects of different sources of information on public preferences for party change. Somer-Topcu (2009) shows how previous national election outcomes inform parties of the necessity for change, especially if there is not much time passed in between two national elections. Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) show that parties shift their positions in response to their rival parties. Pennings (1998) examines how political parties change their issue emphases on economic planning and the market in response to changes in inflation and unemployment levels.

European elections constitute another source of information for parties to educate themselves about changing public opinion. Due to the national focus of these elections, results can convey important and meaningful information to political parties about public preferences and hence about their national electoral prospects. We now turn into a more detailed analysis of European elections to state our specific hypotheses for how political parties should use these elections to change their national manifesto positions.

Implications of European Elections for National Party Politics

The second-order model for the European elections (Reif and Scchmitt, 1980) predicts three outcomes in these elections: (1) larger parties lose votes, while smaller parties increase their vote shares, (2) governing parties lose votes, (3) turnout is low. A large number of articles

and books are written to test each of these predictions with generally supportive empirical findings. Van der Eijk et al. (1996) and Marsh (1998, 2007), for instance, show consistent and strong evidence that larger parties lose votes in the European elections. While there is more mixed evidence for the governing party losses, the general conclusion is that governing parties lose votes especially in elections that are not immediately following a national election (during the honeymoon period) (see, e.g., Oppenhuis et al., 1996; Hix and Marsh, 2007). The question more important for this paper, however, is that if these predictions are correct, what lesson should the parties learn from these elections as they strategize their policy positions for the upcoming national elections.

The prediction that larger parties lose votes in these European elections compared to smaller parties, which generally increase their vote shares, rests on the argument that voters cast their votes solely on their party preferences in the elections. While voters may be inclined to vote for certain (and usually larger) parties in national elections in order to ensure that their votes are not wasted during the government formation process, the nature of the European elections allows voters to be more adventurous and vote for parties that they prefer but probably would not vote for in the national elections.

If this sincere voting ("voting with heart") argument is correct, this would indicate that political parties at the national level would use these election results to educate themselves about the real preferences of voters, which are not tainted with strategic calculations. Hence, if a party lost votes in a European election, this party could infer that the true preferences of voters lay away from the party position, and hence would change its position to more accurately reflect the preferences of voters.

These effects should be particularly strong for governing parties, who can derive more

accurate information about their electoral prospects from these election results. The second-order

model predicts that governing parties are likely to lose votes in these elections mostly because

governing party vote shares in these elections are largely a result of how much voters turned

against the government between the last national election and the current European election.

Therefore, if we see any effect of these election results on political parties' positions at the

national level, we should see the largest effects for governing parties, who use these elections to

understand how voters evaluate their performance in office. Regardless of the governing status of

the party, however, we expect political parties to change less and less as they gain votes in the

European elections. This latter expectation follows our argument that political parties experience

a dilemma between changing their positions to gain votes and keeping their positions stable to

eliminate risks associated with change. If they gained in a European election, they should not

change their positions in response to this election result. The previous position worked, and as

the saying goes, why change it if it is not broken (Janda, 1990)?

> *H1: The more votes the parties lose (gain) in the European elections, the more*
> *(less) they will change their left-right manifesto positions for the upcoming*
> *national elections, and this effect is stronger for governing parties.*

Timing of the European Elections

European elections have a fixed schedule. They have been held in June once every five

years since the first election in 1979. This means that they usually do not coincide with the

national elections. There are two reasons for these nonconcurring election schedules. First, some

countries in Europe have fixed election schedules for their national elections, which are

scheduled for a different month or year.[4] Second, most European countries usually hold early

elections. These early elections may be because of a loss of no confidence vote in the parliament

or a strategic call on the part of the governing party to benefit from its relatively positive ratings

at the time of the early election call. Regardless of what the reason is, however, it is common to

see European elections held some time between two consecutive national elections. This

nonconcurring schedule has implications for the European election outcomes, and more

importantly for this paper, for how these election results affect national party position-taking.

Reif and Schmitt (1980) and Reif (1984) suggested that the punishment effects against

governments should occur particularly in the middle of an election cycle. This argument relies on

the business cycle theory in the American politics literature where scholars have shown that

presidential parties lose votes in the midterm elections (Miller and Mackie 1973, Tufte 1975).

According to this argument, European elections right after a national election have the

"honeymoon effect," in which voters would be less inclined to vote against the government that

they elected to the office. On the other hand, European elections in the middle of election cycles

are usually when the governing parties are at their most unpopular and hence when they should

lose votes. They further argued that European elections would receive a lot of national attention

and effort on the part of national parties as the time between a European election and the

subsequent national election decreases. As a result, they conclude that the negative effect of

European elections on governing party vote shares should level-off as the next election

approaches.

Our focus in this paper is not on understanding how political parties perform in European

elections; however, instead, we seek to understand the consequences of European election results

on national party behavior. Hence, we argue that increasing national attention and efforts paid to

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[4] Norway, for instance, has national elections once in every four years in September.

European elections as they approach in time to the next national election should mean that political parties, and especially, the governing parties, should be most responsive to these late elections in the cycle.

This argument is also consistent with the "marker-elections" theory that Oppenhuis, van der Eijk, and Franklin (1996) first introduced. According to this theory, European elections that are held immediately following a national election are "throw-away elections." They do not have significant national consequences, and their results are mainly ignored by national actors. On the other hand, those European elections that are held only shortly before the subsequent national elections are "marker-setting elections." "In this situation the marker set by the previous national election has become obsolete, and politicians are tempted to regard the results of the European election as a new indicator of their own and other parties' electoral strength" (van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh, 1996, p.157). We, therefore, expect that political parties, and especially governing parties, should be more responsive to European election results when these elections are closer in time to the subsequent national election.

> *H2: The effects of a European election on political parties' national policy positions should be stronger as the time between the European election and the upcoming national election decreases.*

Research Design:

To test our hypotheses we need information on (1) vote shares of parties in European elections relative to their performance in the previous national election, (2) shifts in parties' left-right positions between their previous national election manifesto and their manifesto for the upcoming election, (3) government versus opposition party status at the time of the European

11

election, and (4) the timing of European elections in the national election cycle. We collected the data on European election dates and party vote shares using official election data. We use Woldendorp et al. (2000) to classify political parties as governing versus opposition parties at the time of the European elections, and we updated these data to 2010 using Keesing's World Archives and other on-line resources. Party manifesto positions come from the Comparative Manifesto project data.

The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data have been the medium of research over the last decade to study strategic party positioning by providing longitudinal, and cross-national measurements of party policy based on the published party manifestos. More specifically, these data include information for each party in established democracies based on the proportion of the election manifestos dedicated to fifty-six different issues. The authors of the CMP dataset have developed an index that measures the overall left-right ideology for each party's manifesto in each election year, which can potentially range from -100 to +100 with positive and higher numbers representing a more right-wing emphasis. This ideological index has been employed by scholars to examine changes in party left-right policy positions and the reasons behind these changes (e.g. Budge, 1994; Somer-Topcu, 2009). We use this left-right scale and test whether parties change their positions on this scale from one national election to the next based on their performance in the European election. We focus on the left-right scale, and not on another dimension or on change for a single issue, because the left-right scale has been the most important dimension of party competition in Western Europe. While focusing on one dimension (left-right) may sacrifice a better understanding of the politics in some countries, the left-right scale provides the summary view of politics in most advanced industrial democracies. As Carkoglu (1995) notes, "a simple left-right positioning of parties and issues helps people form

opinions in complex situations requiring a good deal of information gathering and processing, thus cutting their information costs" (295) and helps parties to simplify their ideology in the eyes of voters.[5]

Our dependent variable to test our hypotheses is the magnitude of change in party positions in national election manifestos. We used the left-right positions of the parties from the CMP data and calculated the absolute changes between the previous national election (at time t-1) and the current election (at time t). In the existing literature, the crucial variable of interest for the analysis of party policy changes has been the *direction* of the parties' policy shifts in the current election (i.e. change toward left or right), compared to its position in the previous election (Budge, 1994; Adams et al., 2004). By contrast, we analyze the more basic and general question of whether and why parties *change at all*, rather than the more specific question of the direction of policy change. There is also a theoretical reason for this choice: while we expect parties to change their positions in the presence of a loss, we do not expect any particular directional change toward left or right. Some parties, which in the previous election made an extreme left move, may decide to move to center-right. Some parties that changed their positions from a clear left position to center-left may decide to move to center-right. Hence, we expect change, but not in a particular direction.[6]

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[5] The CMP data have been the best available measure to capture the change of party positions over a long period of time (1945-2011) for multiple countries (see Klingemann et al., 2007 for more details on the CMP data). While expert surveys and public opinion data have been proposed as alternatives, they do not cover the range of issues, countries, and the time-period that the CMP data cover. Moreover, the CMP party programme codings generally correlate with other widely used datasets on party positioning, such as expert surveys, party placements of election survey respondents, and other word-scoring techniques (Hearl, 2001; Laver et al., 2003).

[6] Nevertheless, we tested our model using directional change rather than the magnitude of change as the dependent variable. Not surprisingly there was no clear directional change in response to the European election outcomes.

The main independent variable is the change in each party's vote share between the previous national election at time t-1 and the European election that occurred between the upcoming national election and the previous national election (t-1).[7] Instead of using the change in raw vote shares between the national election at time t-1 and the following European election, we calculated the weighted vote changes, weighing them by parties' national vote share at time t-1. We opted for this weighted measure to account for the possible different effects of, for instance a 5% vote loss, for a party with 40% of vote share at the national level versus for a small party with 10% vote share. We expect this 5% loss to be a more devastating signal for the smaller party, which in this case lost half of its vote share.

To test the hypothesis that the effect of a vote loss in a European election should be strongest for governing parties we added a dummy variable. This variable is coded 1 if the party was in office at the time of the European election.

Finally, to test the effect of the timing of the European election we created and included two different versions of time. In the first version we simply calculated the raw number of months left to the next national election after the European election. We use this raw version of the time variable to test whether the timing has any effects on all parties (Model I). On the other hand, we calculated a *proportion of time* variable for the model where we test whether there are any differences between governing and opposition parties. The second hypothesis implies that governing parties should be more responsive to the results of a European election if the European election is immediately followed by a national election. Yet, there is no reason for a governing party that had been holding the office only for a couple of months to worry about these European election results as a signal about its government performance. Hence, if a governing party has

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[7] If there was no European election between two national elections we dropped those national elections and party positions in these elections from our analysis.

14

been in power for a relatively short period of time, we can expect them to behave as other parties in the opposition and not strongly react to these election results. To control for time in office, we create this *proportion of time* variable, which is calculated by dividing the number of months in office into the total number of months between the month when the government takes the office and the following national election. Hence, this time variable can in practice range between 0 (when the European election was held concurrently with the national election at time t-1) and 1 (when national election at time t and the European election were held on the same day). We care about this variable also because it is likely to have multiple governments in an election cycle in many European countries. We would like to make sure that we control for the time of taking office, especially if it is not the original government that came into office following the previous national election. In our data the minimum and maximum values for this *proportion of time* variable are 0.03 in France, and 0.95 in Portugal. We expect that governing parties should be more responsive to their electoral performance in the European election as this number increases.

In addition to the weighted vote change between the previous national election and the European election, we also include into our models the weighted vote change between national elections at time t-2 and t-1. Following the argument of Budge (1994) that previous national election outcomes provide information to political parties, Somer-Topcu (2009) shows that political parties change their left-right positions based on the signal they receive from the previous election. If parties lost in the previous election this should indicate that public opinion has shifted away from the party, and thus the party should change its position. Regardless of the significance of their European performances, we contend that parties' national election performances are still significant for political parties. Therefore, we calculate and add the weighted vote change between national elections t-2 and t-1 into our model as a control variable.

Below in the sensitivity checks, we also show how much our main independent variable of European vote loss/gain explains, independent of national election effects.

Another control variable we add into our models is a dummy variable for the period after 1992. The Maastricht Treaty (Treaty on European Union) increased the scope of the European Union policies by creating a pillar structure. Together with this increasing influence of the EU on new policy areas in domestic politics, the Treaty also increased the powers of the European Parliament by introducing the codecision legislative procedure. Even though it was limited only to a few policy areas, this codecision power meant that the powers of the European Parliament for legislation were increasing and becoming on par with the Council (even though the full codecision power was not guaranteed until the Treaty of Lisbon). Therefore, we expect that European parliamentary elections might become more about European politics and less about national politics (and hence have less influence on national politics) since 1992. To control for the effect of the Treaty of Maastricht and the increased powers of the European Parliament since 1992, we created a dummy variable coded 1 for the European elections after 1992.

We also include the lagged dependent variable (the lagged magnitude of change in left-right and European positions) into every model because of theoretical and methodological reasons. Theoretically, we should expect political parties that change their positions a lot from one election to the next to have more flexibility to continue changing their positions. Previous work by Budge (1994) and by Adams (2001) also argue that party elites have electoral incentives to shift their party's policies in the opposite direction from their shifts in previous election, which would imply a positive relationship between the previous and current absolute policy change. In addition, the Langrage multiplier test indicates a serial correlation problem for the model without the lagged dependent variable, but fails to reject the null hypothesis of no serial correlation when

16

we include the lagged dependent variable.[8]

We expect the effect of European elections on left-right party policy shifts to be especially salient for parties that compete on the left-right scale, that is, for *mainstream* parties. Thus, we only focus on these mainstream parties in our analyses below. We define mainstream parties using the typology of Meguid (2005). Therefore, we classify Social Democratic, Communist, Liberal, Conservative, and Christian Democratic parties as *mainstream* parties, and Green, ultra-right, and ethno-territorial parties as *niche* parties.

Our data are composed of 14 countries and cover the period between the first European election in 1979 until 2011. We focus only on Western European members of the European Union. We exclude all concurrent elections and focus only on those elections that occurred between two national elections. This means that we focus only on 14 of 15 Western European members of the EU. Luxembourg drops out from the data given the concurrent European and national elections for the whole time period.[9] Appendix II lists the countries and the time periods included into the analyses.

To examine the hypotheses, we run OLS regression with robust standard errors and clustered by election. Clustering controls for possible correlations between parties within a specific interelection period in a specific country. Because our dependent variables' lower-bound is fixed at 0, we also ran tobit analysis for the same models. The substantive and statistical conclusions were very similar between the OLS and tobit models.

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[8] Appendix I reports the descriptive statistics for the variables.
[9] We note that the main substantive results are very similar when we include these concurrent elections.

<u>Results:</u>

Table 1 reports the results examining the effects of European electoral performance on party

policy shifts. Column 1 tests the effects of European election outcomes on left-right policy shifts

of mainstream parties without introducing the in government and time variables. The main

variable of interest in this model is the *vote change* variable, which measures the weighted

change in the vote share of parties between the previous national election and the European

election.

[Table 1 about here]

The negative coefficient for the weighted vote change variable indicates that parties

change their left-right positions more as they lose votes. However, the standard errors are larger

than expected, indicating a statistically significant relationship only at a 90% level with a one-

tailed test. Interpreting the substantive effects in Column 1 is not straightforward given that the

vote change variable is a weighted variable (weighted by the previous vote share of the party).

This coefficient suggests that if a party lost most of its vote share (-0.82 is the minimum value

for the weighted vote change variable in our data) compared to a possible scenario of almost

tripling its vote share (2.74 is the maximum value in the data), the party would change its

position by 6.83 points on the left-right scale. This may not seem as a particularly substantial

effect given that the left-right scale can potentially range between -100 and +100, and hence a

party potentially can change its position up to 201 points. Yet, the mean and median absolute

change values in the data are 11.38 and 8.1, respectively, with a standard deviation of 10.36. In

addition, the magnitude of the coefficient is in line with the findings of Adams, Clark, Ezrow,

and Glasgow (2006) and Somer-Topcu (2009) for instance, which present results showing that parties can alter their positions only slowly and in small steps over time. However, we hesitate to conclude from these results that there is strong (if any) evidence that supports our hypothesis that all political parties respond to their electoral losses in European elections.

We, however, expected stronger effects for governing parties, which take these elections as referendum for their performance in office. To test this argument we included the dummy variable for governing party status, and interacted it with the weighted vote change variable. Column 2 tests this interaction effect. The results show no discernible difference between opposition and governing parties.

While these results may seem disappointing, we were not particularly surprised given that we have not yet controlled for the time effects. To test whether all parties or governing/opposition parties respond to European election results as the schedule of the European election with respect to the national election changes, we included the time variable into the first and second models. Column 3 replicates the results in Column 1 for all parties but interacting the weighted vote change variable with the number of months left to the next national election. These results show that time does not mediate the original (weak) relationship when it comes to all parties.

We, however, expect the effects to be especially strong for governing parties as the next election approaches. To test this final hypothesis we incorporated the proportion of time variable, which takes both the time left to the next national election and also time passed in office into account. We note once again that this variable takes a value between 0.03 and 0.95, where higher numbers suggest that the government has been in office for a long time, and the next national election is upon the parties. In France, the European elections in 2004 took place only two

months after the formation of the new government, and 36 months before the next national

election (June 2007), which gives us the minimum value of 0.03. On the other hand, the

Portuguese government was in office for 52 months when the 2009 European elections took

place, and this was only three months before the next election. This gives us the maximum value

in our data, 0.95. Column 4 in Table 1 presents the results for this triple interaction. It is almost

impossible to infer anything about the marginal effects of the main independent variable by just

looking at these results. As a result we present the marginal effects on a figure.

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1 shows the marginal effects of weighted vote change for governing and

opposition parties as the proportion of time variable changes. This figure shows that only

governing parties respond to these European election results and only if they have been in power

for a long time and if there is not much time left to the next national election. At the maximum

value of the proportion of time variable (0.95), we expect a governing party to change its

position by 14.13 points if it lost most of its vote share (-0.82) compared to a possible scenario of

almost tripling its vote share (2.74). This is a substantively important and highly significant

effect.[10]

Turning to the control variables, we see that the decade dummy does not have any

significant effect on left-right party policy changes. Previous vote change between national

elections at time t-2 and t-1 has a statistically significant effect on absolute left-right shifts of

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[10] We note that we also tested the same model using the raw number of months to the next election variable that we used in Column 3. However, as we expected there was no mediating effect of this raw variable. Governing parties respond to these election results and the time left only if they have been in power for a significant time.

parties as we expected. As parties lose votes in the national election they change their positions for the next election more (Somer-Topcu, 2009).

<u>Discussion and Future Directions</u>

A European Union politician told Reuters as the then 12 members of the European Union were heading to the 1994 European elections that they had "effectively 12 national elections with a slightly European flavour" (The Straits Times, June 9, 1994). In this paper, we tested the national consequences of European parliamentary elections with a focus on how parties use European election outcomes to change their left-right positions in their national election manifestos.

Political parties seek votes to become influential political players in their system, to gain office, and/or to implement their policies. This requires political parties to change their policy positions if necessary in response to shifts in public preferences. However, parties are also risk-averse and (at times) internally divided organizations. Risks associated with change and uncertainties about public preferences limit political parties' abilities to respond effectively to public opinion shifts. Given this dilemma, we have argued political parties are continuously in search for information about their performances and changing public preferences. European election results are one such source of information.

Our results showed that parties overall change their left-right positions in their national election manifestos if they lost votes in the European election, even though this results was only weakly significant. On the other hand, the results were stronger and substantively and statistically significant when we differentiated between governing and opposition parties and examined the mediating effects of the relative timing of European elections with respect to

national elections. We showed that when governing parties have been in power for a long period of time and face a national election that will immediately follow the European election, they would significantly change their left-right positions if they lost votes at the European level.

This strong impact of these elections on governing parties confirms the importance of these elections as signals to political parties about their performance. At the same time, the weak evidence we found for all parties in general does not necessarily mean that European elections are not important for all actors in national politics. The reason goes back to the original second-order model with which we started this paper.

We derived our hypothesis that political parties overall should be responsive to European results from the second-order model, which states that voters reflect their true preferences in these elections by "voting with heart." On the other hand, while European elections may indeed reflect the true preferences, these true preferences may not indicate much about how voters would cast their votes in national elections and hence about national electoral performances of political parties, especially if a particular European election has some European elements that the parties were competing for.

A possible further test of the effect of European elections on national parties' positions, therefore, might be controlling for the context of specific European elections, i.e. whether a particular European election was fought on European stances of political parties, or was solely a national contest. We know from the literature that the campaigns for the European elections are an important mediator for how people vote. Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley (2008) show that it is more likely for voters to turn against the governing parties if the European election campaign has Eurosceptic sentiments, for instance.

Despite the mixed evidence we presented, this is the first study, to our knowledge, that examines how European election results affect national party programmes. As a result, it has important implications for our understanding of interactions between European politics and domestic politics. These weak results for all political parties may be consistent with the literature where scholars were examining the general Europeanization of election manifestos (Ladrech, 2002; Pennings, 2006), or of the effects of Europe on party organizations (Poguntke et al., 2007). Yet, the strong and substantive results for governing parties lead us to believe that we may be onto something and have to continue examining the national consequences of these elections.

Appendix I: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	St Dev	Min	Max
Absolute Left-Right Change (DV1)	11.384	10.357	0	46.56
Vote Change in European Election	-0.009	0.476	-0.824	2.743
In Government	0.441		0	1
Raw Time to Next Election	23.249	13.456	3	47
Proportion of Time	0.470	0.268	0.033	0.946
Vote Change in Nat Elect (t-1)	0.040	0.365	-0.674	1.838
1990s & 2000s dummy	0.750		0	1

Appendix II: Countries and Years Included

Countries	Years
Austria	1999-2002
Belgium	1979-2003
Denmark	1979-2005
Finland	1999-2003
France	1979-2007
Germany	1979-2009
Great Britain	1979-2010
Greece	1979-2000
Ireland	1979-2007
Italy	1979-2006
The Netherlands	1979-2002
Portugal	1987-2009
Spain	1987-2008
Sweden	1995-2006

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Tables and Figures:

Table 1: Testing the hypotheses

	Model I All Parties	Model II Governing v. Opposition	Model III All Parties & Time	Model IV Governing v. Opposition & Time
Weighted Vote Ch in EU Election	-1.919≝ (1.233)	-2.599 (1.784)	-0.315 (2.646)	-2.287 (6.733)
In Government		-0.147 (1.459)		-1.846 (3.502)
Time			0.013 (0.063)	-7.386* (3.982)
Weighted Vote Ch * In Govt		1.118 (2.150)		3.169 (6.527)
Weighted Vote Ch * Time			-0.083 (0.121)	0.417 (11.235)
In Govt * Time				3.217 (5.366)
Weighted Vote Ch * Time * In Govt				-5.526 (10.256)
Weighted Vote Ch in National Elec (t-1)	-2.540* (1.388)	-2.473* (1.378)	-2.719* (1.451)	-1.954 (1.647)
Decade Dummy	-0.796 (1.881)	-0.821 (1.818)	-0.593 (2.007)	-0.244 (1.752)
Lagged DV	0.299*** (0.076)	0.298*** (0.076)	0.295*** (0.080)	0.308*** (0.078)
Constant	8.748*** (1.818)	8.896*** (1.947)	8.298*** (2.689)	11.861*** (2.691)
N/ R^2	177/ 0.10	177/ 0.10	177/0.10	177/0.12

Notes: The dependent variable in these models is the absolute change in the left-right positions of parties between their national election manifestos at time t-1 and t. All models are OLS regression with robust standard errors clustered by election. ≝$p<0.10$ (one-tailed), $*p < .10$, $**p<.05$, $***p<.01$

Figure 1: The marginal effect of vote change in a European election for governing and opposition parties as the proportion of time variable increases
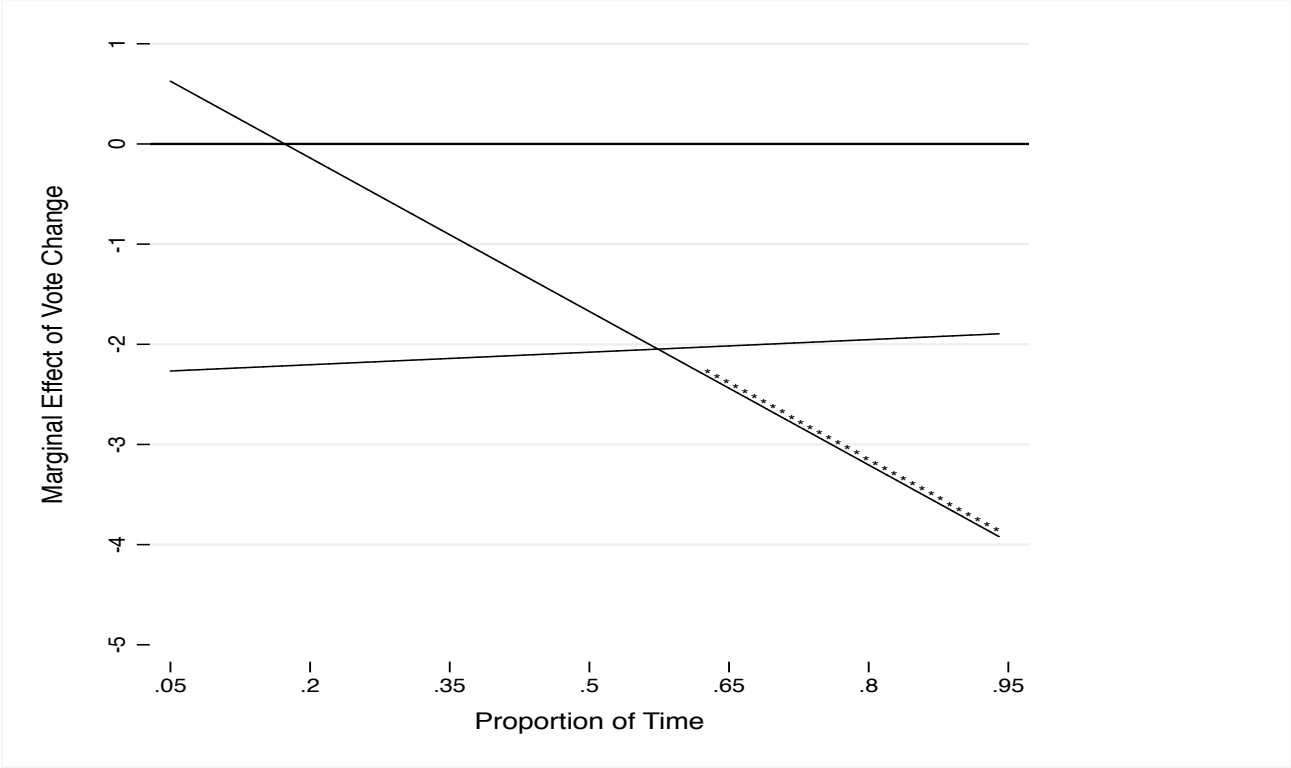
Notes: The line with a steep decline is for governing parties, and the line that a stable marginal effect over time is for opposition parties. The stars on the governing party line indicate statistically significant marginal effects of the weighted vote change variable on absolute party policy change at the 95% level. The *proportion of time* variable is calculated by dividing the number of months the government has been in office at the time of the European election by the total time between taking the office and the next national election.