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The Quality of Democratic Representation in the European Parliament

Do election manifestos matter for the parliamentary behaviour of legislators?

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Abstract

What is the level of the quality of democratic representation in the European Parliament (EP)? This paper investigates this question by analysing the extent to which promises in election manifestos matter for the parliamentary behaviour of legislators. By employing a dyadic model on an original dataset in which we compare the similarities of election manifestos to the similarities in roll-call voting behaviour, we find that the democratic quality of the EP is markedly lower than the quality of most domestic parliaments. Furthermore, we find that for some issues (most notably economic issues), what parties put in their manifestos does not matter at all for the way in which they decide on policy alternatives in the parliamentary arena. We conclude the paper by reflecting on the causes of the low level of democratic representation in the EP.

1. Introduction

In the nineteenth century mass political parties have introduced popular participation in democratic institutions and as such it generated the moral authority of majority rule (Schattschneider 1942, p.208). Democracy became synonymous with political representation by parties and the notion of the party mandate emerged. The idea of mandates for government policy in which citizens could influence the policy of the future government by endorsing the election promises of parties is still a powerful justification of government policies (Robertson 1976). In this study we compare the issue positions of parties elected to the EP in their European manifestos with the voting behaviour of the individual members of parliament that belong to those parties. In this way, we investigate the extent to which election promises in party manifestos matter for the parliamentary behaviour of the representatives. The empirical research of the mandate of representation is important for the evaluation and legitimacy of the EP in particular and the European Union in general.

Bingham Powell (2000, p.70) argues that “[d]emocratic theory requires majorities to prevail over minorities. Mandates offer decisive evidence of democracy in action.” However, the majority rule will have only have legitimacy when there exist a “collective identity of a body politic, which may justify the imposition of sacrifices on some members of the community in the interest of the whole” (Scharpf 1996, p.26). So far, only at the level of the nation-state such a body politic could govern with a majority rule.

The EP does not have the power, sway and status of its domestic counterparts, the national parliaments in Europe. “If European Parliament elections are intended to provide popular democratic legitimacy for the EU’s decision-making process, they must be adjudged a failure” (Gallagher et al. 2006, p.127). The discussion about the democratic deficit of the EP is well-known and the conditions for the European Union to become a body politic have not improved. On the contrary, the rise of Euroscepticism since the 1990s (Szczerbiak & Taggart 2008; Hakhverdian et al. 2013), and the debate about the democratic deficit has increased substantially. More importantly, the European polity “lack[s] the quality of *government by the people*” (Scharpf 1999, p.188). Nonetheless, since 1979 the EP elections are quite similar to those elections to national parliaments, and the EP has been given the same characteristics of a parliamentary regime (Kohler-Koch 2000) This means that the parties that compete in the EP elections *behave* in the context of the EP as they do in that of their national setting. Essential here is the component of election manifestos which are, as argued above, an important element in making majority rule work. Even though the EP lacks many features such as the right of initiative or competence of legislating over all of the EU’s policies, parties still write election manifestos as if the institution to which they seek to be elected has these rights.

The focus of this paper is thus on the degree to which party mandates are fulfilled in the EP. Most national parties that seek election to the EP have a separate manifesto for these elections (and the small number of parties that do not often devote a large section to EU and EP politics in their national manifestos). The manifestos or European party programs define the ideological positions of parties in the *electoral* competition during the campaign. After the election the same manifestos define the ideological position of an individual member in the *parliamentary* competition, and therefore provide a guide for these members in how to decide on policy alternatives.

The party preferences in manifestos are relevant in the electoral competition since in it, parties emphasize different issues during the election, providing policy alternatives to the electorate. Mandate theory argues from the premise that citizens base their choice for a specific party on its programmatic position. However, only when the promises laid out in the manifesto are mirrored by what the party does in parliament afterwards can we speak of the fulfilment of a mandate. Indeed, mandate fulfilment is defined as “the level of congruence between the electoral party competition and the parliamentary party competition” (Louwse 2011, p.2). Although parties are mandated by the electorate on the basis of their manifestos, the electorate has little mechanisms of exerting control over the behaviour of the parties after the elections. Only the threat of voting for a different party during the next elections (i.e. ex-ante punishment) offers a credible control mechanism of the electorate over the selectorate. In essence, whether parties fulfil their mandates is (in part) a function of the (perceived) threat of punishment by the electorate.

Such a threat is only relevant to parties if the electorate indeed judge the past parliamentary performance of their representatives when casting a ballot. The argument this paper develops is that the EP is a special case in which very little incentives exists for parties to fulfil their mandates as both the electoral connection is weak (Reif & Schmitt 1980; Reif 1984), and the institutional set-up of the EP favours non-fulfilment. With the latter, we refer to the differing preferences from the two main principals of MEPs: their national parties and the European party groups (Hix 2002).

The level of congruence between the position in the electoral party competition (i.e. the position in the manifesto) and the position in parliamentary party competition (e.g. the position on an issue during a parliamentary vote) is an indicator of the democratic quality of a parliament. This paper concentrates on mandate fulfilment in the seventh EP by comparing the election manifestos of national parties of the election of 2009 to the voting behaviour of members of parliament in the period 2009 to 2014. The research question of this study is therefore: *What is the democratic quality of the seventh EP?*

The answer of our research question will be given by our empirical analysis and the outcome will be a certain level of congruence between the electoral and parliamentary competition. We are, however, less interested in the *absolute* level of congruence, as we want to compare the democratic quality of the EP to that of the domestic parliaments. To this end, we will introduce the concept of mandate fulfilment and present an overview of existing research to be able to compare our research on the EP to the extant research on national parliaments. We will then move on to discuss why we expect that the mandate fulfilment in the EP will be lower than that in national parliaments, followed by our main hypothesis.

2. Theory

We expect that the fulfilment of mandates is markedly lower in the EP because of two factors: a very weak electoral connection, and an institutional context which stimulates MEPs to potentially follow other leads in determining how to vote on issues that come up in parliament. Before we turn to discussing these factors, we first need to establish what mandate fulfilment is and how we should interpret results from our mandate fulfilment analysis. In essence, we need a baseline of mandate fulfilment to which we can compare the EP.

The mandate fulfilment is a specific research tradition that differs from other versions of the mandate theory, like the pledge approach and the saliency approach (Robertson 1976; Royed 1996; Klingemann et al. 1994; Bingham Powell 2000; Thomson 2001; Andeweg & Thomassen 2005; Mansergh & Thomson 2007; Louwse 2011). The mandate fulfilment approach compares the electoral competition with the parliamentary competition, while the pledges approach compares specific pledges with government policy. Working from the mandate fulfilment tradition,

Some versions of mandate theory look specifically at governing parties and very specific claims (“we will do this and that”) rather than the general outlook of the party as laid out in the manifesto (e.g. Costello & Thomson 2008). However, we agree with Louwse (2011) that we should not limit our analysis to governing parties, nor to very specific claims. Political parties have little control over the composition of the entire parliament and are thus dependent upon other parties whether or not they are able to join a coalition or whether they are able to pass a law. It is indeed the position that parties take in within the parliament (and not just in the government) that is most directly related to the fulfilment of mandates. If we were to focus on the fulfilment of mandates from a government-focussed analysis, we would need to conclude that in the EP no pledges are fulfilled as in the EP we cannot speak of a traditional coalition-opposition dynamic. This is because there is no European government that is directly accountable to the parliament (though see Kreppel & Tsebelis 1999). Therefore, we adopt the position of Louwse (2011) and compare manifestos with position-taking in parliament.

Louwse (2011) compares mandates with parliamentary behaviour (specifically: the references to manifesto issues in parliamentary debates) in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. He finds that the average distance (and therefore the level of mandate fulfilment) between manifesto and parliamentary positions of parties the period 2001 - 2005 in Britain is slightly higher than in the Netherlands. The mandates flowing from elections on the basis of the election manifestos are therefore slightly better fulfilled in Britain compared to the Netherlands. Louwse finds a congruence level of 0.5, meaning that about half of the parliamentary positions of the parties can be explained by the positions of these parties in their manifestos. Essential for our discussion is the observation that there is a moderate congruence between what parties promise in their manifestos and what they actually do once they are elected, at least in terms of the contents of the parliamentary debate.

Other studies also show that the fulfilment of mandates is at a “decent level” (Fivaz et al. 2015, p.198). For example, the level of congruence between mandates and parliamentary position-taking is about 70 per cent in Ireland (Costello & Thomson 2008, p.253), ranges from 63.7 to 72.2 per cent in the United Kingdom (depending on cabinet duration) (Rallings 2008, p.11), and in Spain ranges from 20 per cent to 70 per cent for, respectively, opposition and coalition parties (Artés 2011, p.156). Although the methods and the definition of mandates, party promises, and the way in which promises are argued to be kept vary considerably between these studies, the crucial point is that, in general, what parties promise during elections in their manifestos have clear effects on what these parties do after they are elected.

From the above discussed studies, we find that the legislatures of European member states show moderate to high levels of mandate fulfilment. If we would phrase these findings in regression terms, about half of the variation in parliamentary behaviour—in the case of the work by Louwse (2011) the parliamentary debates—can be explained by the election mandates of the parties of these

representatives. For the EP, however, we expect the level of mandate fulfilment to be lower than in the national legislatures.

2.1 Mandate fulfilment in the EP

The levels of congruence between manifestos and parliamentary behaviour, in essence the fulfilment of mandates, is moderate to high for domestic parliaments. However, due to the nature of the elections to the EP and the institutional set-up which puts legislators under the influence of not only the national party (which arguably is interested in keeping its manifesto for electoral reasons), but also under the influence of the European party group (which is arguably less bound by manifesto promises than the national party). This section builds an argument around these two observations and constructs our main hypothesis.

Our first argument stems from the observation that elections to the EP are *second-order elections* (Reif & Schmitt 1980; Reif 1984; Kreppel & Hix 2003a; Hobolt & Høyland 2011). Essentially, elections to the EP are less about the EP itself or the policy that is decided upon in it, but rather about domestic political issues and parties, and the national government's performance. As Reif argues, "European elections have become pure national test elections without institutionally binding consequences but not without considerable potential of political repercussions" (1984, p.253). The issues that dominate in the elections are therefore often outside of the competences of the EP and rather within those of the domestic legislature (Hobolt et al. 2009; Rohrschneider & Clark 2008). Fulfilling a mandate without having the formal competence to do so would indeed be difficult, if not wholly impossible. At the same time, the turnout rates for EP elections are low, much lower than turnout rates during national elections (Kreppel & Hix 2003b, p.76). This means that what is debated during elections does not mirror that what is decided upon during a parliamentary term. Nonetheless, the parties that participate in the elections come up with elaborate election manifestos in which they make promises about various issues.

Parties are relatively free to put in their manifestos what they want, as little scrutiny over these manifestos takes place during the elections due to the second-order nature of these elections. As the elections are not so much evaluations of past performance of the elected MEPs themselves but rather evaluations of their parties' performance in the national legislature, MEPs can reasonably be expected to attribute little value to the manifesto on which they are elected. National legislators, at the other hand, can be expected to care more about their (national) election manifestos as manifestos to them matter.

Hix et al. (2007, p.28) argue that MEPs are unlikely to be punished (or rewarded, for that matter) by the electorate for what they have done in the EP's parliamentary arena. Similar conclusions are drawn by Slapin & Proksch (2010) who argue that "[t]he electoral disconnection between European political groups and citizens raise questions about the extent to which the parliamentary behaviour of MEPs matters for re-election." The mechanism of control that the citizens have over their representatives is a broken device: the electorate is either uninformed about EP politics or cares more about signalling their domestic governments than about holding their EP representatives to account.

Our second argument why the mandate fulfilment in the EP will be lower than in national legislatures revolves around the dual-natured party system of the EP. Elections to the EP are domestic enterprises, as the *competition over votes* is inherently national in nature (Scully 2005). Every five years, voters are asked

to go to the ballot to cast their vote on whom to send to Brussels on their behalf. Although the elections are held all over the EU at about the same moment and under quite similar electoral rules and system, voters can only vote for candidates that run in their member state. They can only cast a vote in their country of residence. At the same time, *competition over policy* is inherently European in nature (Hix et al. 2003). The national parties that take part in in the elections are too small to effectively pursue policy on their own as they would have to compete with hundreds of other small national parties, making coalition building a difficult if not impossible undertaking (cf. Hix et al. 2005, p.212). National parties therefore join European party groups after the elections. These party groups bring together legislators from ideologically like-minded national parties from various member states. In essence, whereas the national parties are important in the competition over the voters' favour in the electoral arena, European party groups are important for pursuing policy in the parliamentary arena. The use of most parliamentary instruments (tabling amendments, motions; forming committees, etc.) are an exclusive right of these party groups (de jure), or in cases when party groups are not formally required, they are a de facto necessity because of far-reaching requirements on how many signatories are required to use an instrument. Party groups, especially the larger ones such as the Christian-democratic EPP and social-democratic PES, have considerable control over policy by being able to effectively control the political agenda (cf. Hix et al. 2007, p.114).¹

The occurrence of two types of parties introduces problems for individual legislators, as they are the 'agent' of not one but two 'principals' (Hix 2002): national parties are necessary for electoral purposes (without a national party, one cannot be elected – although a legislator could in theory start his or her own party). At the same time, a legislator that wants to fulfil his or her mandate after the elections is reliant on his or her European party group for support, without which the legislator would be unable to table policy or gain important committee positions. Party groups require unity to be strong towards other party groups, and therefore demand loyalty from their members (e.g. Finke 2014). The median position of a party group more often than not does *not* correspond to the position of the legislator's national party, meaning that he or she is whipped in a direction away from the position, as laid out in the national party's manifesto, on which that legislator is elected. In other words, for strategic reasons, legislators have an impetus to intentionally ignore their election manifestos and choose the party group line – which in broad lines would be resembling the national party position but certainly not completely (cf. Hix et al. 2007). Nonetheless, Hix (2002) finds that the national party is the most powerful principal (for reasons of being able to reward and sanction MEPs by placing, or rather refusing a place, on the electoral ballot), nonetheless the European party groups possess policy-making powers (see, for example, Farrell & Héritier 2004). This raises the question of whether MEPs follow their national party's manifesto or the preferences of the European party group in deciding how to vote on policy alternatives.

The two main arguments about the second-order nature of EP elections and the institutional set-up of the EP lead us to our main hypothesis:

¹ We refer to these party groups with these acronyms throughout the paper, even though they change over time.

H1: The similarity of election manifestos of pairs of MEPs predicts similarity of their roll-call voting behaviour *less* for the EP than for domestic legislatures.

3. Data & Methods

Most analyses of mandate fulfilment rely on measuring congruence between a party's manifesto and the behaviour of its legislators in parliament by manual or automatic linking of issue positions in the manifesto to concrete acts in parliament (e.g. voting on a bill or taking a position in a debate). We opt for an indirect method of measuring mandate fulfilment which revolves around the core idea that *if two legislators have similar positions in their party manifestos, then they can be expected to also behave in parliament more similarly than parties that take dissimilar positions in their manifestos*. This means that we test mandate fulfilment using a dyadic approach in which we compare the manifestos and voting behaviour for all possible combinations of legislators. We focus on roll-call votes (see below for why we opted for this instrument) and expect that if two legislators have similar positions in their manifestos on an issue (say the environment), then we should also see that these two legislators vote on environmental issues more similarly than two legislators that have differing positions in their manifestos on the environment.

We opted for this indirect measurement using legislator dyads for a number of reasons. If we rather were to employ a direct measurement of the extent to which electoral promises lead to voting according to these promises, we run into the problem that only very few promises in manifestos are concrete enough to translate to simple votes in favour or against a tabled piece of policy. This is especially a problem for the EP, where most policy that is discussed and voted upon is initiated by the Commission rather than within the Parliament itself (Maurer 2003) – making it difficult for legislators to table policy that is directly relatable to manifesto pledges. Manifestos contain ideological perspectives on specific issues as well as concrete proposals for (amendments to) laws, motions, and other legislative position-taking (Laver and Hunt 1992; Benoit and Laver 2003). In this sense, we would be faced with the choice to ignore many of the positions that are taken in manifestos as well as almost all votes that cannot directly be related to such promises. If we (as researchers) were to liberally interpret the entire manifesto and link the ideological positions to policy proposals (i.e. that what is voted upon), this would require a very subjective classification of both manifestos as well as votes.

The classification problem is the core reason why Fivaz et al. (2015, p.197; see also Louwerse 2011) adopt an approach of limited analysis by focusing solely on pledges parties make in voting-advice applications (VAAs). Here, parties are asked to interpret their own manifestos and mould it into a limited number of statements with which they can agree or disagree (and in which parties often can indicate the how salient each of the issues are to them). However, such an approach ignores the more fine-grained and less salient issues in manifestos which might nonetheless receive attention in manifestos. Those who set-up the VAA in essence decide over which issues are relevant for keeping promises, rather than parties or legislators themselves. Furthermore, much that is voted upon is event-driven, meaning that at the time of the writing of the election manifestos, the specifics about issues that come up during a legislative term are simply unforeseeable. Manifestos contain both specific promises as well as more general viewpoints

which, so the party promises, guides how the party and its legislators would deal with these unforeseen issues.

Our dyadic approach is different from the extant work on mandate fulfilment. We argue that if two members of parliament take a similar viewpoint in their manifesto on a specific issue, then the position they take in parliament (by, for example, voting on policy proposals during a parliamentary vote, or raising points in debates, etc.) should also be similar—if indeed manifestos matter for parliamentary behaviour. For example, if a policy proposal on agricultural subsidies is reaches the plenary vote within the EP then we can reasonably expect that legislators who agree that agricultural subsidies are good would vote in favour of policy that supports these subsidies, and vote against policy that would limit the subsidies. Conversely, if two legislators differ in their views on agricultural subsidies, we can also expect them to vote differently: one would favour the proposal, while the other would reject it. We therefore believe that our dyadic model has the potential to solve the issues discussed above, specifically the difficult and subjective linking of manifesto promises to specific parliamentary behaviours such as votes. Our dyadic model of all pairs of legislators combines a measure of manifesto agreement (per issue, see below) with a measure of parliamentary position-taking agreement, with the underlying expectation that we can explain variation in position-taking (dis)agreement by variation in the manifesto (dis)agreement.

Our model is probabilistic in that we do not expect that a similarity in manifesto positions necessarily translates into parliamentary position-taking similarity. Rather, interpretation differences and strategic considerations (“if I vote against this amendment now, the final proposal might make it, which is still better than the status quo”) might interfere up to a degree. Nonetheless, we believe that it is reasonable to assume that legislators with similar party manifestos would have a higher degree of parliamentary position-taking than legislators with dissimilar party manifestos do.

Our dependent variable is therefore the similarity score of roll-call voting. This score counts the number of times that the pair of legislators are in agreement (i.e. vote the same: yea/yea, nay/nay, abstain/abstain) as a proportion of the total number of votes in which both participate.

We specifically choose the instrument of roll-call voting—rather than, for example, parliamentary debates, as Louwse (2011) does—as we believe this is the appropriate instrument to measure the effects of mandate fulfilment in the EP. In the EP, many debates take place in multiple rounds of compromises with the Council (Corbett et al. 2011), in committees and, increasingly, in “secluded trilogue meetings of a limited number of representatives of the three EU legislative institutions – Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission” (Yordanova 2016, p.179). Therefore, it is difficult to compare manifestos to parliamentary debates, as much of the actual position-taking occurs behinds closed doors and can therefore not be related to manifesto promises. We believe that manifesto fulfilment strongly relates to the actual decision-making, which in the EP occurs by roll-call vote in which each member of parliament voices his or her agreement or disagreement with the policy which is voted upon.

The roll-call data are gathered from the Votewatch.org website (VoteWatch 2014), which provides data on virtually all roll-call votes for the seventh EP term. The data set contains for a total of 6408 roll-calls the voting decisions of the individual MEPs. To calculate the roll-call voting similarity score, we determined the proportion of roll-calls in which the pair of legislators voted the same (i.e. yea/yea,

nay/nay, or abstain/abstain) as a proportion of all of the votes in which both legislators took place.² We coded the voting similarity score as missing of both MEPs when both MEPs took part in less than ten per cent of all of the roll-calls for the given issue category.

The data contains a total of 4,047,136 voting decisions being cast by in total 848 MEPs (including replacements for MEPs retiring from the EP halfway during the seventh legislative term). Rather than comparing the total of the manifesto promises to all of the roll-call votes (i.e. calculating the gross overlap of the manifesto of MEP 1 with the gross overlap of the roll-call voting behaviour of MEP 2; see below), we compare promises on an issue-by-issue approach. We do this, because parties might agree on some issues (and therefore make similar election promises) but disagree on others; if we force a comparison of the whole manifesto on all of the voting behaviour, we would introduce noise coming from this agreement on some, but disagreement on other issues.

The data for the manifestos is derived from the Euromanifesto Project, EMP (Braun et al. 2010). This data set contains an adapted version of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) coding scheme for almost all election manifestos of the national parties taking part in the 2009 EP elections. Using quantitative content analysis, country experts code the number of quasi-sentences that are spent in 90 categories of issues. The coders furthermore distinguish for each of these issues between positive and negative mentions, and therefore we can calculate the position of the national party on an issue (e.g. more positive than negative mentions of 'freedom of enterprise', or more negative than positive mentions of 'EU enlargement').

In order to be able to link the manifestos to the individual legislators, we rely upon the ParlGov database (Döring & Manow 2012) which provides information on national parties as well as on unique identifiers to the EMP data set. We were able to link 65 per cent of the national parties to manifestos. Those parties which we could not link were mainly missing because they were not included in ParlGov or the EMP (e.g. because they are break-offs during the legislative terms, combining MEPs from multiple national parties).

The calculation of the distance between election manifesto programmes is somewhat more complicated. First, we calculated for each of the 90 EMP issues per issue the position each of the two national parties on the issues. We did this by subtracting the percentage of negative mentions that a party has in their manifesto on an issue from the number of positive mentions. In this way, we have calculated a party's position towards an issue ranging (theoretically) from -1 to 1. In the case of a score of -1, a party would devote its entire party manifesto against this specific issue, while a score of +1 would indicate that the entire manifesto is in favour of the given issue. In reality, obviously, no party devotes that much attention to one single issue.

The next step is to subtract the score of the first MEP's national party on this issue from the score of the second MEP's national party, again on this issue, and then take the absolute value of this distance. This then yields a measure of distance: if national parties completely agree on an issue (thus both in position: both in favour or both against, as well as in terms of the relative number of sentences the parties attribute

² Abstentions are only included when both legislators *voted* abstain, rather than not being present or not taking part in the vote. These latter two categories are treated as missing data and therefore excluded from the calculation of the similarity scores.

to the issue), the distance would be 0, while if they would completely disagree, their distance would be 2 (for example, party A scoring -1 on an issue, party b scoring +1 on an issue, then the distance would be 2).

The third step is to sum up the distances for all the EMP issues that fall under our categorisation scheme and then to normalise it.³ This means that we sum up all distances for the manifesto issues that fall under the fourteen categories we have coded the issues in. Then we normalise them by dividing for each pair their distance by the highest distance any pair has on the given category. Finally, for purposes of interpretation, we convert the distance scores into similarity scores by subtracting each distance score for each pair and each category from 1. The end result is a number that ranges from 0 to 1, whereby 0 indicates complete disagreement on between the two legislators in the pair for the given issue, and whereby 1 indicates a complete agreement (i.e. the two legislators' manifestos are both in favour or against all of the issues in the category *and* attribute the same amount of attention to each of the issues).

As parties take in totality adopt differing positions *on the whole*, we look at specific categories of issues (e.g. interest groups, foreign policy, Green issues). In other words: parties might agree on agricultural subsidies but might disagree on international relations issues, and by splitting up our data set in specific issue categories, we can measure (per issue) the mandate fulfilment. This measurement does not suffer from differences in the saliency of issues in the manifestos compared to the parliamentary arena. We first manually linked each parliamentary vote to each of the 90 issues that are present in the EMP. Then we proceeded by bringing down the 90 EMP issues to a total of fourteen categories (see the appendix for a description of this process). In practice, this means that our per-category dyadic dataset contains observations for all pairs of legislators times the fourteen issue categories, while the non-split-up dyadic dataset contains observations of manifesto and roll-call voting similarity (comparing whole manifestos and all roll-call voting) for all pairs of legislators.

Our analysis is a simple Pearson's correlation analysis which yields, for each category, the correlation between manifesto similarity and roll-call voting similarity for all pairs of legislators.

4. Results

We test the mandate theory by linking what politicians promise during the election for the European Parliament in 2009 with what these politicians have voted during the seventh European Parliament period 2009-2014. On the macro level we have two distributions which are presented in the two-dimensional space in Figure 1. The figure shows the similarity of parties' manifestos in the electoral competition (horizontal axis) and the distribution of the roll-call voting similarity scores in the parliamentary competition (vertical axis). The axes run from low similarity (0) to a high similarity (1). Figure 1 presents the overall correspondence between the two similarities and the correlation R is .42 which is illustrated by the slope of the line in the two-dimensional space.

This means that an overlap between what is in manifestos and how legislators cast their votes during roll-calls is clearly present. Nonetheless, the value of .42 is markedly lower than what previous research has found for domestic parliaments. In this sense, the degree to which election manifestos matter for the

³ See the appendix for an explanation of how we constructed our categorisation scheme and how we link these to the issues in the EMP and the votes. We also generate an overall data set which does not categorise issues but instead compares the entire manifesto to the entire roll-call voting behaviour.

parliamentary behaviour is clearly lower in the EP than in other parliaments. Our hypothesis H1, which states that *the similarity of election manifestos of pairs of MEPs predicts similarity of their roll-call voting behaviour less for the EP than for domestic legislatures.*, is indeed confirmed.

Although we have no specific hypothesis on differences between different categories of issues, we present here an analysis that splits up between thirteen categories of issues.⁴ Figure 2 show the similarity score manifesto with roll-call data for the thirteen distinct issues. The ranking order of the issues with roll-call data is from high (top left corner) to low (bottom). The different scatterplots show that there are six issues EU, Financing the EC/EU, Social Policy, Market regulation, membership EU, and Culture, with a relative high correlation between the promises that have been made in the electoral competition and the roll-call voting on each of the issues in the EP. The six issues are the main competences of the EU and the EP. The data show that the conflict of interest (Axelrod 1970) in the electoral competition in 2009 was relative low on these six issues, which corresponds to a low conflict of interest in the parliamentary competition. Although lower than when comparing the whole manifesto with the whole roll-call voting behaviour, we find reasonable levels of congruence between manifestos and voting behaviour for these six issues.

The other seven issues show an absence of a relationship between the two main dimensions. The similarity score on the manifesto program on each of the seven issues has almost no predictive power on the roll-call similarity score. The slope of the regression line in each of the seven plots is almost zero and there is no congruence between the electoral competition and the parliamentary competition. In other words, what parties promise on the issue of military issues, economic policy, interest groups, green politics, foreign policy, law & order, and the welfare state simply does not matter for the parliamentary behaviour of the MEPs. Especially the issue of economic policy is surprising as economic policy is one of the core competences of the EU and the EP, while the low congruence between manifestos and parliamentary behaviour for military and foreign policy issues can be understood as a lack of competences.⁵ The flat regression line in the last seven issues is at the one hand disturbing from the point of view of the mandate theory, because what parties promise on the issue of Foreign Policy in the electoral competition in each country has no bearing on the behaviour of the MEP in the roll-call in the EP. This result will damage the legitimacy of the EP even further. Our result do present some reason of concern, but we need to investigate the data in more detail in a later study to understand to full extent of the mismatch of the similarity score in manifesto programs and the similarity score of the roll-call data.⁶

⁴ In a future version, we will provide theory and hypotheses for analysing different categories of issues, mainly revolving around competences of EP in EU policy making. In the meantime: suggestions are welcome!

⁵ One could still make the argument that parties voluntarily put promises in manifestos which *they know they cannot keep* as these promises revolve around non-competences. This means that parties wilfully promise things they cannot deliver on as a matter of law, which is potentially as bad for the quality of democratic representation as not delivering on promises which can actually be delivered upon.

⁶ Further investigation is also necessary as we find a level of $R=.42$ when we compare the whole manifesto with all roll-call voting, but we only find lower levels of correlation when we split-up the dataset into the thirteen issues. Although we expected that the correlation was lower for some issues than for others, we did not expect all correlations for the thirteen issues to be lower than the overall correlation. Any and all suggestions and pointers are welcome!

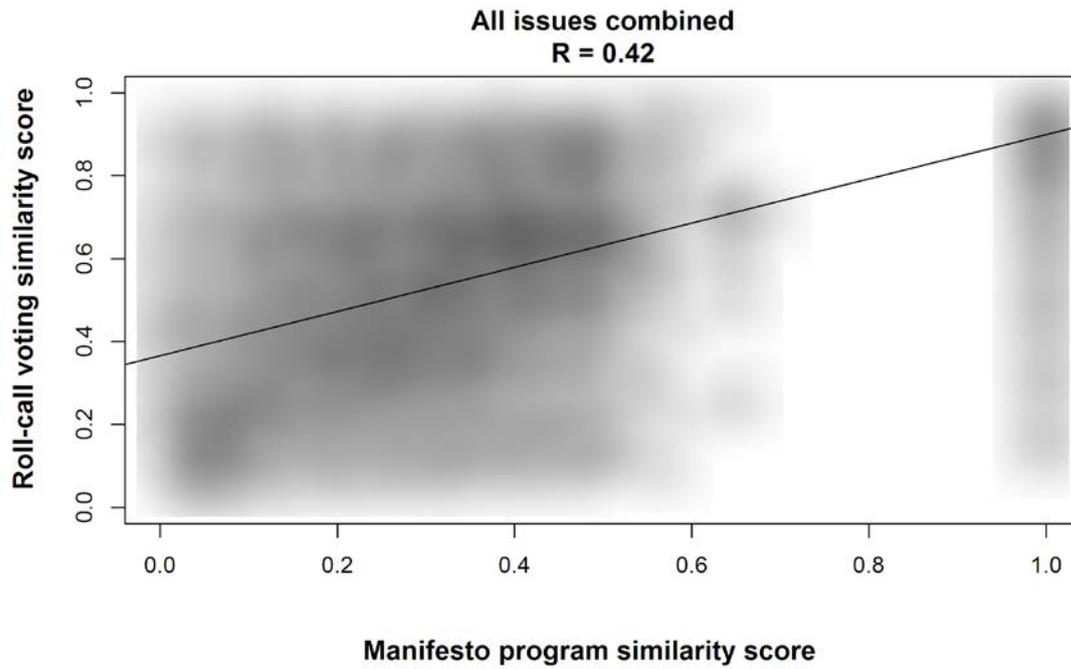


Figure 1 – The correlation between manifesto similarity scores and roll-call voting similarity for pairs of legislators, comparing whole manifestos with all roll-call voting.⁷

⁷ Note that a peak exists near the top right, this is where pairs of legislators who are from the same party cluster. If we remove these from the analysis, the correlation figures only marginally change.

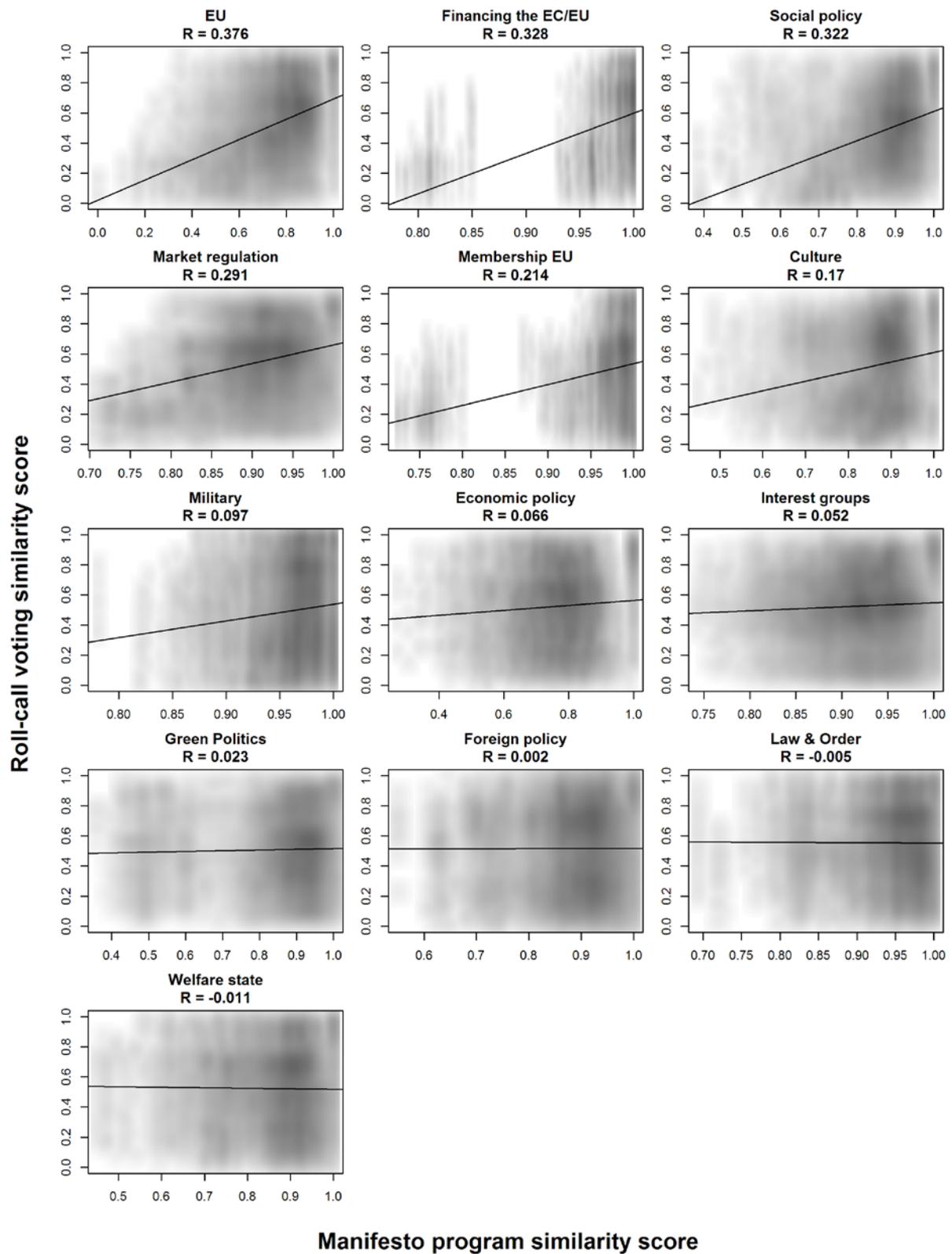


Figure 2 – The correlation between manifesto similarity scores and roll-call voting similarity for pairs of legislators, split up by category.

5. Discussion

Our research question is *What is the democratic quality of the seventh EP?* Overall, we find that the democratic quality of the seventh EP is lower than domestic parliaments. Furthermore, we find that what parties put in their manifestos for some issues hardly matters for what their MEPs do in parliament. This has serious consequences for the legitimacy of decision-making in the EU and the EP as a representative organ itself.

Nonetheless, can we find something positive in this rather dim view of parliamentary politics in the EP? One of elements we have to take a closer look at is a notion of Peter Mair (2009) who argued that parties have not only must be representative for the electorate, but they also must be responsible. When in the electoral competition the polarization is getting stronger on specific issues, then the mandate theory on representation would require that the legislators in the EP would also behave in manner that is consistent with the polarized electorate. However, another view argues that the responsible behaviour would actually be to *hold the community together* by depolarising the issues (rather than mirroring societal conflict lines in parliament). This view comes close to what Arend Lijphart (1975) have describe as the *Politics of Accommodation*.

The mandate fulfilment requirement demands that the same level of polarisation on the national level must be matched by a high polarisation on the parliamentary level. However, this match is a requirement of democratic representation, but for the working of some form of democracy in a highly divided community it is necessary that a parliament holds the European community together. We cannot exclude the possibility that in the EP there exists “a spirit of accommodation’ and the politics of the EP is a *politics of accommodation*, i.e. a pragmatic style of governance working in environment with minimal consensus” (Lijphart 1975, p.103). A key element of the politics of accommodation is the shared mind-set that “the existing system ought to be maintained and not be allowed to disintegrate” (Lijphart 1975, p.103). Or to paraphrase Mair, it is possible that the MEPs have moved from representing interests of the citizens to the EP to representing interests of the EU to the citizens. This will probably not decrease the ‘all seasons of discontent’ in Europe, since the only real solution would be that the parties in the member states go against the populist stream and make clear to the public that the EU and the EP are the only political instrument to solve problems of collective action.

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7. Appendix

Categorising EMP issues and linking votes to these categories

As we do not compare the whole of the manifestos to the whole of the voting behaviour, we needed to link votes to the categories in the EMP. We did this by manually coding all 6408 votes to one of the 90 EMP categories, or if none of the categories applied, a separate category of 'no code applies'. We took care to investigate the content of the policy voted upon by going through the text of the piece voted upon. About 12.4 per cent of the votes fall in the no code applies category and mainly deal with technical issues such as the call to end a debate (without containing substantive conclusions). We excluded this category and all of the underlying votes from our investigation as we cannot formulate expectations without election promises.

We cluster the different issues in the EMP in fourteen categories. This is because not all of the 90 categories in the EMP coding scheme receive equal attention in terms of the number of roll-call votes that are cast and because we want to compare issues which receive equal attention (both in the manifestos as well as in the voting). Obviously, economic issues receive far more attention than specific foreign policy issues (as the former is a solid competence of the EP, while the latter is not). Therefore, we decided to cluster the 90 EMP categories into fourteen main categories, which form the basis of our investigation.