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Second-Order Elections versus First-Order Thinking: How Voters Perceive the Representation Process in a Multi-Layered System of Governance

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ABSTRACT Second-order election models are based on several assumptions about individual-level motivations. These can be summarized by a *transfer hypothesis*: individuals presumably apply their evaluations of national-level phenomena to the EU level when voting in EU elections. In contrast, a *suis generis* hypothesis stipulates that voters evaluate the EU on its own performance terms. This paper tests these competing hypotheses. We find considerable support for both models. In the election context, where national institutions — political parties — dominate the representation process, the transfer hypothesis receives considerable support. However, we also find surprisingly strong support for the first-order hypothesis: electoral choice in EU election is influenced to a considerable extent by EU level factors. Furthermore, when voters evaluate the mechanisms of representation more broadly without a focus on elections *per se*, we find much more support for the first-order than the transfer hypothesis — voters clearly separate the two levels and evaluate each level on its own terms. These results have important implications, both for how we analyse voters' decisions in European elections, and how we view the sophistication of voters more broadly in the context of multi-layered institutions.

KEY WORDS: Second-order elections, elections to the European Parliament, public behavior in the EU, representation in the EU

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Introduction

The EU's democracy deficit — the presumed inability of the EU to represent citizens — is becoming an increasing concern to analysts and observers of the European Union (Majone 1998; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Rohrschneider 2002). A key element of the presumed deficit is that elections are not evaluations of the EU's performance *per se* but mostly reflect voters' judgements about national political issues (Reif 1980; Marsh 1998; Hix and Marsh 2007). Consistent with this argument, legions of studies provide evidence supporting this interpretation: the national economy influences EU election outcomes, government parties lose vote shares in EU elections, especially during the mid-term of a parliamentary cycle, smaller and extremist parties usually gain in EU-wide elections, and turnout in European elections is substantially lower than in national elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Hix and Marsh 2007; van der Brug, van der Eijk, and Franklin 2007). Because EU elections are presumably dominated by events at the national level, they are dubbed 'second-order' elections.

This interpretation of EU elections makes several assumptions, key of which is the premise that national considerations dominate voters' decisions even in EU elections. Voters presumably rely on the popularity of national governments to decide whom to support in EU elections; they rely on the national economy to allocate their support accordingly, and so on. Because voters presumably transfer their perceptions of national events to the EU level, we will refer to this individual-level mechanism as the *transfer hypothesis*.

In light of the transfer hypothesis, it is surprising how few analyses directly examine the extent to which perceptions of national- versus EU-level factors influence the party preferences of voters. As we will detail below, the vast majority of studies rely on an aggregate approach, with all its promises and pitfalls. Analysts have only recently begun to directly examine the transfer hypothesis at the individual level (Carrubba and Timpone 2005; Schmitt 2005; Schmitt, Sanz, and Braun 2008). All in all, however, we know little about the reasons for voters' electoral choice in a multi-layered system of governance.

This gap in our knowledge is unfortunate because there actually are several reasons why one might plausibly argue that voters increasingly evaluate the EU *sui generis*. For one, the EU has become more important over time to individual citizens, certainly since the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties came into force in the 1990s. An increasing number of laws are passed by the EU, which means that the decisions taken by the EU affect a growing number of citizens. What is more, European integration has moved beyond economics — which was widely carried by a permissive consensus — to politics which is based on a 'restrained dissent', in Hooghe and Marks' (2008) words. As a result, citizens may increasingly rely on their preferences about European integration *per se*, as well as their perceptions of the EU's performance or that of the performance of national parties at the EU level, when they cast a ballot in EU elections or more generally judge the representation

process at the EU level. Thus, in contrast to the transfer hypothesis, this *sui generis* hypothesis expresses the idea that citizens arrive at voting decisions in EU elections and judge the EU on the basis of EU-related factors.

This paper, then, contributes to the growing body of research by analysing the validity of the *transfer* and *sui generis* hypotheses. We will proceed as follows. First, we will examine the extent to which citizens rely on national versus EU-based performance indicators in European elections. This is necessary because the transfer hypothesis is directly tailored to the nature of European elections. Secondly, we will broaden the analyses to examine how citizens generally evaluate the process of representation at the national and EU levels. We deem this necessary because we would like to examine whether the *transfer* and *sui generis* hypotheses can be generalized to the EU more broadly.

The Individual-Level Foundation of Second-Order Elections Models

What are the key elements of the second-order election model? The main evidence for this model consists of four observations (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Hix and Marsh 2007). First, compared to national elections, voters typically defect from government parties in European elections. This is consistent with the observation that large parties, who are likely to be included in national governments, tend to lose votes in European elections when compared to the last national elections. Secondly, smaller parties tend to increase their vote share from the last national election to a subsequent EU election. Thirdly, this defection from larger to smaller parties is *especially* pronounced during the middle of parliamentary cycles. This is consistent with the observation that the extent of parties' vote gains and losses is mediated by the national electoral cycle at the time EU elections take place. Finally, turnout rates at national elections are significantly higher than participation rates in EU elections. Cumulatively, this evidence seems to indicate that voters transfer information from the performance of national party systems to the EU level.

The second-order election model is not only supported empirically, it also makes a lot of sense from the perspective of party competition. For one, political parties in most European countries are ordered along a left–right division within nation-states. Given this programmatic commitment at the level of nation-states, they have few incentives to go against their programmatic tradition in EU-wide elections (Andeweg 1995; Gabel 2000). This, in turn, severely restricts citizens' ability to evaluate the EU *sui generis* since parties are the key representatives at both levels. Thus, unless an EU-related issue cuts across the left–right dimension, which increases a party's capacity to develop stances that are not tied to its programmatic heritage, it is hard to see how parties can ignore their programmatic heritage in EU elections. In short, they must — indeed should — connect their stances about integration to their domestic policies in order to maintain their credibility. For these reasons, students of party positions on European integration find that parties' left–right stances on domestic cleavages strongly predict their

integration stances (Dalton 2005; Marks et al. 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2007). Thus, the institutionalized role of national political parties in EU elections reinforces citizens' inclinations to transfer information from the national level to that of the EU. Finally, further reinforcing the transfer hypothesis is the fact that analyses about EU support show that the popularity of national governments is taken as a proxy of how well the EU performs and, subsequently, affects citizens' evaluations of the European Union (Anderson 1998). This too suggests that individuals transfer information from the level of nation-states to the level of the EU.

All in all, there exist both conceptual reasons and considerable empirical evidence in support of the transfer hypothesis. However, while the transfer hypothesis is plausible, it is not the only mechanism that might underlie these results.

Problems of Second-Order Models

Despite the widespread support for second-order models, we actually know fairly little about the extent to which voters behave in EU elections according to perceptions of national factors. The gap in our knowledge mainly results from the focus of most second-order elections models on aggregate election outcomes. This is somewhat surprising given that the logic of the argument attributes special importance to the perceptions of individuals in deciding how to cast their ballot at the national and supranational levels. Let us consider why the focus on aggregate data alone does not produce the kind of evidence needed to test the transfer and *suis generis* hypotheses.

The dependent variable is typically the vote loss/gain for each party, when election outcomes in national and supranational elections are compared. The change scores are then correlated with variables measuring party characteristics (e.g. party size; government status, etc.). Given this aggregate approach, however, it remains unclear precisely why voters defect from governmental parties. For many patterns found at the aggregate level are actually consistent with both the transfer and *suis generis* hypothesis. For example, small party support in EU elections is often taken as a sign that voters defect from large government parties because of their performance as a governing party. As Hix and Marsh (2007, 22) put it, 'the main story is that "party size" matters, as the second-order model predicts. Small parties gain and large parties ... lose'. This is no doubt the case in the aggregate, but what does this imply for how voters arrive at their decision to support a smaller party in an EU election over a larger party in a national election? The second-order model interprets this pattern as evidence that voters are dissatisfied with the performance of major parties in the national arena. This is clearly one possibility. However, another one — equally plausible we argue — is an interpretation that voters view both institutional layers separately, and apply different criteria in their decision making at each level: in our example, smaller parties (such as the Greens) may be supported in an EU election because they are perceived to do a better job in pushing green issues than larger parties would do at the EU level (Carrubba

and Timpone 2005). Thus, while EP elections are no doubt less relevant in the consequences for the actual distribution of power, they may not be second-order in terms of the mechanisms that underlie the choice of voters. The aggregate approach is here running the danger of committing the ecological fallacy.

Another problem is the empirical focus of most second-order analyses on vote *switching* across the two levels. While the conceptual model itself speaks to both why voters defect from government parties (e.g. dissatisfaction with parties in government) or stay with them (e.g. satisfaction), the method entails that the analyses exclusively examine vote switching. Imagine a hypothetical scenario where all parties at the national and EU-level receive exactly the same aggregate vote share. In this case, there would be no variance across the two elections, and thus nothing could be explained with an aggregate model where parties' vote gains and losses constitute the dependent variable. These aggregate models only have an opportunity to explain gains and losses once net switching is greater than zero. In other words, the results of aggregate analyses are driven by (net) vote changes. The important point here is, then, that the way the dependent variable is designed does not use information about consistent vote choices across the two levels.

This shortcoming is unfortunate for at least two reasons. Conceptually, it is worth knowing why voters support the same parties at both levels or oppose them at both levels. For the transfer hypothesis assumes that voters are happy with the performance of parties at the national level if voters support government parties at the EU level. It is equally plausible that voters are happy with parties' performance at the EU level, independent of their performance at the national level. In addition, since consistency in party support is the norm, the aggregate approach of most second-order analyses focuses on the instances that constitute an empirical minority, ignoring evidence from the majority of voters who support or oppose the same parties at both levels.

To be clear, we do not suggest that the transfer hypothesis never applies. We suspect (though do not know for certain) that this is how many voters arrived at decisions during early European elections when the powers of the European Parliament were more restricted than they are now (Reif and Schmitt 1980). We also expect, however, that voters begin to evaluate the EU on its own terms given the growing importance of EU institutions in the policy-making process at the national level (Schmitt 2005, 654) and an increasing shift in the EU's focus from economic integration to more controversial proposals of political integration (Hooghe and Marks 2008). Neither do we argue that the transfer hypothesis is obsolete. However, we do suggest that it is an empirical question to determine the extent to which the transfer and *suus generis* mechanisms underlie voters' electoral choice in EU elections. We therefore see a need to examine the individual-level assumptions of the second-order model, in part because of the changing character of European integration, in part because the two mechanisms have not been systematically examined.

Hypotheses

We focus the analyses in this paper on the determinants of citizens' choice after they have decided to participate in an election.¹ In this context, the transfer hypothesis predicts:

Hypothesis 1: Voters' performance evaluations of the national government and the national economy influence the extent to which voters defect from governmental parties in EU elections.

And, the following prediction is implied but has not been tested by most second-order models:

Hypothesis 2: Voters' performance evaluations of the national government and the national economy influence the extent to which voters support the same party at the national and EU levels.

The *suis generis* hypothesis, in turn, predicts that vote choices at the EU level are made on the basis of EU-related factors. Specifically,

Hypothesis 3: The perceived performance of parties at the EU level influences the extent to which voters defect from government parties.

Hypothesis 4: Voters' performance evaluations of parties at the EU level influence the extent to which voters stay with the same party at the EU level.

Results

Our dependent variable in these analyses follows Carruba and Timbone (2005, 266). We created a new variable, based on voters' recalled past vote in the last national and EU elections. This new variable contains four cells: (1) voters support government parties in both elections; (2) support opposition parties in both elections; (3) move from government parties in national election to the opposition in EU elections; (4) defect from the opposition in national elections to (national) government parties in EU elections.²

We use the 1999 European Election Study which contains several performance indicators needed to test the hypotheses. We included two predictors located at the national level: public perceptions of the national economy and mass evaluations of the performance of national governments. The transfer hypothesis predicts that greater satisfaction with the economy and the national governments increases the odds that voters support governmental parties in both elections.

In contrast to most prior studies, however, we also included two predictors located at the EU level. One indicator measures voters' evaluations of the performance of parties at the EU level. This variable, while focused on national parties, attempts to gauge separately the perception of how well parties handle EU affairs.³ Another variable measures citizens' support for European integration. (All measures are described in detail in Appendix A–C.)

Table 1. Predicting support for government parties across national/EP elections

	Electoral choices		
	Defections to opposition parties in EP elections	Defections to government parties in EP elections	Support for opposition parties across elections
Parties' government performance	-0.41** (0.11)	-0.36** (0.07)	-0.76** (0.09)
Economic perceptions	-0.23 (0.13)	-0.07 (0.11)	-0.23* (0.1)
Integration support	0.04 (0.09)	-0.53** (0.14)	-0.28** (0.05)
Parties' EU performance	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.15* (0.06)	-0.16** (0.04)
Strength of party attachment	-0.28 (0.4)	-1.03** (0.28)	-0.18 (0.19)
Far-left ideology	-0.53* (0.24)	0.22 (0.21)	-0.38 (0.39)
Left-centre ideology	-0.21 (0.25)	0.26 (0.23)	-0.44 (0.34)
Right-centre ideology	0.28 (0.26)	0.35 (0.18)	0.53** (0.16)
Right ideology	-0.23 (0.35)	0.06 (0.18)	0.61* (0.26)
Far-right ideology	-0.56 (0.4)	-0.13 (0.27)	(0.71) (0.36)
Age	0.01** (0.003)	0.01** (0.003)	0.01* (0.005)
Education	0.02** (0.006)	0.01* (0.006)	0.01 (0.007)
Sex	-0.05 (0.11)	-0.01 (0.12)	-0.26** (0.04)

Entries are coefficients from a multi-nominal logit analysis. Government supporters at both elections are the reference category.

*, ** significance at the 0.05 and 0.01 level, respectively. European weight is used.

Source: 1999 European Election Survey (5,997 observations).

Since the four levels of the dependent variable constitute a nominal variable, we conducted a multi-nominal logit analysis. Table 1 shows the coefficients, with government supporters at both levels serving as the reference category. The first column shows the coefficients for respondents who switch from governmental parties in national elections to opposition parties in the EU election. We note, first, that parties' governmental performance is a highly significant predictor, which clearly supports the transfer hypothesis. Those voters who are dissatisfied with the way the government performs are more likely to switch their support to an opposition party at the EU level. Also note that a perception that parties do well at the EU level does not induce voters

to move from governmental to opposition parties. All of this is consistent with the transfer hypothesis — greater dissatisfaction with the perceived performance of national governments increases the odds of defection from governments to opposition parties in EU elections, while the performance of parties at the EU level seems irrelevant for voters who move from a government party in national elections to an opposition party at the EU level. However, we do note that when the governmental performance variable is dropped from the model, the EU performance variable becomes significant. This suggests that the transfer mechanism is connected to the fact that EU-wide elections are conducted through national party systems, and not a genuine, EU-wide party system (Andeweg 1995).

Turning to the group of voters who switch their vote from an opposition party in national elections to a government party in an EU election (column 2), we now note that the two EU predictors are statistically significant. First, when voters believe that parties do a good job at the EU level, they are more likely to move *towards* national government parties at the EU level. Remarkably, this pattern emerges regardless of their evaluations of governmental parties' performance in the national arena. Note also that supporters of integration are also more likely to switch towards governmental parties. This constitutes clear evidence in support of the *suis generis* hypothesis because voters move towards governmental parties not only when they are happy with the performance of governments — which does matter, as the first coefficient in the column indicates — but also because they perceive these parties to perform well at the EU level. Similarly, when voters support the EU *per se*, they are also more likely to switch from national opposition to supporting governmental parties in EU elections, perhaps because they would like to strengthen the role played by these parties in EU negotiations.⁴ One possible explanation for this pattern may be that as the governing parties appoint representatives in the Council of Ministers; voters might be assigning greater responsibility for EU issues to governing parties.

Finally, support for all four hypotheses emerges from the last group of voters (column 3), which compares persistent government supporters to those who consistently oppose governmental parties. Here all performance predictors are statistically significant. Clearly, one reason for supporting opposition parties at both levels is that citizens are dissatisfied with national governments, both their performance and the national economy. But another reason is that if citizens disapprove of parties' performance at the EU level *per se*, then they are more likely to oppose the government at both levels. This not only means that the vote choice in EU elections is connected to perceptions of parties' EU level performance, but may also signal that the vote choice in national elections is affected to some degree by how parties perform at the EU level. Given that we control for partisanship, ideology and several nation-level performance perceptions, the significance of the EU-level performance variable seems to suggest that voters' decision to support opposition parties at both levels is related partly to their concerns with EU affairs. This interpretation is supported by the fact that general support for integration also affects the odds of supporting opposition parties in both arenas.

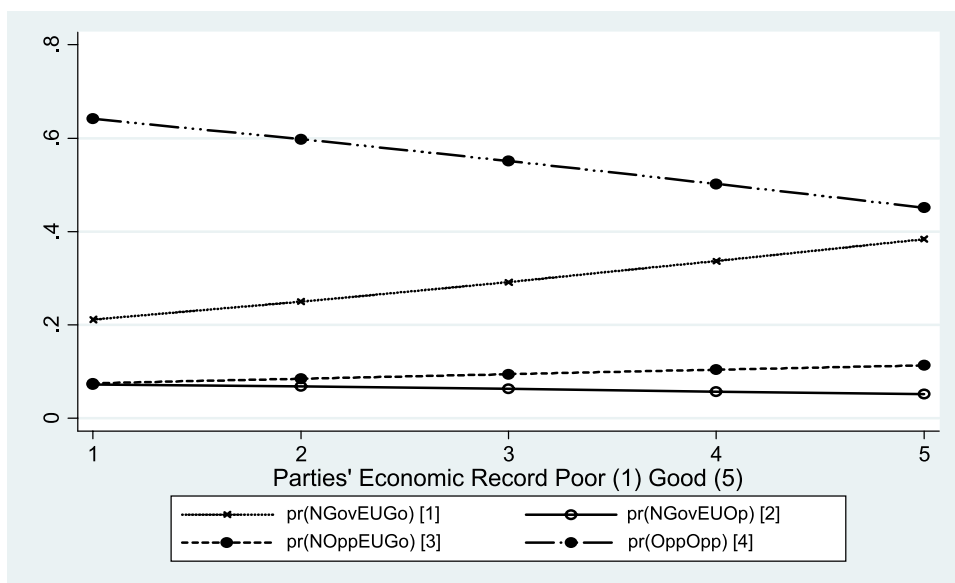


Figure 1. National economic performance.

In order to convey a better sense of the predictive relevance of each variable, we plotted the predicted value of falling into one of the four categories against the theoretically relevant predictors (Figures 1, 2). The first two figures illustrate the impact of parties' economic record and perceived government

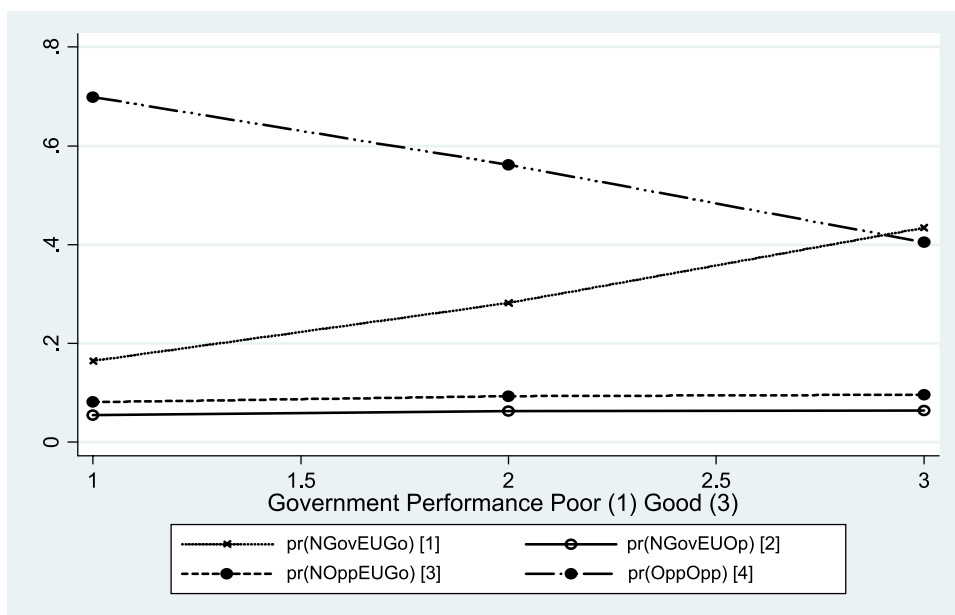


Figure 2. Government performance.

performance on whether voters support governmental or opposition parties in both elections or exhibit cross-level defections. As expected, these graphs provide considerable support for the transfer hypothesis because they visualize the influence of national performance factors on EU-level vote choices.

Figures 3 and 4, however, show the impact of EU-related performance factors on vote choices. Visually, these are related less strongly to vote choices than evaluations of parties' government performance. At the same time, they do matter. In fact, parties' EU-based performance factors are nearly as important as national economic performance. For example, when perceptions move from being very dissatisfied with parties at the EU level, the probability of moving from national governments to an opposition party at the EU level are slightly above $p=0.20$. In contrast, when they are happy with the EU-level performance of parties, this nearly doubles to a probability of about $p=0.39$.

All in all, this evidence provides not only support for the transfer hypothesis, but for the *suis generis* hypothesis as well.

East–West Differences in Second-Order Elections?

Recent analyses have suggested that the second-order election model does not appear to be supported in new democracies in east-central Europe (Schmitt 2005; Koepke and Ringe 2006; Hix and Marsh 2007). This conclusion is based on the observation that the predictors of aggregate vote changes from national to EU elections in the west do not apply to the east. This non-finding is consistent with evidence that national elections in new east-central European democracies demonstrate a much higher level of volatility between

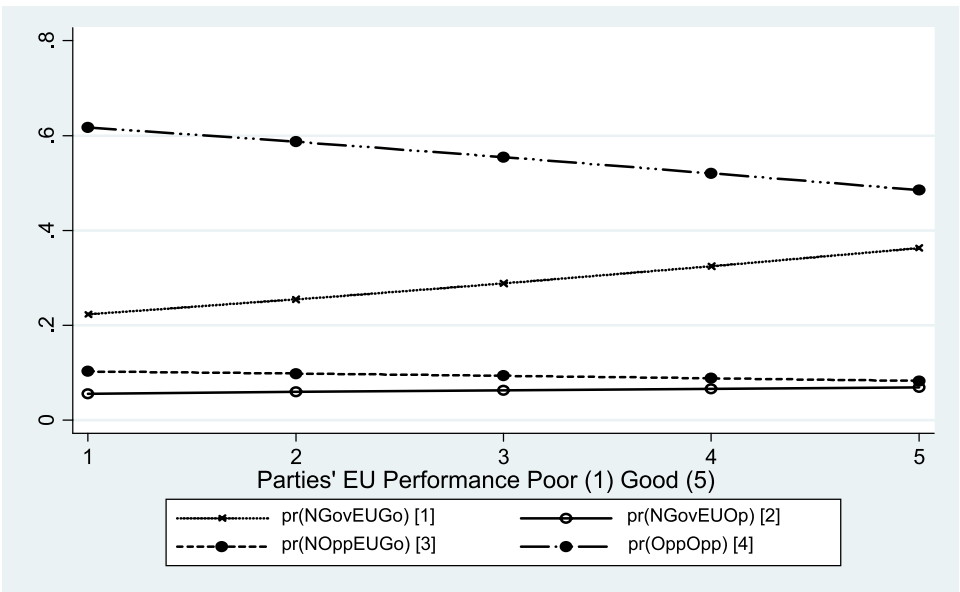


Figure 3. Parties' performance at EU level.

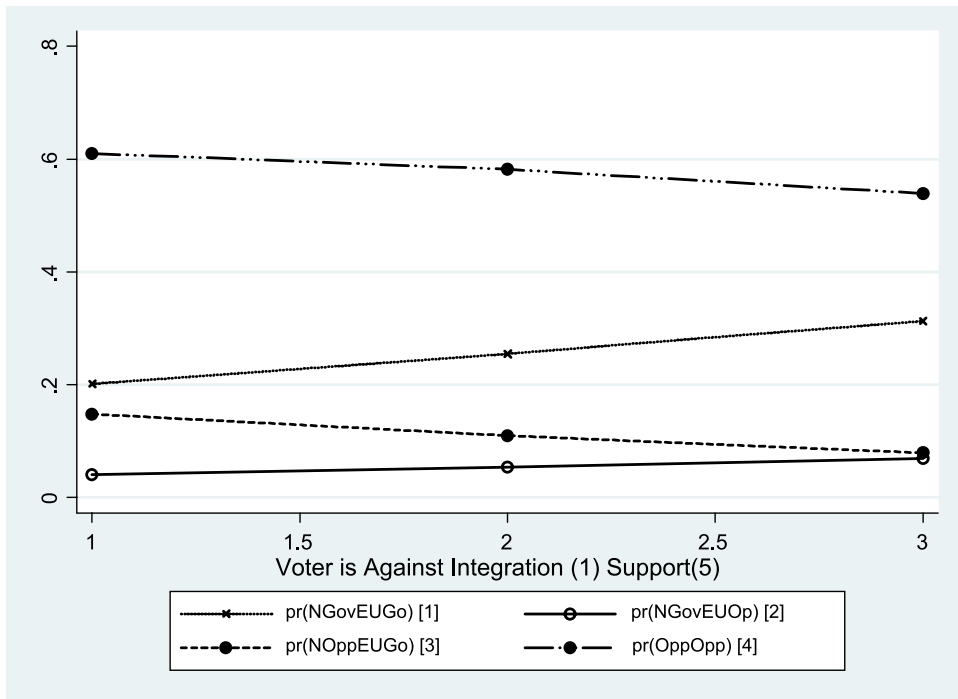


Figure 4. Support for European integration.

elections than in Western Europe (Tavits 2005; Caramani 2006); this volatility presumably undermines the development of a connection between national and EU-level elections. The reason appears to be that east-central Europeans do not link their performance evaluations as clearly to government and opposition parties as voters in the west, presumably because the organizational and programmatic instability in the first fifteen years after the democratic transition makes it difficult for voters to identify those parties most likely to solve a problem — or to be responsible for it. Consequently, the second-order model may not be applicable in east-central Europe.

As argued in the previous section, however, we would suggest that it is premature on the basis of aggregate change scores alone to characterize the motives of individual voters. So in order to analyse the degree to which the transfer and *suis generis* hypotheses do not apply to new democracies, we conducted a tentative analysis of vote changes across national and EU elections. Naturally, the 1999 European Election Study does not cover the newer democracies of central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that joined the EU in 2004. We therefore use the 2004 European Election Study, even though this study lacks a few important variables, notably one that measures the performance of parties at the EU level. The following analyses are therefore of a preliminary character.

We first constructed the same dependent variable as in the previous analyses. Secondly, we included variables measuring voters' evaluations of the

government and perceptions of the national economy (see Appendix A–C). The EU-level performance variables are less than ideal, however, because they do not measure parties' performance at the EU level. We used one indicator of whether voters view the EU as beneficial; and another indicator measures whether they feel represented by the EU. These indicators lack a clear attribution of responsibility to parties — but they do measure the perceived performance of the EU. The model also includes several control variables, including left–right ideology, strength of partisanship, age, education and gender.

Table 2 shows the results for the four predictors that measure the transfer hypothesis (governmental performance and evaluations of the economy) and *suis generis* hypothesis (perceptions of a democracy deficit and European identity). The reference group is, as in the previous analyses, voters who support government parties at both levels. As a test of East–West differences, we also included an interaction term between a predictor listed in the left-most column and an East–West dummy variable. The interaction terms were added separately for each equation. For example, we first estimated a model that included an interaction term between governmental performance evaluations and the East–West dummy. On the basis of these results, we then computed the conditional coefficients listed in the table for the East and the West. We also indicate whether an interaction term is significant. Then, we

Table 2. Predicting support for government parties across national/EP elections in Eastern and Western Europe

	Electoral choice					
	Defections to opposition parties in EP elections		Defections to government parties in EP elections		Support for opposition parties across elections	
	Interaction		Interaction		Interaction	
	East	West	East	West	East	West
	(Significant)		(Significant)		(Significant)	
Government performance evaluations	–0.92**	–1.9*	–1.0**	–2.0**	–1.6**	–3.2**
	(No)		(Yes)		(No)	
Economic perceptions	–0.02	–0.42**	–0.19**	–0.38**	–0.21	–0.03
	(No)		(Yes)		(No)	
EU represents citizens	–0.09	–0.07*	0.07	0.19**	–0.11	–0.03
	(No)		(No)		(No)	
Integration support	–0.50**	0.10	–0.78**	–0.31**	–0.46**	–0.03
	(Yes)		(Yes)		(Yes)	

Entries are conditional coefficients from a multi-nominal logit analysis. Government supporters at national and EU elections are the reference category. $n=9,025$.

*, ** significance at the 0.05 and 0.01 level, respectively. European weight is used.

Source: 2004 European Election Survey.

estimated another model, this time including an interaction term between evaluations of the national economy and the East–West dummy. And so on.

The results underscore much of the previous analyses. First, national performance perceptions are very important in the West — but also in the East. Secondly, there is some evidence, again, for the *suis generis* hypothesis: perceptions of the democracy deficit affect vote choice in the predictable direction. For instance, when citizens believe the EU represents them, they are more likely to fall into the national opposition/EU government category. In other words, perceived positive democratic performance by the EU helps national governmental parties to boost their support in EU elections, just as the *suis generis* hypothesis predicts.

As far as East–West differences are concerned, they are mostly *insignificant*, except for the European identity predictor. For nearly all coefficients, the sign is in the same direction and the differences are insignificant. Note also that most coefficients have the same sign but tend to be larger in the West. These preliminary analyses therefore do not suggest that national and EU elections are viewed fundamentally differently across the former East–West divide. Instead, they seem to suggest that the magnitude tends to be larger in the West, presumably because voters had more time to connect performance evaluations to parties' status as a government or opposition party. In short, we see differences of degree but not a fundamentally different character. And we find evidence, again, for both the transfer and *suis generis* mechanisms.

Political Representation and System Satisfaction

We would like to push the analyses one step further. To this end, consider that the *suis generis* hypothesis assumes that voters actually distinguish fairly clearly between the national and EU levels. In contrast, the transfer hypothesis assumes that voters generalize from the national to the supranational level, thus distinguishing less clearly between the two levels. A different way to examine the plausibility of the transfer and the *suis generis* hypotheses is to examine the degree to which voters clearly discriminate between two institutional layers. For this purpose, the indicators from the two election studies are less-than-ideal, for two reasons. First, while they measure the performance of national conditions reasonably well, they are quite imperfect for the EU level. Secondly, the fact that parties are prominent at both levels means that voters inevitably pay considerable attention to the national level, even when they evaluate the EU. Is there evidence that allows us to examine how voters actually perceive the process of representation, independent of political parties?

Fortunately, Eurobarometer 52.0, conducted in 1999, contains several useful indicators that we use here to tease out a bit further whether citizens clearly discriminate between the two levels, as the *suis generis* hypothesis suggests. We particularly look to the question:

Many important decisions are made by the European Union. They might be in the interest of people like yourself, or they might not. To

what extent do you feel you can rely on each of the following bodies to make sure that these decisions are in the interest of people like yourself?

Respondents also evaluated a series of institutions, including their national parliament, their national government, the European Commission and the European Parliament on a ten-point scale. Another set of questions asks whether citizens are satisfied with the way democracy works at the national and EU level, again asked in the same question.

The *suis generis* hypothesis would predict that citizens clearly distinguish between the two levels. Therefore, support for this hypothesis would emerge if perceptions of the quality of national representation predict satisfaction with national democracies; if EU representation perceptions predict satisfaction with EU democracy; and, finally, if representation perceptions from one level do *not* predict satisfaction with democracy at the other level. This would be the clearest signs that citizens attribute representational responsibilities separately to each level. In contrast, the transfer hypothesis would predict that national performance perceptions affect satisfaction with the national *and* EU democracy because the performance of the two institutional layers are hypothesized to be linked in voters' minds.

Table 3 shows the surprisingly clear results in support of the *suis generis* hypothesis. Representational perceptions at each level predict satisfaction with democracies at each level. And representational perceptions at the national (EU) level do not influence evaluations of democracies at the EU (national) level. Note that these results emerge despite the fact that the question wording might easily have produced cross-level consistency because the representational indicators were asked in the same question as the satisfaction with democracy indicators. This provides strong support for the *suis generis* hypothesis because it shows, for West European voters at least, that they systematically distinguish between the representational mechanisms at the two levels.

Conclusion

The nature of multi-level governance in the EU creates unique problems for understanding public behaviour in that the same political actors — national political parties — serve as the instruments of public accountability at both the national and EU levels. It thus becomes very difficult to disentangle the national-level and EU-level motivations of voters across different elections. While the literature on second-order elections has clearly demonstrated that national considerations influence, if not dominate, the behaviour of voters in EP election, it has been less obvious when and how EU considerations might impact voting behaviour across elections. We have thus sought to assess how both national and EU considerations might influence behaviour in the EU.

There is considerable evidence that voters generalize the national performance to the EU level. There is also quite a bit of support for the idea that citizens distinguish between the transfer and *suis generis* mechanisms. The aggregate approach tends to be biased in favour of the transfer hypothesis to

Table 3. Relationship between perceptions of representational responsibility and perceptions of democracy at the national and EU levels

Predictor	EU democracy	National democracy
National institutions represent citizens	-0.008 (0.005)	-0.099** (0.009)
EU institutions represent citizens	-0.08** (0.007)	0.006 (0.007)
Party preference	0.02 (0.04)	-0.12* (0.04)
Nation benefits	-0.24** (0.02)	-0.14** (0.01)
Knowledge about EU	0.06** (0.01)	0.004 (0.01)
National economy positive	-0.07** (0.01)	-0.12** (0.01)
Personal economy positive	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
Age cohort: Young	-0.15** (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)
Age cohort: Middle	-0.08* (0.03)	-0.003 (0.04)
Education	0.02** (0.003)	0.002 (0.005)
Left ideology	0.05 (0.05)	0.07 (0.04)
Centrist ideology	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Income	-0.01 (0.009)	-0.04** (0.01)
Number of observations	14,023	14,035

Source: Eurobarometer (1999).

the detriment of the *suis generis* mechanism. Both perspectives, however, are needed to explain more fully the complex nature of vote choices in multi-level systems of governance.

We have not only found that EU considerations do indeed influence the public, but also some clues as to the conditions that impact the relative weight of national and EU considerations. Our analysis indicates that the transfer hypothesis may be supported, in part, by the way in which EP elections are conducted. Voters appear to weigh EU concerns more heavily when they are not focused on the performance of national political parties, for example, in the context of political representation. However, national parties establish the procedures governing EP elections, select the candidates for EP office and control the content of EP campaigns. The current system of EP elections thus inevitably links national issues, political parties and EU issues. If European actors were allowed more control over EP elections, then these

mechanisms might begin to focus more on EU issues and we might observe a shift in the relative weight of the different concerns motivating voting behaviour in these elections. Additionally, it appears that government parties benefit more if voters positively assess parties' performance at the EU level.

All told, these patterns suggest that perceptions of multi-level institutions mediate the relative emphasis that voters place on national and EU issues. In other words, national issues may dominate EU issues in EP elections due to the relative weaknesses of the European Parliament and/or the perception of EP elections as disingenuous instruments of accountability. Additionally, voters may believe that governing parties are better positioned to influence EU issues and may thus be more inclined to look to EU issues in deciding to punish or reward these parties. In short, the way EU elections are organized increases the salience of national factors at the EU level. Future research efforts should then seek to better identify those variables that may mediate the salience of EU issues on voting behaviour across elections, and to identify the conditions under which the EU is evaluated *suis generis*.

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Notes

1. We stipulate this condition because we view the decision to participate in an EU election as distinct from the choice of parties once a voter decides to cast a ballot.
2. Unfortunately, Carrubba and Timbone do not use individual-level performance evaluations. Consequently, their analysis does not directly examine the motives of voter — which is our primary objective.
3. The correlation coefficient between governmental performance and parties' EU performance is significant ($r=0.36$) though far from perfect. This suggests that the two performance dimensions are partially independent.
4. Given the lack of appropriate variables, we cannot sort out exactly why EU supporters are more likely to switch towards governmental parties than opponents of integration.

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Appendix A: Measurement of Government Support — EES (1999)

Dependent Variables

- *Government support across national/EP elections:* We coded respondents as (1) voted for a party in a governing coalition in the last EP election and the last general election, (2) voted for a party in a governing coalition in the last EP election and a party not in a governing coalition in the last general election, (3) voted for a party not in a governing coalition in the last EP election and a party in a governing coalition in the last general election and (4) voted for a party not in a governing coalition in the last EP election and the last general election.

Independent Variables

- *Parties' EU performance*: 'Thinking once again about European integration, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the current policy in <name of your country>? Are you (1) very satisfied, (2) somewhat satisfied, (4) somewhat dissatisfied or (5) very dissatisfied?' We included the small number of don't know responses as a (3) middle category.
- *Parties' government performance*: 'Let us now come back to <name of your country>. Do you (1) approve or (3) disapprove of the government's record to date?' We included the small number of don't know responses as a (3) middle category.
- *Economic perceptions*: 'How about the state of the economy, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the current policy in <name of your country>: are you (1) very satisfied, (2) somewhat satisfied, (4) somewhat dissatisfied or (5) very dissatisfied?' We included the small number of don't know responses as a (3) middle category.
- *EU support*: 'Generally speaking, do you think that <your country's > membership of the European Union is (1) a bad thing, (2) neither a good nor a bad thing or (3) a good thing?' We placed the small number of don't know responses in the (2) category.
- *Party identification*: We created a dichotomous variable: (1) if the respondent identified themselves as 'very close to <their party of choice>, fairly close, or merely a sympathizer' and (0) if they did not identify with a party or gave did not know.
- *Far-left ideology*: Taking the respondent's self-placement on a ten-point ideology scale (1–10), we classified them as (1) far-left if they answered 1–3 and (0) for any other answer.
- *Left-centre ideology*: Taking the respondent's self-placement on a ten-point ideology scale (1–10), we classified them as (1) left of centre if they answered 4 and (0) for any other answer.
- *Right-centre ideology*: Taking the respondent's self-placement on a ten-point ideology scale (1–10), we classified them as (1) right of centre if they answered 6 and (0) for any other answer.
- *Right ideology*: Taking the respondent's self-placement on a ten-point ideology scale (1–10), we classified them as (1) right if they answered 7 and (0) for any other answer.
- *Far-right ideology*: Taking the respondent's self-placement on a ten-point ideology scale (1–10), we classified them as (1) far-right if they answered 8–10 and (0) for any other answer.
- *Age*: 'What year were you born?'
- *Education*: 'How old were you when you stopped full-time education?'
- *Sex*: (0) male, (1) female

Appendix B: Measurement of Government Support — EES (2004)

Dependent Variables

Government support across national/EP elections: We coded respondents as (1) voted for a party in a governing coalition in the last EP election and the last general election, (2) voted for a party in a governing coalition in the last EP election and a party not in a governing coalition in the last general election, (3) voted for a party not in a governing coalition in the last EP election and a party in a governing coalition in the last general election and (4) voted for a party not in a governing coalition in the last EP election and the last general election.

Independent Variables

- *EU represents citizens:* An additive index of two questions about the government's economic performance. 'How much confidence do you have that decisions made by the European Union will be in the interest of (1) [country] and (2) people like you?' The indicator ranges from (2) doesn't feel represented to (10) feels represented.
- *Support for integration:* 'Generally speaking, do you think that [country's] membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?' (1) Bad thing, (2) Neither, Don't know, (3) Good thing.
- *Parties' government performance:* 'Let us now come back to [country]. Do you approve or disapprove the government's record to date?' Respondents could answer (0) disapprove or (2) approve. We included the small number of don't know responses as a (1) middle category.
- *Economic perceptions:* An additive index of two questions about the government's economic performance. 'What do you think about the economy? Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in this country is a lot worse, a little worse, stayed the same, a little better or a lot better?' and 'Over the next 12 months, how do you think the general economic situation in this country will: get a lot worse, get a little worse, stay the same, get a little better or get a lot better?' The indicator ranges from (2) bad performance to (10) good performance.

Appendix C: Measurement of Representation Variables — Eurobarometer 52.0 (1999)

Dependent Variables

- *Satisfaction with EU democracy:* 'On the whole are you (1) very satisfied, (2) fairly satisfied, (4) not very satisfied or (5) not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in the European Union?' We included the small number of don't know responses as a (4) middle category.
- *Satisfaction with national democracy:* 'On the whole are you (1) very satisfied, (2) fairly satisfied, (4) not very satisfied or (5) not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in <our country>?' We included the small number of don't know responses as a (4) middle category.

Independent Variables

- *National institutions and EU institutions represent citizens*: ‘Many important decisions are made by the European Union. They might be in the interest of people like yourself, or they might not. To what extent do you feel you can rely on each of the following bodies to make sure that these decisions are in the interest of people like yourself?’ Respondents placed the national government, national parliament, European Commission and European Parliament on a ten-point scale, ranging from (1) cannot rely on it at all to (10) can rely on it completely.
- *Party preference*: Respondent would support a party in government if there was an election next Sunday (coded 1) or an opposition party (coded 0).
- *Nation benefits*: ‘Taking everything into consideration, would you say that <our country> has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?’ We included the small number of don’t know responses as a middle category.
- *Knowledge about EU*: A four-point indicator (0–4) based on the number of correct answers to four factual questions about the (i) President of the EU Commission; (ii) a European commissioner appointed by national government; (iii) (National) Minister of Finance; (iv) National Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- *National economy positive*: An additive index of two questions about the future economic situation. ‘What are your expectations for the year to come: will 2000 be better, worse, or the same, when it comes to: (1) the economic situation in <our country>; (2) the employment situation in <our country>?’ The indicator ranges from 2 (worse) to 6.
- *Personal economy positive*: Same question lead as for national economy, after which respondents evaluated: (1) the financial situation of your household; (2) your personal job situation. The indicator ranges from 2 (worse) to 6.
- *Age cohort: Young*: Dichotomous variable: (1) respondents aged 15–29; (0) respondents all other ages.
- *Age cohort: Middle*: Dichotomous variable: (1) respondents aged 30–50; (0) respondents all other ages.
- *Education*: Years of schooling. Respondents ‘still studying’ were coded to the mean year of schooling for that nation.
- *Left ideology*: Taking the respondent’s self-placement on a ten-point ideology scale (1–10), we classified them as (1) left if they answered 1–3 and (0) for any other answer.
- *Centrist ideology*: Taking the respondent’s self-placement on a ten-point ideology scale (1–10), we classified them as (1) centre if they answered 4–6 and (0) for any other answer.
- *Income*: Four-point indicator ranging from low to high, with missing data recoded to the mean income for that country.