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# Aggregation and Representation in European Parliament Party Groups

RICHARD ROSE and GABRIELA BORZ

*While members of the European Parliament are elected in national constituencies, their votes are determined by the aggregation of MEPs in multinational party groups. The uncoordinated aggregation of national party programmes in multinational EP party groups challenges theories of representation based on national parties and parliaments. This article provides a theoretical means of understanding representation by linking the aggregation of dozens of national party programmes in different EP party groups to the aggregation of groups to produce the parliamentary majority needed to enact policies. Drawing on an original data source of national party programmes, the EU Profiler, the article shows that the EP majorities created by aggregating MEP votes in party groups are best explained by cartel theories. These give priority to strengthening the EP's collective capacity to enact policies rather than voting in accord with the programmes they were nationally elected to represent.*

Theories of representation postulate that in a democratic political system there should be a high degree of congruence between the policy preferences of voters and the programmes of the parties that represent them (Rosema *et al.* 2011: Part I). However, as Cox (1997: 225) has emphasised, representation is not only about ‘having one’s views voiced in the legislature’ but also about ‘having one’s views reflected in the final product of the legislative decision-making process, that is, in enacted policy’. Therefore, there should also be a high degree of congruence between the programmes that parties offer their voters and the policies that they endorse in parliament. Parties must aggregate ‘the interests, claims and demands’ articulated by their voters into programmes that can be enacted by government (Almond 1960: 38f; cf. Mair and Thomassen 2010; Pitkin 1967). Since the number of ways in which the ‘common and opposed’ views of the electorate could combine is far greater than the number of effective parties in a national party system, aggregation is a process that ‘necessarily involves a reduction in the number of competitors’ and in the

extent to which the positions of parties can be totally congruent with those of their electorates (Cox 1997: 4f; Wessels 2011).

Our aggregation model emphasises the contingent conditions in which representation is or is not congruent with the programmes that parties present to their electorates. There should be a high level of congruence where a continuing feedback between the policy decisions of parties in a national parliament and their voters co-ordinates the views of representatives and those they represent (cf. Cox 1997; Easton 1965). However, these conditions are not met in the European Parliament. Instead, there is no co-ordination in the aggregation of programmes that parties present to their national electorates and the policies endorsed by multinational party groups in the European Parliament.

The EP's rules require a party group to have at least 25 members from a minimum of at least seven countries; the average group aggregates MEPs from more than 15 countries. They are not electoral parties appearing on the ballots of the 27 national constituencies electing MEPs. They are parliamentary caucuses organised to conduct the EP's business.<sup>1</sup> The enactment of major EP policies requires endorsement by an absolute majority of MEPs. Since no group comes anywhere near having a majority, groups whose MEPs competed with each other in their national constituency must aggregate their votes if the Parliament is to have a positive influence over policies (see Kreppel 2002). Lord and Pollak (2010: 118) charge that this multi-stage process of aggregation 'undermines standards by which political power is justified to the represented'.

Our focus on the aggregation of national programmes within a multinational EP majority adds a theoretical level to approaches that focus on whether national party programmes represent the preferences of voters (Volkens 2007) or on cohesion in EP voting in a multi-national party group (Hix *et al.* 2007; Vote Watch 2012). It does so by linking the aggregation of national party programmes in party groups with the votes of groups combining to form an EP majority on policies. First, we set out propositions about how multi-level institutions influence agreement between the national programmes on which MEPs are elected and the aggregate position of their group. Ideology is most important. Secondly, we set out competing theories of how different groups form majority coalitions in EP voting, and find that cartel theory provides a better explanation than spatial models of ideological proximity (cf. Katz and Mair 2009). The lack of co-ordination of group policies and that of their nationally elected MEPs threatens the claims of EP majorities to represent what European voters endorse. Our data comes from the EU Profiler analysis of the programmes of national parties contesting the 2009 European Parliament election. Its unique feature is that party positions have been determined through Internet-based interaction between researchers at the European University Institute, Florence, and more than 250 national parties (see Trechsel and Mair 2009).

### **National Parties Represent; EP Party Groups Aggregate**

Studies of representation in the European Parliament focus on two different levels of the multi-level system of EU government. Many follow the Miller and Stokes (1963) model of testing the congruence between the position of voters and their members of Congress (see e.g. Rosema *et al.* 2011). The empirical and normative question is: to what extent do the policy positions of representatives elected to the European Parliament match those of their electors. Others (Hix *et al.* 2007; Vote Watch 2012) have analysed recorded roll call votes to establish the extent to which MEPs from different countries vote together in a group. Neither approach shows whether national party programmes on which MEPs are elected are congruent with the votes that MEPs cast in the European Parliament.

#### *Multinational Aggregation of National Parties*

In a European Parliament election, parties compete nationally to represent a single country's citizens. Each member state is a separate constituency with its own nationally determined party system. When the list system of proportional representation is used, the national party committee determining positions on the list has a disciplinary hold on MEPs that their party group lacks. Each national party determines the content of the programme on which its candidates seek election. In making up their national programmes, parties give priority to what suits their national context without regard to the statements of the multinational federations to which their MEPs affiliate (Sigalas and Pollak 2012).

There is virtually no co-ordination between the campaigns in the 27 national constituencies and EP party groups. The rules of the European Parliament forbid EP party groups spending funds to participate in national election campaigns. Campaigns are conducted in more than two dozen different languages and media networks (Bardi *et al.* 2010). The attitudes noted by Lodge and Herman (1982: 19) after the first EP election persist; national parties view supranational party groups as irrelevant, potentially disruptive or even as an anathema. In the 2009 EP election, the outcome of 27 uncoordinated national ballots was the return of 736 MEPs from 161 different parties. The median EU member state is represented by five parties and five states return at least eight different parties.

The parties for which Europeans vote in their national constituencies are not the party groups that determine the policies of the European Parliament. Since the foundation of the European Assembly in 1952, the precursor of the European Parliament, members have sat in transnational party groups. Transnational groups act as a counterweight to national governments represented in the European Council. Whatever the national significance of a party, its MEPs are too small in number to dominate their party group. The median national party returns two MEPs and 50 parties have only one MEP.

Party groups aggregate the activities of MEPs from diverse countries into disciplined parliamentary fractions (Lindberg *et al.* 2008: 112ff). There are strong organisational incentives for MEPs to join a group, since their national party is far too small to influence the EP on its own, nor is it recognised by the Parliament. Groups allocate resources such as office space and administrative assistance and key positions in the EP's committee structure. MEPs depend on their transnational party group for guidance about what position to take on the many issues that come up about which they have little knowledge and no readily discernible political stake (Ringe 2010). Although 'MEPs have stronger attitudinal links to their national party than to their EP party group', they are much more likely to follow instructions about how to vote from their party group (Rasmussen 2008: 1168, 1172). Providing cues to inexperienced MEPs is particularly relevant because of the high turnover of MEPs from one parliament to the next. Just over half of the MEPs elected in 2009 were new members, a pattern that has persisted for many elections (European Parliament 2009: 36).

Groups are caucus parties giving intense albeit introverted attention to activities within the EP and its relations with other EU institutions. Each group has a formal, hierarchical structure with leaders that negotiate with other groups (see Bailer *et al.* 2009; Bressanelli 2012). A group's leaders are responsible for arriving at agreements with other groups. In interpreting the scope for give-and-take in negotiations between groups, the volume and complexity of issues gives the representative of a group with a large membership significant discretion vis-à-vis the bulk of its MEPs. Whereas in national parliaments all those participating in such negotiations are accountable to the same national electorate, the leaders of each EP party group are only accountable for support to their multinational caucus.

The functions of party groups differ from those of national parties of member states (Kreppel 2002; Ladrech 2009). Groups do not nominate candidates or contest elections. Moreover, MEPs cannot engage in a perpetual campaign for votes because they are out of their country for most of the week and their activities in Brussels receive little media coverage nationally. Inasmuch as the outcome in each national constituency is determined by first-order national politics and what happens at the EU level is of secondary importance (see Reif and Schmitt 1980; Schmitt 2009), there is limited incentive for MEPs to spend time campaigning. Unlike a national parliamentary system, the votes of party groups are not determined by the need to support or oppose a government. If only by default, deliberating on policies becomes the primary function of the European Parliament and the co-decision process of the Lisbon Treaty substantially enhances its influence on policy.

Since a party group can be organised with only 25 of the European Parliament's membership,<sup>2</sup> there could be up to 30 groups. However, following the 2009 EP election, MEPs aggregated themselves into eight groups, including one that is a residual collection of non-aligned MEPs. Groups differ substantially in their size, the number of countries represented, and the number

TABLE 1  
COMPOSITION OF EP PARTY GROUPS

Party groups	Countries <i>N</i>	Parties <i>N</i>	MEPs <i>N</i>	Seats %	Votes %
European People's	26	41	265	36.0	32.0
Socialists	27	28	184	25.0	22.3
ALDE: Liberals	19	29	84	11.4	9.8
Greens	14	19	55	7.5	7.5
Left-Nordic Green	13	15	35	4.8	3.8
Conservative & Reform	8	9	54	7.3	4.8
Freedom & Democracy	9	9	32	4.3	4.5
Non-aligned	9	11	27	3.7	3.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>161</i>	<i>736</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>88.4</i>

Source: European Parliament (2009: 14).

of parties represented (Table 1). The largest group, the European People's Party, has 36 per cent of the seats; the Socialists are second with one-quarter of the seats; Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) has one-tenth of the seats and other groups are relatively small. Although all groups are European in name, only two – the European Socialists and the European People's Party – include parties from all or almost all member states. Since EP rules allow a group to have more than one party from a single state, there are substantial differences in the extent to which a group aggregates parties that compete against each other nationally. The EPP has 41 parties, whereas the Socialists apply the norm of one party per country. The absence of national electoral sanctions against changing groups at the EP level makes it easy for MEPs to migrate between groups and over time there have been significant changes in the labels and membership of most groups (see e.g. Corbett *et al.* 2011: chapter 5).

### The Effects of Aggregation: Theories, Propositions and Data

The priority of a party group is to ensure that its multinational members vote together in order for the group to exercise influence on EU policymaking. However, the absence of co-ordination between the positions that MEPs take nationally and decisions taken by each group at the EU level creates the potential for conflict between the national commitments of MEPs and the majority position emerging from the aggregation of national programmes in multinational groups.

#### *Theories about How Aggregation Affects Representation*

The logic of spatial analysis (Enelow and Hinich 1984; McElroy and Benoit 2010) is that each national party should join a group whose members are closest to its own programme. A multinational party group can be representative if the programmes that their national parties put to their respective electorates are collectively in agreement. Because ideologies have transnational relevance,

whether socialist, religious, environmentalist or European federalist, ideological theories imply that agreement on major values can lead national parties to join party groups that represent a common transnational ideology, because its members will have been elected on similar national programmes that minimise the effect of aggregation on policy representation (Ringe 2010: 212). Because an ideology reflects a comprehensive *Weltanschauung*, it can maintain a high degree of agreement across multiple dimensions of public policy (Table 2: Proposition 1). In effect, ideology can produce congruence without co-ordination.

Historically, Catholicism, Liberalism and Socialism have been ideologies salient to party formation in many lands that are now EU member states (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) and many contemporary studies differentiate party groups on ideological grounds (see e.g. Marks and Steenbergen 2004). Among the EP's party groups, Socialists have had more than a century of viewing policies through an ideological lens and have maintained transnational links through meetings of the Socialist International. Catholic parties were significant in the founder states of the European Union. However, ideological unity has been diluted by the accession of Northern European parties where Catholicism has never been a political force and by the withdrawal of the Catholic Church from sponsoring national parties. This implies that the European People's Party, the heir to the Catholic tradition, will be less ideologically cohesive. Liberalism was a major political movement in pre-1914 Europe with a comprehensive ideology challenging pre- or anti-democratic conservative groups. However, since the Second World War there have been disagreements between or within countries about the policies common to a liberal ideology (MacCallum Scott 1967).

The small number of members required to form a group enables it to make ideological demands on MEPs that restrict its membership without preventing it from claiming the benefits of a group. Since only seven national parties are required to form an EP group, a small group can be formed by requiring strict agreement on policy before admitting members (Proposition 2). Two groups, the Conservative and Reform and Freedom and Democracy, have only nine parties each.

TABLE 2  
PROPOSITIONS ABOUT AGGREGATION AND PARTY GROUP REPRESENTATION  
(predicted group placement)

- 
- P1. Groups with comprehensive ideologies will be representative of their national parties across multiple dimensions of public policy. (Socialists, EPP, Liberals)*
  
  - P2. The fewer the number of national parties in a group, the greater the group's representativeness of its member parties. (Conservative & Reform, Freedom & Democracy)*
  
  - P3. Groups with a defining principle will not be representative of their national parties on non-core issues. (Greens, Left-Greens)*
  
  - P4. Groups formed on a 'catchall' basis for instrumental benefits will be low in representativeness across all dimensions. (Non-aligned)*
-



Since the European Parliament unites parties representing 27 diverse national electorates, this can make it harder to form groups united across a range of policy dimensions. In such circumstances, a group can be formed by giving priority to a single defining principle and being indifferent to agreement on other dimensions. Such selectivity will result in a group having a high degree of representativeness on its defining dimension but not on dimensions of little significance to its members (Proposition 3). The environmental movement nominally appears to be defined by a single principle but theories of ‘new politics’ treat it as a movement with a distinctive and comprehensive ideology (cf. Kitschelt 1989; Marks and Steenbergen 2004). There are now more than two dozen Green parties in the European Parliament (cf. Kitschelt 1989). The presence of two green groups in the EP, one of which explicitly links itself with the Left while the other does not, calls attention to the choice of uniting around a single principle or having a comprehensive ideology. Similarly, nationalist and anti-EU parties may represent a single principle of national identity or a comprehensive ideology. The same alternatives apply to so-called populist parties; they may simply protest against the status quo or alternatively endorse radical policy change (see Mudde 2010).

The EP’s Rules of Procedure do not require a party group to have a common ideology. Rule 30 simply states: ‘Members *may* form themselves into Groups according to their political affinities’ (Bardi *et al.* 2010: 11f; emphasis added). Almond (1960: 43) has hypothesised that the ‘aggregative potential of pragmatic parties is relatively high’. The institutional advantages of group membership such as favourable assignments of committees, offices and other benefits make it possible for national parties without an ideological affinity to band together in a catchall group (cf. Kirchheimer 1966). The pragmatic pursuit of institutional benefits can be a sufficient motive for MEPs to join a party group, without regard to the extent to which its position matches that of their national programme. Insofar as this is the case, then aggregation will tend to displace representation (Proposition 4). The non-aligned group should be the paradigm example of a group constituted to secure institutional resources for instrumental rather than ideological reasons. The large size of the European People’s Party could be a sign that it has compensated for a decline in ideological agreement by becoming a catchall party.

### *Identifying Policy Dimensions*

If party programmes differ on only a single dimension, then no question of priorities between dimensions can arise, since all issues in programmes will be reduced to a single common denominator. Downs’ (1957) model of party competition on a single dimension, usually characterised as left vs. right, has been used by generations of survey researchers to position parties (see e.g. Klingemann *et al.* 2007; for critiques, see Albright 2010: 700ff; Mair 2007). Many EP studies add a second dimension, the attitude of national parties towards European integration (e.g. van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Marks and

Steenbergen (2004), building on research into ‘new politics’ at the national level (cf. Inglehart 1990), have proposed a GAL/TAN dimension differentiating EP parties, with one end representing Green, Alternative and Libertarian (GAL) positions as against Traditional, Authoritarian and Nationalist (TAN) views (cf. Thomassen 2009: 86).

The data used to place national parties on policy dimensions vary (for a review, see Marks 2007). Surveys of voters ask respondents to assess the issue positions of parties as well as their own position; the 2009 European Election Study collects complementary data about parties, candidates and the media (<http://www.piredeu.eu>). Expert surveys ask political scientists to classify parties on one or more pre-set dimensions of policy (see e.g. Benoit and Laver 2006; Hooghe *et al.* 2010; McElroy and Benoit 2010). The Comparative Manifesto Group’s (Klingemann *et al.* 2007) methodology has been applied to the analysis of manifestos issued by national parties for EP elections (Bardi *et al.* 2010: 16ff; Braun *et al.* 2010). Comparisons of individual candidates and party programmes find that party programmes tend to determine the views of their candidates, thus justifying making the programme the unit of analysis (Schmitt *et al.* 2010). After reviewing different methods for ascertaining policy dimensions, Dinas and Gemenis (2010) conclude that differences in data sources are justifiable because of differing theoretical and analytic purposes.

The EU Profiler project of the European University Institute provides a valid and reliable assessment of national party positions for the 2009 EP election (Trechsel and Mair 2009: 11ff). Web 2.0 technology was used to request from the headquarters of 274 national parties their position on a five-point scale for 28 issues. Each party was asked to provide public domain documentation, such as manifestos, statements by leaders or conference resolutions, to confirm the validity of its positions. Concurrently, social scientists in the Profiler team knowing the relevant national language assigned positions to all of a country’s parties on each issue. The reliability of codings was high; on four-fifths of issues there was agreement between a party’s self-placement and that of the Profiler coders. Where there were differences, they were usually matters of degree – for example, between completely agreeing and tending to agree with a policy. To resolve differences, the team engaged in further dialogue with national party officials before making a final judgement. The EU Profiler database covers 156 of the 161 parties that won EP seats.<sup>3</sup> Because we are concerned with how MEPs relate their group position to their national party commitments, it is appropriate to use the Profiler database, since its codes are formulated in dialogue with national party headquarters.

Aggregation leaves open to empirical investigation the number of policy dimensions on which national parties take positions and how these dimensions are determined. In the absence of agreement about the number and types of cleavage that differentiate national parties (cf. Kriesi 2010; Lipset and Rokkan 1967), we factor analyse the Profiler data for 156 national parties. This identifies five different dimensions that collectively account for 60.8 per cent of the variance in party positions (Table 3). The distinctiveness of each

TABLE 3  
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF EU PROFILER ISSUES

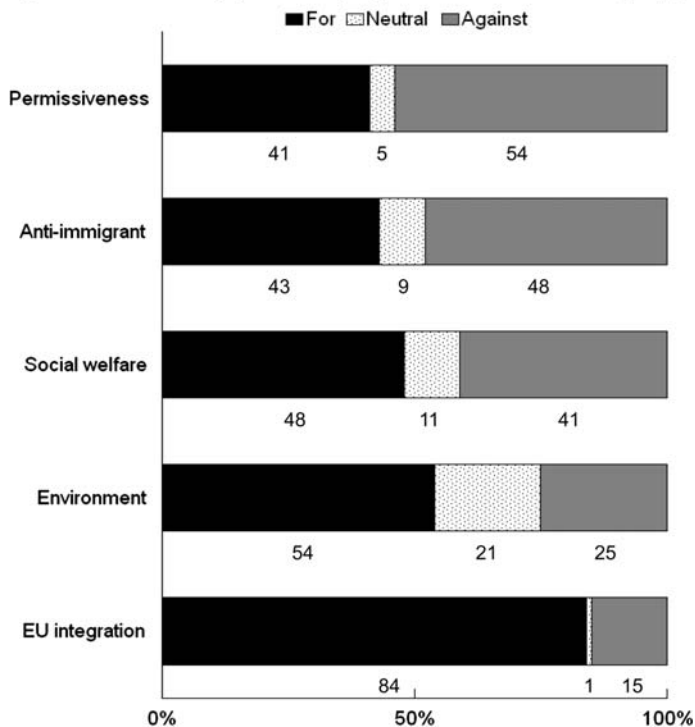
Factors	Rotated loadings		
	Eigen value	Variance (%)	cumulative variance (%)
EU integration	5.28	18.86	18.86
Permissive	3.37	12.03	30.89
Pro welfare	3.10	11.08	41.96
Green	2.66	9.51	51.48
Anti-immigration	2.60	9.27	60.75

Source: Borz and Rose (2010: 9). For full details, see Appendix Tables. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation; rotation converged in seven iterations.

dimension is shown by the fact that no single factor accounts for as much as one-fifth of the variance. The coherence of each factor is shown by the fact that three-quarters of the measures loaded at 0.66 or higher.<sup>4</sup> Five issues with weak loadings that did not fit any dimension have been excluded from subsequent analysis (for details, see Appendix A and Borz and Rose 2010). The dimensions are:

- *EU integration* (18.9 per cent of variance). The impact of EP policies depends on the extent of European integration and integration is often identified as important in two-dimensional analyses of popular attitudes toward EU (see e.g. Dinas and Gemenis 2010). The factor includes measures favouring an increase in EU powers and a reduction in the scope for national vetoes.
- *Permissiveness* (12.0 per cent). This dimension differentiates six ‘post-modern’ positions such as legalising soft drugs and same-sex marriage and traditional views about religion and being tough on criminals. Some can be found in the GAL-TAN dimension (Marks and Steenbergen 2004). Although these issues are often dealt with at the national level, they can involve first-order differences between parties that ‘spill up’ to the European level.
- *Socio-economic welfare* (11.1 per cent). In this dimension are issues central to the conventional left/right dimension, such as maintaining social programmes even if it means higher taxes, giving priority to lowering taxes by cutting spending, and reducing regulations about workers’ rights to encourage employment. The fact that it is not first in statistical strength raises a question about theories that make socio-economic differences pre-eminent for EP parties.
- *Green* (9.5 per cent). Environmentalist statements about renewable energy, pollution taxes and global warming form a dimension that is both clear and also narrow in scope.
- *Anti-immigration* (9.3 per cent). The leading issues are whether immigrants should accept the culture of their host country and if there should be

FIGURE 1  
 DISTRIBUTION OF MEPs ON POLICY DIMENSIONS ABOUT HERE  
 (Percent of MEPs by position of programme of their national party)



Source: Compiled from data in EU Profiler, as reported in Borz and Rose (2010; 41ff).

restrictions on further immigration. Whether Turkey should be admitted to the EU is also included, since its application has raised the issue of the cultural scope of the EU.

Consistent with theories of party competition, when national party positions are weighted by their number of MEPs, the transnational parliament is divided on four of the five dimensions. On socio-economic welfare and immigration, the division is so close that the median MEP is neutral. There is a narrow majority against permissive policies and a majority of MEPs in favour of green policies. On one dimension there is a consensus: European integration. Five-sixths of MEPs favour more policies promoting ever-closer union. Because the 2009 European Parliament was the first to include all 12 new member states, we checked whether the distributions in Figure 1 were due to structural differences between MEPs from old EU member states and formerly

Communist countries. The two categories are similar, with the exception that parties in new EU member states are a little more opposed to permissive policies and those in old member states slightly more in favour of anti-immigrant policies.<sup>5</sup>

### **Testing Propositions Regarding Group Representation**

If multinational party groups represent the views of their nationally elected member parties, then an index of party group representation will show a high degree of congruence between the dominant position of the group and that of the national programmes of its member parties. This is different from the Index of Cohesion of Hix, Noury and Roland (2007: chapter 5), which measures whether a group's members are voting as a bloc but does not refer to the positions that they take on issues in their national party programmes.

The starting point for calculating the Index is the position of each national party on each of the multiple indicators that are included in each of the five dimensions (Appendix A). The EU Profiler classifies party positions on a five-point scale: completely agrees, tends to agree, neutral or no opinion, tends to disagree or completely disagrees; these are coded from +2 to -2 respectively. A national party's position on a dimension is determined by summing the scores on all its indicators, and dividing by the number of indicators. Its MEPs are then classified as being positive on the indicator if the mean score is higher than 0.0 and up to 2.0; neutral if 0.0; and negative if lower than 0.0 (for details, see Borz and Rose 2010). The proportion of a group's MEPs whose programmes fall in each of the three categories are then summed and given percentages.

The Index of Party Group Representation is created by subtracting the percentage of a group's MEPs in the minority on a dimension from the percentage in the group's majority position.<sup>6</sup> The Index thus ranges from 100, if the national programmes of all parties aggregated in a group endorse the same position on a dimension to 0, total disagreement, if 50 per cent take one position and 50 per cent take the opposite. As the value of the Index falls, the more divided a group is on a dimension. If the group's whips nonetheless produce unity in an EP vote, this will force a substantial minority to misrepresent the programme on which they were elected when they cast their EP vote. There is substantial variation between groups in the Index scores on a given dimension. The range is from 3 to 100 (Table 4). A group's mean Index is calculated by averaging its position across all five policy dimensions. There is substantial variation in the extent to which aggregation affects representation; mean group scores range from 88 to 25.

The first proposition is given partial support, because groups historically linked with comprehensive ideologies vary in the extent to which they are representative across all policy dimensions (Table 4). The Socialist group's ideology does fit the first proposition. Even though some members of the Socialist International have promoted 'third way' programmes, while others are

TABLE 4  
INDEX OF PARTY GROUP REPRESENTATION BY POLICY DIMENSION

	EU	Welfare	Permissive	Green	Anti-immig	Mean
Green	78	94	90	90	a90	88
Left-Green	a37	97	100	94	a82	82
Socialist	100	90	51	83	a73	79
Free & Dem	a78	a45	a59	a68	88	68
Non-aligned	a65	43	a83	a40	100	66
EPP	98	a55	a95	3	52	61
ALDE	100	a14	23	17	a9	33
Cons & Ref	a28	a32	a6	a4	57	25

Notes: Index range 100 to 0. If the largest bloc of MEPs is against, the index is marked with an a. Source: EU Profiler data as reported in Borz and Rose (2010: 26–37). Index calculated by subtracting from a group’s largest percentage of MEPs the percentage of its opposing bloc.

offshoots of former East European Communist parties, it is highly representative of its member parties across four dimensions. The Index of Party Group Representation is 100 on European integration, 90 on socio-economic welfare, 83 on green issues and 73 in rejecting anti-immigrant policies. Cross-national differences about the permissive society lower that Index score to 51.

By contrast, the historic ideologies of two other EP groups are no longer comprehensive (Table 4). The EPP’s aggregation of national parties from secular as well as Catholic societies, along with changes within Catholic societies, have reduced the significance of that comprehensive philosophy. On three dimensions – socio-economic welfare, immigration and green issues – the EPP’s Index shows limited or no congruence. Yet the EPP has not become a catchall party lacking representative characteristics. Its opposition to permissive measures is shown by an Index score of 95 and it displays even higher agreement on European integration (Table 4). The EPP thus falls between the categories of a party with a comprehensive ideology and a party appealing with a single defining principle.

The ALDE is an aggregation of national parties from the European Liberal Democrat and Reform group and from the European Democratic group. Consistent with being a ‘catchall’ group, it accepts two national parties as members from more than half the countries it covers. It is very divided on four of the five policy dimensions, including such classic liberal principles as immigration and permissiveness (Table 4). However, its 29 parties show 100 per cent agreement in support of European integration; this makes ALDE a paradigm example of proposition 3, a group representing its members on a single defining policy dimension.

Contrary to proposition 2, the number of parties in a group does not affect its representativeness; the correlation between the number of parties and their Index of Party Group Representation,  $-0.01$ , is not significant. Among groups with few parties, the Index varies greatly. The Freedom and Democrats and the Conservative and Reform group each has only nine parties, but there is much more cohesion in the former (Index of Party Group Representation: 68) than in the latter

(Index: 25). Among the groups that have the most national parties as members (see Table 1), the mean Index ranges from 80 for the Socialists to 33 for ALDE.

Green parties label themselves by a single defining principle. Since the environment is a collective good affecting all Europeans, then, consistent with proposition 3, they could represent this principle without taking positions on other dimensions. However, both Green groups have a comprehensive ideology, consistent with Marks and Steenbergen's (2004) argument that Green politics is a new ideology (Table 3). Across policy dimensions, both groups are consistently more united in representing their national parties than is the Socialist group. The Index of Representation for the Green group is consistently high (mean score: 88). The European United Left/Nordic Green Left group, a refuge for former Communists after the fall of the Berlin Wall, is very representative of its national parties on four policy dimensions. The one issue on which it is divided is European integration.

Because the purpose of the non-aligned group is to gain its national members the institutional benefits that the EP gives to groups, Proposition 4 postulates that the non-aligned group should be catchall. However, this is not the case. Its member parties are 100 per cent in agreement in being anti-immigrant and have a high Index score in opposition to the permissive society. The racist and often homophobic positions of its members, such as the British National Party and the French National Front, suggest that the non-aligned group is not so much a residual catchall category as it is a meeting place for 'pariah' parties that are unwelcome on policy grounds by other EP groups. The Conservative and Reform group is the one catchall aggregation of national parties. It was created by the British Conservative Party after its withdrawal from the EPP because of opposition to European integration. It succeeded in securing partners in enough other countries to gain the institutional advantages of group membership without regard to affinities of policy. The mean Index of the Conservative and Reform group, 25, is the lowest of any EP group. Moreover, its two leading members, the British Conservatives and the Polish Law and Justice Party, are on opposite sides on four of five policy dimensions (Borz and Rose 2010: 34).

Differences between party groups deny uniform support for Cox's theory that the lack of co-ordination will cause each group to fall far short of representing the programmes of national parties and theories that transnational ideologies will make each group representative of its member parties' programmes. Three of the propositions set out in Table 2 fit at least one party group, albeit not necessarily as expected. Ideology, stressed in proposition 1, does make three EP groups – the Socialists, the Left-Greens and the Greens – represent the programmes of their national parties. Although ALDE does not have a comprehensive ideology, it is representative, in terms of proposition 3, having a single defining principle. The Conservative and Reform group is a catchall group, as described in proposition 4. The proposition that size matters is the only one that does not receive some support; groups with fewer members are no more likely to be representative than are large groups. Three EP

groups, including the largest one, the EPP, are contingently representative: the extent to which the group view is shared by its national party members depends on the dimension.

In place of co-ordination by European-level party groups or transnational co-ordination by ideological party families (Mair and Mudde 1998), MEPs appear to use a 'pick and mix' strategy to join a group in which a majority of members take positions consistent with dimensions important to their national party. While this challenges political science theories that reduce groups to a single dimension or uniform typology, it increases the collective representativeness of the European Parliament on each of the five policy dimensions. When the focus on representation is shifted from the level of multinational groups to national parties, then on each dimension there is a high degree of congruence between the positions on which MEPs are elected and the majority view of their party group. Whichever side their group takes, 94 per cent of MEPs are in a party group with a majority endorsing the same position as their national party programme on European integration; 85 per cent of MEPs have national programmes matching the majority position of their group on socio-economic welfare and permissive policies, as do 82 per cent on immigration and 80 per cent on green issues.<sup>7</sup> In a sense, these figures are methodologically determined. In the absence of EP groups preparing a central programme on which its national members fight an election, then the degree to which MEPs are in a group that represents an electorate is defined by the sum of its members' national programmes. However, a measure of policies for which a group can claim a mandate from its electorate is not proof of how this mandate relates to the policy outputs of the European Parliament.

### **Aggregating Majorities Supplants Representation**

If parties are to be effective in representing their voters, they must have their policies enacted into law; otherwise, they provide only representation without legislation (see Cox 1997: 226). Approval of major measures by the European Parliament requires endorsement by an absolute majority. No group comes close to having an absolute EP majority. Therefore, several groups must aggregate their votes if the Parliament is to approve new EU policies; failure to do so means that, notwithstanding the formal powers granted it by EU treaties, the European Parliament becomes a 'do nothing' parliament. An absolute majority requires negotiations between group leaders. Any agreement between group leaders will require MEPs who have competed with each other in their national constituencies to vote together.

### *Three Theories of Majority Formation*

Theories of spatial modelling postulate that parties close to each other on a policy will vote together. Insofar as this is the case, the majority formed will



tend to be representative of European citizens consistent with Huber and Powell's 1994 (Figure 1) theory of coalition representation. The three groups on the left – the Socialists and the two Green groups – have positions on all policy dimensions that match those of the great majority of the 62 national parties that belong to them. However, the five non-left groups, with 99 national parties, do not represent common policies across dimensions (Table 3). They are a category defined by what they are not rather than a coalition agreeing on policy. Since EP decisions are not votes of confidence in government, there is no need for non-left groups to form the same coalition on all five dimensions of policy. Instead, policies can be endorsed by what the Danes call a 'jumping majority', that is, ad hoc combinations as MEPs allied on one dimension take different positions on another.

*Proposition 5. The greater the degree of shared positions on a given policy dimension, the more likely party groups are to combine in a majority on a policy.*

Minimum winning coalition theory postulates that the number of MEPs a party has is more important than ideological proximity. The fewer the number of parties aggregated in a coalition, the more benefits, or 'spoils', each may claim (cf. Riker 1962). The relative remoteness of the Parliament from European citizens gives party groups much leeway in deciding coalition partners independent of national programme commitments. Since the number of MEPs is consistent across dimensions, a minimum winning coalition can also be stable, an asset in bargaining with the Council, which has co-decision powers with the EP.

*Proposition 6. Independent of national party programmes, the minimum number of groups needed for a majority will combine together across policy dimensions.*

A defining principle uniting MEPs across group lines is endorsement of measures to promote ever closer European Union through the classic Monnet strategy of the gradual accumulation of authority in multiple policy dimensions (Haas 1958). When MEPs are asked whether there should be more or less EU-wide regulation in seven different social and economic areas, an average of 64 per cent favour more EU regulation, five times the percentage wanting less (calculated from Farrell *et al.* 2011). MEPs are similarly activist about extending EU activities in home affairs and foreign policy: 65 per cent favour more EU action, four times the proportion wanting the EU to do less. Agreement on a defining principle creates the institutional 'common good' of maximising the influence of the European Parliament vis-à-vis other EU institution and, more generally, enhancing the power of the EU (Kreppel 2002: 214). The common good of the EP may thus be given precedence. This is

consistent with the Katz and Mair (1995, 2009) cartel theory, which predicts that, in order to secure collective benefits, groups will form more than a minimum winning coalition.

*Proposition 7. Party groups will advance the common good of the EP by combining in majorities independent of national party programmes.*

### *The Political Arithmetic of Policy Enactment*

When there are only three positions – for, against or neutral – then most of the eight party groups will necessarily have positions that substantially agree with at least one other group, thus making it easier to combine to form a parliamentary majority. On three Profiler policy dimensions – economic welfare, permissiveness and European integration – four party groups are positive and four groups are negative. On environmental issues and immigration, four party groups are on one side, three on the other, and one group is neutral. However, whether a combination of three or four groups constitutes an absolute majority depends on the number of MEPs that it has.

Consistent with proposition 5, the three left-wing party groups – the Socialists, the Greens and the Left Greens – have a high degree of ideological proximity. Not only is each internally cohesive but they also normally take the same programmatic position (Table 4). For these groups to aggregate their votes into an ideological coalition creates no conflict with national party programmes. However, such a combination cannot enact legislation because it lacks a majority. The Socialist group has only 184 of the 369 votes required for an EP majority and the Greens and Left-Greens together have only 90 seats. Thus, a combination of the three ideologically similar groups would still be almost 100 MEPs short of a majority. Even though the European People's Party, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and the Conservative and Reform group together have a notional majority of MEPs, they cannot form a coalition based on ideological proximity because there is no dimension on which all three parties show agreement. Moreover, internal disagreements on policies in the EP's third-largest group, ALDE, make it an unpredictable partner. Thus, the ideological proximity proposition is rejected.

Agreement between the European People's Party and the Socialists meets the minimum winning condition of proposition 6, since the two parties together have three-fifths of the EP's seats. However, political ideology appears as an obstacle to a 'black-red' coalition; instead of being spatially close, they take opposing positions on most dimensions.<sup>8</sup> Whereas 90 per cent of Socialist MEPs have programme commitments endorsing state action to promote economic welfare, 70 per cent of EPP members are against doing so. When permissive issues arise, 74 per cent of Socialist MEPs endorse them, whereas 96 per cent of EPP members take socially conservative positions. There is a similar gap between the two groups on immigration. A total of 76 per cent of EPP

members favour anti-immigration measures, while 85 per cent of Socialists oppose them. On green issues, 86 per cent of Socialist MEPs endorse environmentalist policies whereas only 35 per cent of EPP members do so. European integration is the only dimension on which both groups agree (Table 4).

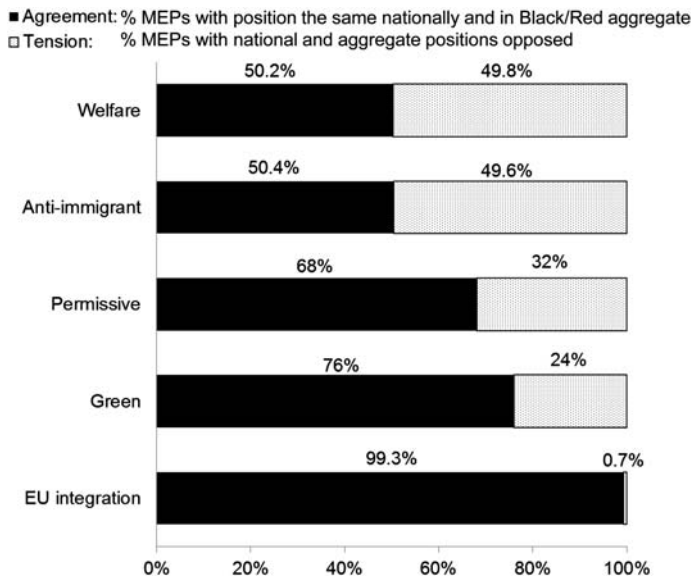
### *Aggregation Supplants Representation*

A big majority of EP votes on major legislation are voice votes taken after informal consultations between group leaders. The absence of a recorded vote makes it easier to blur conflict between national programme commitments and the position endorsed by an aggregation of groups. Although the minority of EP votes taken by roll call vote are subject to selection effects (Hug 2010: 235), by default they are often used as statistical proxies for cooperation between EP groups (see Hix *et al.* 2007; Vote Watch 2012).

Roll call voting supports proposition 7: MEPs are prepared to vote without regard to party programmes in order to enact legislation that promotes the common good of increasing EP influence on the course of European integration. Notwithstanding the consistent opposition between the policy positions of the EPP and Socialist groups, when votes are taken to enact policies there is normally black–red agreement. In 69 per cent of cases in the 2009 Parliament to January 2012, a majority of EPP and Socialist MEPs voted together<sup>9</sup> and this pattern has persisted for decades (see Hix and Noury 2009; Hix *et al.* 2007: 151). Black/red agreement is not a minimum winning coalition, as postulated in proposition 6, because the common good of parliament encourages super-majorities. On 52 per cent of all roll call votes, MEPs in the three biggest parties – the EPP, Socialists and ALDE – vote for the same measure. As some smaller parties invariably favour the position the biggest groups endorse, this further enlarges the majority approving legislation. The super-majority pattern has persisted from one parliament to the next (Hix and Hoyland, 2011: 145; Kreppel 2002: chapters 6–7; Vote Watch 2012).

The collective benefit that the EP gains by aggregating majorities without regard to national party programmes has a price. It greatly reduces the representative status of MEPs because inter-group agreement requires many elected representatives to vote against their national programmes. Pragmatic ‘black–red’ agreement on welfare and immigration measures creates almost as much misrepresentation as representation. There is a difference of only two MEPs between those whose national programmes endorse the combined majority and minority positions on welfare and a difference of only four MEPs in majority and minority positions on immigration (Figure 2). On permissive issues, one-third of MEPs in a black–red combination are elected on a programme different from that of the majority view. The lower level of conflict on green issues is accounted for by the fact a plurality of EPP members represent parties that are neutral. This not only enlarges the majority vote but also increases the number of MEPs who find themselves going against their national party programme by supporting their group whip.<sup>10</sup>

FIGURE 2  
TENSION AMONG MEPS IN BLACK/RED AGGREGATION ABOUT HERE



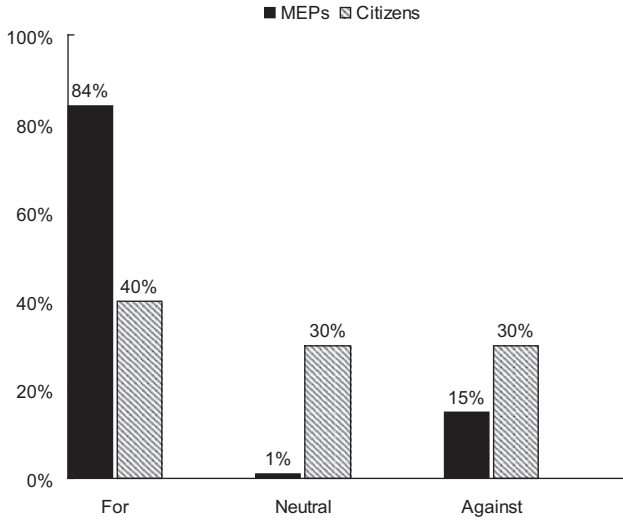
The sharing of a defining principle across party groups is a central characteristic of cartelisation. European integration is the policy dimension most relevant to testing for cartelisation in order to advance the common good of the European Parliament as a major institution of an EU system with increasing powers. The MEPs of the three largest groups – the EPP, Socialists and ALDE – are almost unanimously in favour of European integration. Together, 532 of the three groups’ MEPs endorse integration in their national programmes and only three are against. While on the other four dimensions the groups offer a significant choice between alternatives, there is no choice on European integration (cf. Figure 2).

Whether agreement on European integration by EP party groups is a cartel that denies choice to the European electorate depends on the empirical distribution of public opinion. Insofar as the percentage in favour is similar to that of MEPs, there is a multi-level consensus among party groups, national parties and their electorates. However, insofar as this is not the case, inter-group agreement is a cartel excluding the representation of a significant bloc of Europe’s citizens.

Instead of offering a choice between being for and against European integration, a question that blurs the distinction between the current position and dynamic implications, the European Election Study asks respondents to register their opinion on an 11-point scale ranging from 0, unification has gone too far, to 10, unification should go further. Individuals who do not want movement in either direction from the status quo can place themselves at the mid-point of the scale, 5. The replies show a three-way division of public opinion, with no

FIGURE 3  
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: VIEWS OF MEPS AND CITIZENS COMPARED ABOUT HERE

Q. Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it has already gone too far. What is your opinion?



MEPs: EU Profiler data base of national programme commitments, 2009. Citizens: European Election Survey, 2009 ([www.piredeu.eu](http://www.piredeu.eu)).

Source: Respondents placing themselves at points 6 to 10 are classified as for more integration; at 0 to 4, in favour of less; and at point 5 or no opinion, as neutral.

majority for any alternative. A total of 40 per cent approves more integration, 30 per cent wants less integration, and the median group, also 30 per cent, endorses the status quo. Although there is a plurality approving more integration, the relevant point here is that the 40 per cent who do so are less than half the 84 per cent of MEPs elected on programmes favouring further integration. The result is a cartel in which the common good of EP groups does not reflect the preferences of their voters. Whatever their views, the majority of European voters are not offered the opportunity of voting for parties that will represent their views. The EP consensus ‘downloads’ conflicts in representation to national parties and their electorates.<sup>11</sup>

The multi-level aggregation of parties elected on national programmes into multinational EP groups places far more strain on representation than in a national political system with transparent accountability between MPs and electors. Yet there are examples in national politics of the two biggest parties competing with each other forming a Grand Coalition after the election; these have been continuous in Switzerland, the norm in Austria and intermittent in Germany. When the governing and opposition parties combine, this reconfigures the choice that voters have; it is between cartel parties and parties that protest against policies that governors find in their common good – and protest parties have had striking successes in Austria and Switzerland (cf. Mudde 2010; Rose

2000). This implies that even though the inter-group cartel is well established in the European Parliament it is not invulnerable. Electors who do not feel represented by the European Parliament can, as national citizens, vote for parties that challenge the European-level consensus.

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### **Notes**

1. In this article the term party refers to the national organisations that contest seats in one of the EP's national constituencies. The term 'party group' describes the eight organisations recognised in the organisation of the activities of the European Parliament.
2. The Lisbon Treaty fixes 751 as the maximum number of MEPs. Because the Treaty came into effect in the middle of the current Parliament, the number of MEPs elected in 2009 was 736.
3. The five parties it did not classify elected only seven MEPs scattered among five different EP party groups.
4. Having five dimensions, rather than the three identified in analyses of roll call votes (Hix *et al.* 2007) suggests that the issues raised in roll call voting may be narrower than those that parties deal with in programmes that they prepare for EP elections.
5. Full details available from the authors.
6. Because there is a third alternative, a national party taking a neutral position, a plurality rather than an absolute majority of MEPs can form the largest portion in a Group.
7. These figures cannot be interpreted as evidence of MEPs representing the European electorate, because of gross disparities in the number of electors for each MEP between electorates in more and less populous states due to the EP's requirement of digressive proportionality (see Rose *et al.* 2012).
8. The bimodal distribution of the groups' MEPs is confirmed by their distance from each other on the +2.0 to -2.0 scale. On welfare, the EPP score is -1.00 and that of the Socialists 1.50. On opposition to immigration, the respective scores are 1.00 and -0.67. On permissiveness scores are -1.50 and 0.00; and on the Green dimension 0.00 and 0.67. European integration is the only dimension where there is a unimodal distribution of the two groups: 1.43 for each.
9. Voting together by parties less opposed in spatial terms than EPP and Socialists is only 9 per cent higher for the EPP and ALDE, and only 8 per cent higher for Socialist-ALDE voting.
10. Detailed results available from the authors.
11. Mattila and Raunio (2012) confirm that respondents see the national parties that they vote for as more pro-integration than themselves, but do not consider the implications of their finding for the formation of a cartel promoting integration in the interest of EP party groups.

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APPENDIX TABLE A1  
DETAILS OF DIMENSIONS OF PARTY GROUPS

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**Issues in each factor**

Factor 1. EU INTEGRATION

- 21 On foreign policy issues such as the relationship with Russia, the EU should speak with one voice
- 22 The European Union should strengthen its security and defence policy
- 23 European integration is a good thing
- 24 This country is much better off in the EU than outside it
- 26 The European Parliament should be given more powers
- 27 Individual member states of the EU should have less veto power
- 28 Any new European Treaty should be subject to approval in a national referendum

Factor 2. PERMISSIVE

- 7 The legalisation of same-sex marriages is a good thing
- 8 Religious values and principles should be shown greater respect in politics
- 9 The decriminalisation of the personal use of soft drugs is to be welcomed
- 10 Euthanasia should be legalised
- 19 Restrictions of civil liberties should be accepted in the fight against terrorism
- 20 Criminals should be punished more severely

Factor 3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELFARE

- 1 Social programmes should be maintained even at the cost of higher taxes
- 2 Greater efforts should be made to privatise healthcare services
- 11 Government spending should be reduced in order to lower taxes
- 14 Governments should reduce workers' protection regulations in order to fight unemployment

Factor 4. GREEN ENVIRONMENT

- 16 Renewable sources of energy (e.g. solar or wind energy) should be supported even if this means higher energy costs
- 17 The promotion of public transport should be fostered through green taxes such as road taxation
- 18 Policies to fight global warming should be encouraged even if they hamper economic growth or employment

Factor 5. ANTI-IMMIGRATION

- 5 Immigration into this country should be made more restrictive
- 6 Immigrants from outside Europe should be required to accept our culture and values
- 25 The European Union should be enlarged to include Turkey

NOT IN ANY FACTOR

- 3 State subsidies for crèches and child care should be increased substantially
- 4 Immigration policies oriented towards skilled workers should be encouraged as a means of fostering economic growth
- 12 The EU should acquire its own tax raising powers
- 13 Governments should bail out failing banks with public money
- 15 The EU should drastically reduce its subsidies to Europe's farmers

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Source: EU Profiler data base: <http://www.euprofiler.eu>