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When Politics Prevails: Parties, Elections and Loyalty in the European Parliament

1. INTRODUCTION

In many political systems, legislators serve multiple principals who compete for their loyalty in legislative votes. When casting their votes to make laws and to influence policy, legislators may therefore need to choose between principals. National parliamentarians, for instance, navigate the conflicting interests of their constituents and their party leadership;

Europarlamentarians (MEPs) operate between their transnational and domestic parties. This paper explores the political conditions under which legislators choose between competing principals in multi-level systems, with a focus on how election proximity shapes legislative behaviour across democratic arenas.

When casting their votes, legislators can face principals who disagree and compete; in such a scenario they must trade off delivering votes on legislation against sending political signals through defection. At the other end of the spectrum, legislators may approach a *de facto* ‘one-principal scenario’. When principals’ preferences diverge, a one-principal set-up can occur because one of the principals prevails and/or one of the principals stops competing. We argue that the two scenarios are conditioned by the impact of electoral politics on the interests, incentives and risk perceptions of both legislators and their principals. Elections, we suggest, can ‘compress’ a competing principals scenario into a *de facto* one-principal set-up, because election proximity changes actors’ time horizons and political pressures and, thus, their cost-benefit calculations around defection, around monitoring and controlling, as well as around sanctioning and accommodating.

The European Union (EU)’s legislators choose between principals in a system of multi-level governance. As in all democracies, in this system, elections are defining events for political actors; in the EU, it is the domestic arena that remains democratically dominant, for both national and European elections. We suggest that the pressures generated by national politics and elections are a significant, but so far largely overlooked, explanation for legislative behaviour at the supranational level. In short, we ask: is there a reverse process at work to the well-established ‘second-order’ nature of EP elections? Do both European and national elections have ‘first-order’ importance for supranational political actors?

Empirically, we explore the effect of electoral cycles on national party delegations' 'collective disloyalty' with their political groups in the European Parliament (EP).¹ We argue that election proximity, both national and European (1) increases the attention Europarliamentarians pay to the domestic arena, in view of re-election to the EP and/or potential national office; (2) increases pressure on MEPs from their national political base, because 'Europe' becomes more visible domestically; and (3) makes the EP's political groups less likely to sanction defection, given a vested interest in their constituent parties' electoral success. Hence, we hypothesise that election proximity drives up delegations' collective disloyalty. Under the 'shadow' of elections, legislative behaviour will be shaped by two additional factors: electoral rules and politicisation. Both factors, we argue, drive relations between MEPs and national parties, impact on the EU's domestic visibility, and, therefore, influence incentives and behaviour during campaigns. Before elections, we expect particularly high disloyalty if delegations come from member states with party-centred electoral rules, and if Europe is contested.

We test our hypotheses on a new dataset with roll-call votes cast by delegations in EP plenaries across three parliamentary terms (July 1999-July 2014). The dataset incorporates votes on the whole text under the ordinary legislative procedure (codecision) and gives us 112,163 observations. Most importantly, we demonstrate that elections matter: the proximity of planned national and European elections drives up delegations' collective disloyalty. As expected, this is the case particularly for delegations from party-centred member states. Our results also support a 'politicisation effect'. Overall, delegations have become more loyal over time, but the impact of election proximity as a driver of disloyalty is strongest in the latest Parliament analysed—EP7 (2009-2014), which saw the EU's politicisation increase against the backdrop of the eurozone crisis, a Eurosceptic surge, and the *Spitzenkandidaten* process.

Our analysis contributes to the wider literatures on legislative behaviour, comparative federalism and multi-level governance in three ways. First, we theorise multi-level electoral politics, played out under diverse domestic rules, as an explanation of voting choice and party unity in scenarios where competing principals are 'institutionally empowered to place demands on legislators' (Carey 2009:2-3). In doing so, we introduce dynamic political factors

¹ We use the terms 'national party delegation', 'national delegation' or 'delegation' to denote MEPs from the same national party represented in the EP (e.g., MEPs from the German SPD); 'national party' refers to the party organisation at the domestic level (e.g., the SPD in Germany); and 'political group' denotes the transnational political party in the EP (e.g., the Socialists & Democrats).

as determinants of legislators' strategic motivations and behavioural choices. Second, we theorise the conditions under which such political factors—including contestation over Europe—work across levels of governance. Comparative federalists and EU scholars share an interest in regional and European elections as second-order contests (Thorlakson 2017); we complement their focus by explaining how political conflict 'travels' across democratic arenas in multi-level systems, potentially exerting first-order effects on legislative behaviour and political representation. Finally, a deeper understanding of electoral pressures and multi-level politics speaks to scholars with a general interest in how electoral cycles shape political, legislative and diplomatic behaviour—in national, supranational and global governance.

Scholars of comparative politics have analysed how formal institutions and party-specific factors drive party unity and legislators' choice between multiple principals, both across countries (e.g., Carey 2007; 2009) and within (e.g., Sieberer 2015; Kirkland & Harden 2016). Likewise, extensive work on EU legislative politics has explained the cohesion of the EP's political groups (e.g., Kreppel 2002; Hix et al. 2007; Ringe 2010) as well as defection by national delegations (Faas 2003) and individual MEPs (e.g., Klüver & Spoon 2015; Finke 2016). Yet, these studies, of the EP and beyond, have mainly focused on institutional, party-organisational, ideological and file-level determinants, with dynamic political factors deserving more systematic attention.

Electoral politics is a key such factor. Comparativists have shown a link between election proximity and party (dis)unity in national democracies (e.g., Levitt 1996; Skjæveland 1999; Traber et al. 2014). Similarly, EU scholars have explored how pending *European* elections impact on the timing, output and characteristics of EU legislation (Kovats 2009; Crombez & Hix 2015), on the cohesion of the EP's political groups (Lindstädt et al. 2011), and on MEPs' defection (Meserve et al. 2017); recent studies also demonstrate that national parties' issue salience impacts on MEPs' voting behaviour (Klüver & Spoon 2015; Costello & Thomson 2016). However, the impact of *national* elections on the EU's actors, negotiations and decision-making has been surprisingly under-explored (but see Schneider 2013 and Kleine & Minaudier 2017 on intergovernmental negotiation). By drawing on European *and* national electoral politics to explain delegations' (dis)loyalty, we thus add a multi-level dimension to the fast-developing scholarship on how European elections impact on voting behaviour in the EP, and on how national elections affect voting unity in the domestic democratic arena.

Our analysis uncovers the conditions under which politics travels across the EU's multi-level system: EP elections may be second-order national contests (e.g., Schmitt 2005), but the political pressures generated by elections—national and European—in the domestic arena may well have a first-order effect on national parties in the EP, and increasingly so. Indeed, the EU, along with global governance, has become more politicised and contested (e.g., Grande & Kriesi 2014; Zürn et al. 2012)—through a string of lost referenda, the eurozone crisis, contentious austerity politics, and rising Euroscepticism. Political and academic debate has explored politicisation and its consequences, for the EU's institutions (e.g., Hobolt 2014) and, top-down, for national elections, parties and public opinion (e.g., Hoeglinger 2016). However, we know little about whether and how contestation over Europe shapes supranational decision-making bottom-up, by 'punctuating' the behaviour of policy-seeking actors. Our paper contributes to closing this gap.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section develops our theoretical argument; we test two main hypotheses about the impact of national and European election proximity, and two interactions exploring the effect of elections conditioned by electoral rules and by increasing politicisation. Section 3 introduces our dataset and explains the operationalisation of our variables. Section 4 discusses our statistical models and empirical results. Section 5 concludes and assesses the wider implications of our findings for the study of legislators' choice between competing principals and of political pressures in multi-level democracies.

2. WHEN POLITICS TRUMPS LOYALTY: AN EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK

Legislative voting in the EU is well-suited to analyse behaviour under competing principals. Europarliamentarians serve two principals: the national party nominates candidates for (re)election to the EP and is instrumental for future office, should the MEP return to the national arena; the European group controls a range of offices and benefits, including committee membership, chairmanships, positions in the group hierarchy, rapporteurships and speaking time (Kreppel 2002:202ff., 198ff.; Corbett et al. 2016). When their principals disagree and compete, legislators face a trade-off between 'communicating' their positions (by voting with their domestic party) and 'deciding' (by delivering the transnational majority) (Hix et al. 2007:89f.; for the general argument see Piketty 2000).

Europarlamentarians from the same national party form EP delegations, which serve as political conduits between the domestic and the European democratic arenas. We analyse when and why delegations choose to collectively communicate or decide in legislative votes, and, hence, are collectively disloyal or loyal with their EP groups (see also Faas 2003). Under some conditions, pressure from domestic parties will be unrivalled, with MEPs approximating a one-principal scenario. Under other conditions, the multiple principals problem will ‘bite’, because the transnational groups assert themselves. We expect more collective disloyalty in the first scenario than in the second, and we expect the scenarios to be conditioned by electoral cycles, especially in interaction with electoral rules and politicisation.

Our argument works on three levels. First, an individual legislator is driven by re-election into the EP and by future national office. Since the success of national parties is key to these prospects, the domestic arena dominates an MEP’s strategic considerations before both national and European elections. Second, a national party’s willingness to monitor and control MEPs is determined by the public visibility of Europe as a domestic issue; visibility increases before a country votes. Third, given the weak electoral connection between Europarties and the electorate, the EP’s groups are policy- rather than vote-seeking. Hence, their motivation to either sanction or accommodate defection depends on the perceived trade-offs in the EU’s bicameral law-making. Disciplining defectors may carry one-off legislative votes; accommodating domestic concerns may increase a constituent party’s electoral chances. ‘Sacrificing’ legislative votes in the short-term may thus gain policy-seeking groups more favourable bicameral cooperation in the long-term. In sum, in the shadow of an election, the competition between principals over votes—if not over policy-substance—should decrease, in particular over delegations from countries with party-centred electoral rules, and when contestation over Europe is high.

The proximity of elections

Elections are the defining political events in democracies. Electoral cycles impact on policy outputs and political behaviour by structuring the political agenda, and by defining politicians’ and voters’ interests, incentives and time horizons (Linz 1998; Jennings & Wlezien 2016). Comparativists have, accordingly, complemented the established literature on ‘political business cycles’ (e.g., Nordhaus 1975; Schultz 1995) by analysing how national elections impact on political parties’ legislative behaviour. Levitt (1996), for instance, sees

the link between US senators and their political parties decrease as elections approach; Skjæveland (1999) shows party cohesion in Denmark peaking just after as well as in the run-up to elections; and Traber et al. (2014) demonstrate that some parties in the Swiss Lower House become more cohesive before elections, conditioned by the vote's importance and visibility. For the EU, Lindstädt et al. (2011) argue and find that national parties' influence over their Europarliamentarians varies across the EP's cycle; between 1999 and 2004 the cohesion of political groups was, indeed, strongest mid-term and weakest close to the European election. Meserve et al. (2017) show that electoral volatility in EP elections—at member state level, between 1984 and 2009—increased MEPs' attention to the domestic arena, strengthened the dominance of the national party principal and, accordingly, drove up individual defection.

The above studies investigate the impact of election proximity at one level of governance; Lindstädt et al. explicitly dismiss—but do not test—any possible cross-level impact of upcoming national elections (2011:40). Yet, comparative work shows that a country's multi-level structure matters for legislative and political behaviour: for instance, parties' unity is marginally lower in federal than in unitary political systems (Carey 2007), and economic voting is weakened by multi-level governance and by fiscal decentralisation in particular (Anderson 2006). In a similar vein, we argue that electoral politics travels not only *within* but *across* levels of governance, and that such 'travelling' intensifies with election proximity.

Indeed, with European or national elections approaching in their home country, domestic politics should feature more prominently in MEPs' strategic calculations, because the electoral success of their national party matters. First, national parties select EP candidates and, given the weak electoral connection between Europarties and the electorate, it is the national party that wins or loses the vote in EP elections (Schmitt 2005). Second, office-seeking MEPs may consider the possibility of obtaining a post in the incoming national government and/or parliament. Motivated directly by re-election (via EP elections), or indirectly by the quest for office (via national elections), sitting Europarliamentarians should, therefore, support—or, at least, not undermine—their domestic base during a campaign (see also Traber et al. 2014:198-199).

In turn, prior to an election, EU policy-making should become more important for the national principal. During these periods, parties are exposed to much greater scrutiny by the

public, the media and the opposition—on all political issues, including congruence with their EP delegations (see also Lindstädt et al. 2011:39; 41-47; Meserve et al. 2017:10). National media rarely scrutinise EU law-making, but the defection of a delegation from its domestic base makes ‘headlines’—especially before an election (Lindstädt et al. 2011:45), and especially when a delegation’s (dis)loyalty is collective, as is the standard case in the EP. To minimise electoral loss through perceived inconsistencies, and to capitalise on positive visibility between national agendas and EU-level voting, the domestic leadership is, therefore, more likely before elections than in everyday politics to monitor MEPs and to intensify bottom-up pressure (cf. Faas 2003:843; Lindstädt et al. 2011:44-45; Meserve et al. 2017:10). A similar mechanism has been identified in political parties divided on the issue of Europe: before an election, when vote-seeking becomes the dominant motivation and inconsistent messaging a risk to success, the leadership suppresses intra-party conflict more effectively (Hellström & Blomgren:268, 269, 279). Evidence of intensifying national control before European elections also comes from the formal analysis of legislative voting in EP5 (Lindstädt et al. 2011); the pressure put on the Bulgarian Socialist delegation during the salient vote on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) is a recent illustration of close party control in the run-up to a national election (Euractiv 2016).

Finally, before elections, the European principal re-focuses attention to the domestic arena and is less likely to sanction collective disloyalty. Political groups are, first and foremost, policy-seeking (Hix et al. 2007:32-53), and cohesion allows them to deliver legislation. Yet, upcoming elections punctuate their strategic calculations—and not only to see supportive MEPs re-elected (Lindstädt et al. 2011:39-40). EU laws are adopted in a bicameral system, and while European elections determine the EP’s composition, national elections influence the composition of the EP’s co-legislator, the intergovernmental Council of the European Union. Co-deciding legislation is easier the more politically aligned the Parliament and Council (Costello & Thomson 2016), and transnational groups can expect positive spill-overs into the next European election from their constituent parties’ national electoral success.

In addition, accommodating fundamental domestic concerns is an established feature of the EU’s informal governance (Kleine 2013). At no point should the demand for visible accommodation be greater than prior to an election, and at no point should the importance of accommodation be clearer, given EP groups’ direct and indirect interest in their delegations’ electoral success ‘at home’. Politicians from the same party family may go as far as trying to

increase each other's positive visibility across levels, even at the cost of some disloyal votes (cf. Schneider 2013:453-454; 459-460). Election proximity thus turns the 'policy risk' of a defecting delegation into a potential political asset—because European elections, fought at the national level, define the transnational group's political strength, and because the asymmetry of national electoral cycles allows groups to prioritise their constituent parties' success.

In sum, before elections, delegations' incentives for collective signalling increase, domestic pressures on these delegations rise, and defection becomes less 'risky'. We therefore submit:

- H1** The closer a national election in a member state, the more collectively disloyal will the country's delegations be in the EP.
- H2** The closer a European election, the more collectively disloyal will delegations be in the EP.

The impact of electoral rules

Elections are held under different laws across EU member states. Rules range from the highly party-centred to the highly candidate-centred, depending on ballot access, ballot structure, ballot type and district magnitude (Carey & Shugart 1995; Farrell & Scully 2007). Intra- and inter-party competition plays out differently under different rules (Renwick & Pilet 2016)—impacting on citizens' voting behaviour (for an overview, see Dassonneville et al. 2017), the stability of voters' preferences across the electoral cycle (Jennings & Wlezien 2016), and the incentives for legislators and parliamentary candidates to prioritise their personal versus their parties' reputation (Carey & Shugart 1995). These incentives, we argue, are key to explaining the degree to which electoral proximity shapes both legislators' (dis)loyalty and their political principals' control across levels of governance.

In highly personalised systems, voters' choices directly affect a candidate's electoral success, thus incentivising personalised campaigns, high local visibility and 'self-promotion' (Carey & Shugart 1995:419-420; Hix 2004:197-198; Depauw & Martin 2009:106-108; but see André et al. 2015). Legislators pursuing (re)election should therefore 'cultivate' and prioritise personal reputation as a resource in campaigns that focus predominantly on individual representatives and involve competition within as well as between parties (Söderlund 2016:323-325). In party-centred systems, by contrast, a candidate's electoral success is more immediately

affected by their political party—by the party’s leadership at the point of candidate selection, by the party’s consistent ‘messaging’ during a campaign, and by the party’s ‘brand’ in the ballot box (Carey & Shugart 1995:419-420; Depauw & Martin 2009:106-108). Under party-centred electoral rules, intra-party competition should be absent (Söderlund 2016:323), and vote-seeking candidates should focus on toeing their leadership’s line and on promoting their party’s reputation (Hix 2004:196).

Comparative research offers mixed evidence on how electoral rules impact on legislative voting and party unity in day-to-day decision-making (for overviews, see Depauw & Martin 2009; Martin 2014:468I-469II). Studies of legislative behaviour in the EU, however, consistently show that the national principal is more important for MEPs from party-centred member states (Faas 2003; Hix 2004; Finke 2016). We focus, more specifically, on the effect of electoral rules on (dis)loyalty during campaign periods. As argued above, election proximity generates specific behavioural incentives across the EU’s multi-level system: MEPs’ strategic calculations turn ‘domestic’, while national parties up their interest in—and control of—Europarliamentarians. These incentives should be particularly pronounced when upcoming elections are held under party-centred rules. Indeed, where elections are won and lost by party brand rather than by personal reputation, a political party’s positive image and visible coherence across all levels of governance—regional, national, European—should matter more than under conditions of high personalisation. With no intra-party competition in the ballot box, parliamentarians across arenas stand to gain collectively from a clearly communicated political campaign—if need be, in delimitation from their transnational group.

In sum, as elections approach, MEPs from countries with party-centred electoral rules are particularly dependent on their national party’s leadership and political brand; parties campaigning under such rules benefit most from visibly coherent signalling across levels; and EP groups should reduce pressure on delegations from countries where votes are primarily won by parties rather than candidates. We therefore submit:

- H3** Collective disloyalty before national elections will be particularly high for delegations from member states with party-centred electoral rules.
- H4** Collective disloyalty before European elections will be particularly high for delegations from member states with party-centred electoral rules.

The politicisation of Europe

Finally, the domestic visibility and public scrutiny of Europe will increase with politicisation and contestation. It is well-established that the ‘permissive consensus’ of the first decades of integration has given way to a ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe & Marks 2009); that the EU has become more fundamentally contested in national politics; and that national politics is gaining importance in the EU’s multi-level system. A gradual development since the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, dissensus intensified dramatically in EP7: the contentious politics around the eurozone crisis and macroeconomic governance made the relevance of supranational decisions more visible domestically; Euroscepticism increased across the continent, particularly at the edges of party systems; and the *Spitzenkandidaten* process deliberately attempted to increase public debate and political choice prior to the 2014 EP election (Stratham & Trenz 2015; Conti 2014; Hobolt 2014). The EU became challenged in domestic public opinion and elections alike (Hoeglinger 2016), and referenda—on the Greek bail-out in July 2015, on the UK’s EU membership in June 2016—not only rejected the EU but were highly adversarial.

With Europe increasingly visible domestically, the EP’s delegations should come under tighter scrutiny. Campaigning under politicised conditions, national parties should be particularly willing to monitor and control their MEPs—to score political points, to show their cohesive support of (or opposition to) the European project, and to publicly demonstrate ‘closed ranks’ across party levels (see also Traber et al. 2014:198). In short, national parties will try to exploit the domestic attention paid to EU-level issues, stepping up the pressure on their Europarliamentarians accordingly. In turn, MEPs—selected by national parties and (re-) elected by national voters—should be more willing to follow their national base, even if this requires collective disloyalty. Finally, transnational groups are more likely to condone rather than sanction disloyalty if it is collective and emanates from genuine domestic concern. ‘Appeasing’ voters in the run-up to a politicised election clearly falls into this category; during such periods, Europarties may benefit from their delegations’ disloyal signalling.

In sum, before elections in a politicised Union, delegations will be particularly motivated to signal collectively; domestic pressures on delegations will rise; and MEPs can expect a degree of leniency—and a reduced risk of sanctions—from their EP groups. We therefore submit:

H5 Delegations' collective disloyalty before national elections will be particularly high during EP7.

H6 Delegations' collective disloyalty before European elections will be particularly high before the 2014 vote.

3. DATA AND OPERATIONALISATION

We test our hypotheses on a new dataset with roll-call votes cast by delegations in EP plenaries. Our data cover the period July 1999 to July 2014, thus including three legislative terms: EP5 (1999-2004), EP6 (2004-2009) and EP7 (2009-2014). The dataset incorporates votes on the whole text under codecision; that is, votes on amended Commission proposals and legislative resolutions, but not on amendments. As amendments are more controversial than votes on the whole text (cf. Kreppel & Hix 2003), our selection represents the hardest case to find an effect of election proximity. Disloyalty scores in EP5 were calculated using Hix et al.'s roll-call data (2007); for the period after July 2004 we used VoteWatch data.

As roll-calls only became mandatory for final legislative votes after a reform of the EP's Rules of Procedure in 2009, our voting data are unevenly distributed. We have data for 104 votes in EP5, 253 votes in EP6, and 471 votes in EP7. The overall number of observations in the dataset is much larger since the number of voting delegations ranges from a minimum of 51 in EP5 to a maximum of 165 in EP7. For most files, there is only one recorded vote, typically cast at first reading; on a minority of files, we have more than one vote. Altogether, our data include 828 legislative votes embedded in 749 legislative files.

As is well-established, roll-calls are not representative of the whole population of votes, because there are two other voting methods in the EP ('show of hands' and electronic voting). Before the 2009 reform, roll-calls had to be requested by a political group or at least forty MEPs (e.g., Carrubba et al. 2006), and roll-calls before 2009 were more likely on salient or divisive legislation (Yordanova & Mühlböck 2014). Since 2009, all final and single votes must be roll-calls. As our analysis includes votes cast between 1999 and 2014, the results for the most recent legislature may be somewhat biased. However, any such bias would lead us to underestimate the politicisation we expect to observe in EP7: given increased politicisation over Europe, the effect of election proximity should become *stronger* over time, while the inclusion of all roll-call votes in EP7 should *reduce* the effect.

Our dependent variable *disloyalty* is dichotomous. It takes the value of 1 when the majority of a delegation votes differently from the majority of its EP group, and the value of 0 when the majority votes with the group (Faas 2003:852).² We computed disloyalty for all delegations within groups (excluding only the non-attached) for which voting data are available.³ In total, our main analyses include 112,163 observations, of which 104,141 have the value of 0 on disloyalty (92.9 percent), and 8,022 the value of 1 (7.15 percent). Hence, loyalty is clearly most common. Delegations tend to vote *en bloc* with or against their group. This makes a dichotomous operationalisation of disloyalty the most obvious choice (see Figure A in the Appendix), and demonstrates that disloyalty sends clear and unified party political signals.

We computed the following explanatory variables. *Proximity national elections* (H1) is based on the number of days between a legislative vote in the EP and the next national election, including elections for the lower chamber of parliament and for directly elected presidents. For votes in the last period of EP7, the next election typically took place after the end of the parliamentary term. For elections that took place until summer 2016, we calculated proximity as described above; for others we used the expected election date. We log-transformed the proximity variable in order to account for its non-linear effect. That is, changes in election proximity will matter more as national elections get closer, while being less relevant in non-electoral periods. The variable *proximity EP elections*—which captures EP electoral cycles (H2)—is calculated in the same way; that is, by log-transforming the number of days between a legislative vote and the next EP election. Both variables are reversed for more intuitive interpretation.

Our main analyses exclude votes cast in the shadow of unplanned or ‘snap’ elections at the national level. These not only take place earlier than expected, but are also called at short notice. Such unforeseen elections should not influence legislative behaviour in the way planned elections do,⁴ and our theoretical argument should not straightforwardly apply. We therefore identified all unplanned elections between 1999 and 2014—26 elections in 15

² When no majority is formed among a delegation’s members, but a majority does exist in the EP group, the delegation is considered to be disloyal.

³ In some instances, not a single MEP from a delegation voted, either because all were absent or because those present chose not to turn out (rather than to abstain).

⁴ We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing our attention to this issue.

member states—and we treated votes cast by national delegations between an unplanned election and the previous (planned) election as missing (18,253 in total).⁵

To validate our findings, we also operationalised our key independent variables as dummies capturing campaign periods. Stevenson and Vavreck (2000) show that national-level ‘campaign effects’ are most visible in the six months before planned elections; our dummy *national campaign* therefore takes the value 1 for votes cast in the six months before parliamentary and presidential elections.⁶ The campaign period for EP elections is much shorter. For instance, the 2014 Europarty candidates for the Commission Presidency were only selected in early March for the EP elections in May. Furthermore, the deadline for member states’ electoral lists is, on average, about two months before the EP election, ranging from a minimum of 17 to a maximum of 83 days.⁷ The variable *EP campaign* therefore takes the value of 1 for votes cast in the two months before EP elections.

To assess the conditional effect of electoral rules, we computed two interaction terms with the variables *party-centredness (national)* (H3) and *party-centredness (EP)* (H4). The purpose is to classify electoral formulas according to their incentives for personal-vote seeking (candidate-centred systems) or party-reputation seeking (party-centred systems). We used two indices based on the original conceptualisation by Carey and Shugart (1995).⁸ For rules to elect national parliaments and presidents, we used the ‘index of personalisation’ (Johnson & Wallack 2008, updated by Schwindt-Bayer & Tavits 2016). It ranges from 1 to 13, with 13 representing the most personalised, candidate-centred electoral system. Farrell and Scully’s (2007) ‘modified Shugart index’—ranging from 3 (most party-centred) to 9 (most candidate-

⁵ We preferred this strategy to disregarding unplanned elections in our calculation of the number of days to the next (planned) election. The latter would have resulted in artificially long time periods between elections in countries with multiple unplanned elections (e.g., Greece during the eurozone crisis), thus leading to extremely low values on our proximity variable. Table D in the Appendix presents the main analyses including votes cast before unplanned elections (n=130,416). The table serves as a robustness check, and compares the effect of proximity in models with and without votes before unplanned elections. As expected, the effect of national election proximity is weaker when including unplanned elections.

⁶ In the main models with campaign dummies, we treat votes before unplanned elections as missing. Yet, we also ran the models with an adapted *national campaign* dummy which takes the value 1 for votes cast by delegations from countries with an upcoming unplanned election, between the date of the election announcement and the election date itself. Table E in the Appendix reports the results. As may be expected, the effect of the campaign period does not change substantively when including votes before unplanned elections, but it is slightly smaller (cf. Table 2).

⁷ See the EP Resolution ‘Reform of the Electoral Law of the EU’, adopted on 11 November 2015.

⁸ Table A in the Appendix lists the constitutive elements of the two measures.

centred)—is used to classify the rules for electing MEPs in member states.⁹ We expect party-centredness to strengthen the effect of election proximity. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, we reversed the measures so that party-centred systems have the highest values.

To test the conditional effect of the EU's politicisation (H5 and H6), we use separate models for EP7 and the previous terms (EP5 and EP6). Given rising contestation over the eurozone crisis and macroeconomic governance reform, and the deliberate attempt to politicise the EU's agenda via *Spitzenkandidaten* in 2014, we contrast EP7 with the former parliaments. We run separate analyses instead of using an interaction term for the proximity variables and EP7, because the latter would lead to rather high degrees of multicollinearity.¹⁰

The analysis includes several controls. The first set captures party features. On legislative files 'belonging' to a delegation (*rapporteur's party*), loyalty is expected to be higher. Parties in government (*government party*)—coded using the ParlGov dataset (Döring & Manow 2016)—should also be more loyal, because they face greater pressure from their leaders to toe the line agreed in the Council (Hix et al. 2007:141). Finally, a greater distance between a national party and its EP group on the two key dimensions of contestation—left-right and anti-pro EU—should increase the delegation's disloyalty. We used Euromanifesto data to capture national parties' ideological positions (Braun et al. 2010; Bressanelli 2014). For the groups' positions, we used the average of the positions of the constituent parties, weighted by the number of seats in the EP. We subsequently calculated the Euclidean distances between EP groups and national parties (*Euclidean distance*).¹¹

The following variables capture features of the legislative file. *Early agreement* measures whether a file resulted from an informal compromise between the co-legislators (Reh et al. 2013:1127). In line with Bressanelli et al. (2016), we expect early agreement to reduce disloyalty. *Duration* is the number of months between the Commission proposal and the conclusion of the legislative process; this is used as a proxy for contestation, which should

⁹ Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia were coded by the authors.

¹⁰ Had we used an interaction term combining our (continuous) proximity variables and an EP7 dummy in a model including all controls and fixed effects, the variance inflation factor (VIF) would have been above 40 for the interaction term and the EP7 dummy in a national election proximity-model, and just under 30 for the interaction term and the EP7 dummy in an EP election proximity-model. In line with this, the tolerance levels for these variables are extremely low: under 0.03 and 0.04, respectively.

¹¹ As we have missing data on several (mainly small) parties, either for the whole period or for one or more EP elections, we imputed the mean ideological positions of their political groups.

drive up disloyalty. A dummy for *codification* controls for files replacing legislation without substantive change; these should be uncontested. *Issue salience* measures the importance of EU legislation in member states. It is computed using Nexis Business and News, counting the number of times a piece of legislation was mentioned in selected English-, French-, German- and Italian-language newspapers. We updated the data by Reh et al. (2013) for EP7. We expect more loyalty on codification files, and less loyalty on salient files.

We included three final measures. First, *Euroscpticism* captures public opinion on the EU across member states. Using Eurobarometer data, the variable is the percentage of respondents in each country who answered ‘fairly negative’ or ‘very negative’ to the question: ‘In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?’.¹² Second, *trend* is used to capture changes in disloyalty over time, and is coded 0 for votes cast in 1999, 1 for votes in 2000, 2 for votes in 2001, etc. Previous research shows the EP becoming increasingly cohesive (Hix et al. 2007); disloyalty should therefore decrease over time. Finally, *amended proposal* distinguishes between votes on the amended Commission proposal (coded as 1) and on the final, more formalistic, legislative resolution. Votes on the amended proposal (8 percent of our votes) are all cast at first reading, with some subject to a roll-call. The literature suggests that votes on the amended proposal are often used for political signalling (Bressanelli et al. 2016:100), and delegations should therefore be more disloyal on these. Table B in the Appendix summarises the operationalisation of all variables; Table C includes all summary statistics.

4. ANALYSIS

As our dependent variable *disloyalty* is dichotomous, we estimated binary logit models. These allow us to predict the likelihood of disloyalty given specific values on the explanatory variables. The tables report coefficients and odds ratios (e^{β}), followed later in the section by marginal effects. Marginal effects are useful to appreciate the substantive effect of an explanatory variable, while keeping the effect of other variables constant. Our data include a large number of observations per legislative vote, because we analyse votes cast by all delegations. In some cases, there is more than one vote per file. We therefore clustered the

¹² As the question was not yet asked in 1999, we used the score of 2000 for the few votes cast in 1999. Scores vary per semester and country, but there is only one score in 2000 and 2001 as the relevant Eurobarometer question was asked only once in those years.

standard errors at the highest level: the legislative file.¹³ Moreover, as recommended for models with clustered data, we use robust standard errors (Long & Freese 2014:104).

Election proximity and electoral rules

First, we assess the effect of election proximity, followed by the interaction with party-centredness (see Table 1). Model 1 includes our main variables—the proximity of national and EP elections—with fixed effects for political groups and countries (not reported). Model 2 adds controls. Models 3 and 4 interact party-centredness with national election proximity, while Models 5 and 6 include the interaction with EP election proximity. Because of multicollinearity, country-fixed effects are not present together with party-centredness.¹⁴

We expect disloyalty to increase as an election approaches (H1 and H2). Higher values on *proximity* indicate periods closer to elections; the expected sign for the effect on disloyalty is positive. As hypothesised, the effect of the *proximity of national elections* is in the right direction and robust, with the exception of Model 5.¹⁵ The effect of the proximity of EP elections is also in the right direction, and significant in most of the models, except for the most ‘basic’ model (Model 1).

¹³ The observations are clustered in files, groups and countries. These clusters are not nested. In principle, it is possible to cluster standard errors by file, group and country, but this is problematic because the number of group and country clusters is small (seven groups and a minimum of 15 countries in the early years). There is no ideal approach for such a structure (Cameron & Miller 2015:350). We 1) cluster the standard errors by file, and include file-level variables in the analyses; 2) use group-fixed effects in all models; and 3) include either country-level variables (electoral rules) or country-fixed effects. By using fixed effects, we may not control for all within-cluster correlation, but given the small number of group- and country-clusters, we believe this is most appropriate.

¹⁴ When including country-fixed effects in Models 3 and 4, the VIF for party-centredness is well above 10, and the tolerance level well below 0.10. The other variables do not raise concerns. Similarly, adding country-fixed effects to Models 5 and 6 leads to very high VIF and very low tolerance levels for party-centredness and several country dummies.

¹⁵ This is in line with Klüver and Spoon’s (2015) analysis of individual MEPs’ defection between 1979 and 1999. Our preliminary analysis also suggests that MEPs’ turnout drops significantly as a national election approaches. This may mean that we underestimate the effect of national election proximity, because, first, more MEPs turning out during a national campaign might increase disloyalty further; and, second, those MEPs voting amidst high absenteeism may be the most loyal.

Table 1. The likelihood of disloyalty (1999-2014)

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | | Model 5 | | Model 6 | |
|--|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β |
| Proximity national elections | 0.04 (0.02)** | 1.04 | 0.05 (0.02)*** | 1.05 | 0.13 (0.03)*** | 1.14 | 0.13 (0.03)*** | 1.13 | -0.00 (0.02) | 1.00 | 0.04 (0.02)** | 1.05 |
| Proximity EP elections | 0.03 (0.03) | 1.03 | 0.09 (0.03)*** | 1.10 | 0.05 (0.03)* | 1.06 | 0.14 (0.03)*** | 1.14 | 0.09 (0.04)*** | 1.10 | 0.21 (0.04)*** | 1.24 |
| Prox nat X party centred Party-centredness (national) | | | | | 0.03 (0.00)*** | 1.03 | 0.02 (0.00)*** | 1.02 | | | | |
| Prox EP X party centred Party-centredness (EP) | | | | | 0.14 (0.03)*** | 1.16 | 0.08 (0.03)*** | 1.08 | 0.01 (0.01) | 1.01 | 0.02 (0.01)** | 1.02 |
| | | | | | | | | | 0.14 (0.05)*** | 1.15 | 0.13 (0.05)*** | 1.14 |
| Rapporteur's party | | | -2.12 (0.51)*** | 0.12 | | | -2.15 (0.50)*** | 0.12 | | | -2.18 (0.50)*** | 0.11 |
| Government party | | | -0.23 (0.04)*** | 0.79 | | | -0.19 (0.04)*** | 0.83 | | | -0.18 (0.04)*** | 0.84 |
| Euclidean distance | | | 0.02 (0.01) | 1.02 | | | 0.01 (0.01) | 1.01 | | | 0.01 (0.01) | 1.01 |
| Early agreement | | | -0.11 (0.09) | 0.89 | | | -0.11 (0.08) | 0.90 | | | -0.11 (0.08) | 0.89 |
| Duration | | | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 | | | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 | | | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 |
| Codification | | | -0.89 (0.12)*** | 0.41 | | | -0.83 (0.13)*** | 0.44 | | | -0.83 (0.12)*** | 0.43 |
| Issue salience | | | 0.20 (0.08)*** | 1.22 | | | 0.19 (0.07)*** | 1.21 | | | 0.19 (0.07)*** | 1.21 |
| Euroscepticism | | | 0.02 (0.00)*** | 1.02 | | | 0.03 (0.00)*** | 1.03 | | | 0.03 (0.00)*** | 1.03 |
| Trend | | | -0.03 (0.01)** | 0.97 | | | -0.05 (0.01)*** | 0.95 | | | -0.06 (0.01)*** | 0.94 |
| Amended proposal | | | 0.46 (0.10)*** | 1.58 | | | 0.43 (0.10)*** | 1.54 | | | 0.44 (0.10)*** | 1.55 |
| Constant | -3.64 (0.30)*** | 0.03 | -3.49 (0.37)*** | 0.03 | -2.46 (0.25)*** | 0.09 | -2.17 (0.33)*** | 0.11 | -2.55 (0.24)*** | 0.08 | -1.94 (0.35)*** | 0.14 |
| EPG dummies | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | |
| Country dummies | Yes | | Yes | | No | | No | | No | | No | |
| N | 112,163 | | 112,163 | | 112,163 | | 112,163 | | 112,163 | | 112,163 | |
| Log-pseudolikelihood | -23579.18 | | -23275.14 | | -24141.32 | | -23622.75 | | -24162.53 | | -23640.58 | |
| Wald χ^2 | 2803.52 | | 3454.12 | | 2279.24 | | 3067.75 | | 2136.72 | | 3031.45 | |

Note: Robust standard errors, clustered by legislative file. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1 (two-tailed)

Figure 1, which displays the real, unlogged values of proximity on the x-axis, shows that delegations are more disloyal before planned national elections, and before EP elections. In both cases, the curves become very steep a few months before elections are held. For instance, averaging other variables, the probability of a delegation being disloyal on a vote cast at the beginning of an EP term is about 5.9 percent; five weeks before the election, this probability increases to 9 percent. The figure also shows that proximate EP elections have a slightly stronger effect than proximate national votes. This may be because all MEPs standing for re-election immediately depend on success in EP elections, but not all MEPs will have their eye on national office prior to a general election at home. In addition, while all national parties aim to gain parliamentary seats in national and European elections—and may be helped by cross-level consistency in this endeavour—not all national parties (and, by corollary, their MEPs) stand an equal chance of gaining office. In addition, not all national parties (and, by corollary, their MEPs) stand an equal chance of gaining government office. Closely related, political groups may loosen the reins even more before EP than before national elections, because they immediately depend on their composite parties’ electoral success. By contrast, their parties’ success in national elections brings more medium-term benefits, such as spill-overs into the next EP election or a more favourable composition of the Council.

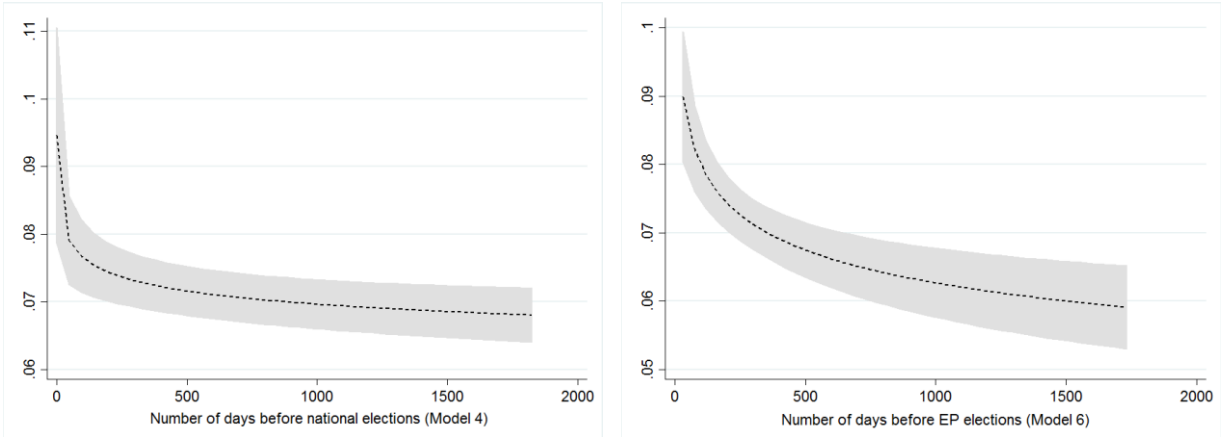


Figure 1. Election proximity and predicted disloyalty

As Models 3 and 4 show, the interaction between national election proximity and party-centredness is also strongly significant (H3). Upcoming national elections particularly increase the disloyalty of delegations from countries where electoral rules give the party leadership a greater role in candidate selection, and make the party brand more important in

campaigns. The interaction between EP election proximity and party-centredness is also in the expected direction (H4), but its effect is less robust to different model specifications. Figure 2 shows that in the shadow of planned national and EP elections, delegations from the most party-centred countries appear to be under tighter control by their national party. The trend for party-centred systems displayed by the two graphs is positive.

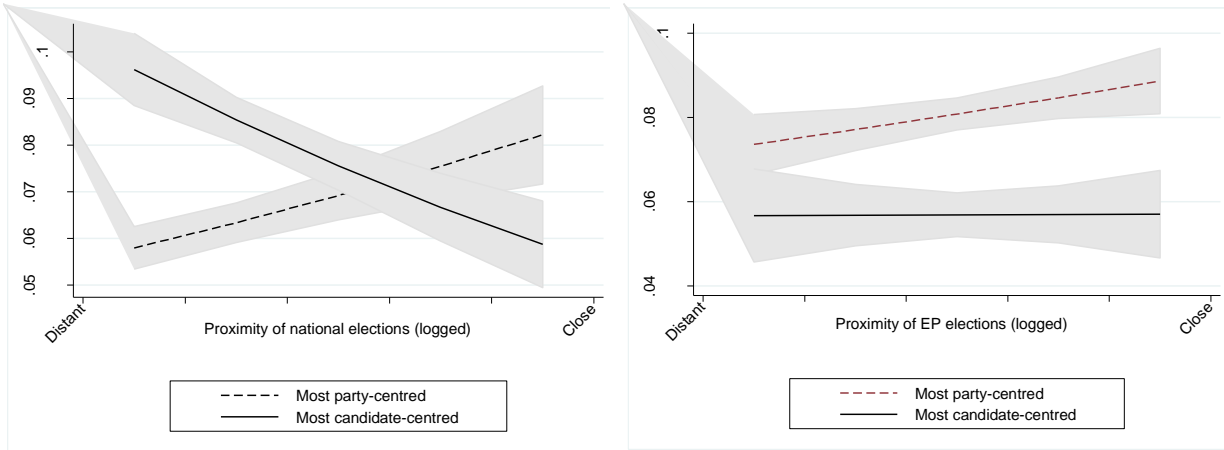


Figure 2. The effect of election proximity under different electoral rules (Models 3 and 5)

These findings support our argument about the conditioning effect of party-centred electoral rules. However, Figure 2 also shows that delegations from candidate-centred countries become *more* loyal before national elections. We did not develop a specific expectation about the effect of candidate-centredness, but this result is puzzling and merits unpacking in future studies. Recent research has, indeed, begun to draw increasingly nuanced conclusions about the impact of electoral rules on legislators’ strategic behaviour, demonstrating, for instance, that the effect of party- versus candidate-centredness on constituency effort is mediated by a legislator’s electoral vulnerability (André et al. 2015). Another potential route worth exploring is pre-electoral absenteeism. We would expect MEPs who stand in national elections in candidate-centred countries to be more intensively involved in constituency-level campaigning and, therefore, to turn out less before elections. Accordingly, those MEPs who *do* turn out in Brussels or Strasbourg may cast their legislative votes for specific reasons—for instance, because they are particularly loyal to their EP group or particularly supportive of the legislation, or because uncertainty (and, hence, the need to signal) is low in their domestic

electoral arena (see Meserve et al. 2017 on how EP election volatility affects individual defection).¹⁶

Turning to our controls (Table 1), the effects of *rapporteur's party* and *government party* are as expected: delegations are less disloyal when they own the legislative file, and when their national party is in government. The effect of *duration* (in months)—our proxy for contestation—is small but significant: disloyalty is higher on files that take longer to adopt. The effects of *codification*, *issue salience* and *Euro-scepticism* are also in the expected direction, and significant. The *trend* variable shows disloyalty decreasing over time. Finally, the large and positive effect for *amended proposal* suggests that delegations, indeed, use lower-stakes votes to signal to the domestic level. Only the effects for *Euclidean distance* and *early agreement* are in the expected direction but not significant.

To assess the robustness of our findings, we ran additional tests with a dichotomous proximity variable. As Table 2 shows, disloyalty is significantly more likely in campaign periods before planned national and EP elections.¹⁷ The findings in the two models are fairly similar, but, here too, the effect of EP election proximity is considerably stronger when including controls. Also, in line with the above results, the effect is slightly stronger for EP election proximity.

¹⁶ An exhaustive analysis of turnout is outside the scope of this article. Yet, our own data, showing lower pre-electoral turnout by MEPs from candidate-centred countries, lend very cautious support to this argument.

¹⁷ We did not include the interaction terms with electoral rules in these two models because of multicollinearity. In models with the national-level interaction, the VIF for party-centredness would be above 10, and the tolerance level below 0.10. In models with the EP interaction, the VIF for party-centredness would be above 60, with extremely small tolerance levels. Also, there would be problematic VIF and tolerance levels for several country dummies.

Table 2. The likelihood of disloyalty (1999-2014), campaign effects

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β |
| National campaign | 0.12 (0.06)** | 1.12 | 0.12 (0.06)** | 1.13 |
| EP campaign | 0.17 (0.08)** | 1.19 | 0.27 (0.08)*** | 1.31 |
| Rapporteur's party | | | -2.12 (0.51)*** | 0.12 |
| Government party | | | -0.23 (0.04)*** | 0.79 |
| Euclidean distance | | | 0.02 (0.01) | 1.02 |
| Early agreement | | | -0.08 (0.09) | 0.92 |
| Duration | | | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 |
| Codification | | | -0.86 (0.13)*** | 0.42 |
| Issue salience | | | 0.21 (0.07)*** | 1.23 |
| Euroscepticism | | | 0.02 (0.00)*** | 1.02 |
| Trend | | | -0.03 (0.01)** | 0.97 |
| Amended proposal | | | 0.44 (0.10)*** | 1.56 |
| Constant | -4.12 (0.23)*** | 0.02 | -4.45 (0.27)*** | 0.01 |
| EPG dummies | Yes | | Yes | |
| Country dummies | Yes | | Yes | |
| N | 112,163 | | 112,163 | |
| Log-pseudolikelihood | -23570.21 | | -23275.67 | |
| Wald χ^2 | 2700.83 | | 3460.26 | |

Note: Robust standard errors, clustered by legislative file; ***p<0.01, **p<0.05 *p<0.1 (two-tailed)

To better understand the substantive effect of the explanatory variables, Table 3 shows their marginal change calculated over the full range of values (corresponding to the discrete change for dichotomous variables like *rapporteur* and *government party*); other variables are held at their observed values. As proximity moves from its minimum to its maximum value (corresponding to the length of a parliamentary term), the probability of *disloyalty* increases on average by 2.7 percentage points for national elections, and by 3.1 percentage points for EP elections. Both effects are significant at the 0.01 percent level. The magnitude of the proximity effect is not dissimilar from that of other factors identified as relevant in the established literature on cohesion and defection in the EP. Moreover, disloyalty is a costly choice, which delegations take cautiously, rarely and collectively; this underscores the importance of the proximity effect. Being from a rapporteur's or government party decreases the probability of disloyalty by 6.1 and 1.1 percentage points, respectively. *Euroscepticism* has the strongest effect: delegations from the most Eurosceptic countries are about 11 percent more likely to be disloyal.

Table 3. The magnitude of the effects on disloyalty

| Variable | Marginal change (Min → Max) |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Proximity national elections | 0.027** |
| Proximity EP elections | 0.031** |
| Rapporteur | -0.061** |
| Government Party | -0.011** |
| Duration | 0.093** |
| Codification | -0.036** |
| Saliency | 0.039* |
| Euroscepticism | 0.110** |
| Trend | -0.052** |
| Amended proposal | 0.028** |

Note: All entries from Model 4; **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Politicisation

The models in Table 4 assess whether politicisation magnifies the effect of election proximity. We present fully specified models, including all control variables and fixed effects for groups and countries, and we compare EP7 to the previous two parliamentary terms.

The effect of election proximity seems largely driven by the dynamics in EP7, for national elections (H5) and, even more so, for EP elections (H6). As argued above, the difference is likely to be underestimated: the analyses include all final votes cast in EP7, but only the requested (and thus more divisive) roll-call votes in EP5 and EP6. Looking at the first two models, the effect of *proximity of national elections* is only significant in EP7, while its effect in the previous two parliamentary terms is far from significant, though positive.¹⁸ The effect of *EP election proximity* is strong and highly significant in EP7 only: disloyalty became significantly more likely before the 2014 European election.

¹⁸ To be precise, the p-value for the effect of national election proximity in the second (EP7) model is 0.055—just above the 5% level—while it is 0.522 in the first model (EP5-EP6).

Table 4. The effect of politicisation

| | EP5-EP6 (1999-2009) | | EP7 (2009-2014) | | EP5-EP6 (1999-2009) | | EP7 (2009-2014) | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|
| | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β |
| Proximity national | 0.02 (0.04) | 1.02 | 0.04 (0.02)* | 1.04 | | | | |
| Proximity EP | -0.02 (0.06) | 0.98 | 0.11 (0.03)*** | 1.12 | | | | |
| Proximity national (dummy) | | | | | 0.12 (0.11) | 1.13 | 0.16 (0.06)*** | 1.17 |
| Proximity EP (dummy) | | | | | 0.06 (0.13) | 1.07 | 0.32 (0.11)*** | 1.38 |
| Rapporteur's party | -2.43 (0.74)*** | 0.09 | -1.93 (0.73)*** | 0.14 | -2.42 (0.74)*** | 0.09 | -1.95 (0.73)*** | 0.14 |
| Government party | -0.20 (0.06)*** | 0.82 | -0.29 (0.05)*** | 0.75 | -0.20 (0.06)*** | 0.82 | -0.28 (0.05)*** | 0.75 |
| Euclidean distance | 0.05 (0.02)*** | 1.05 | 0.07 (0.01)*** | 1.07 | 0.05 (0.02)*** | 1.05 | 0.07 (0.01)*** | 1.07 |
| Early agreement | -0.29 (0.13)** | 0.75 | -0.07 (0.10) | 0.93 | -0.30 (0.13)** | 0.74 | -0.02 (0.10) | 0.98 |
| Duration | 0.01 (0.00) | 1.01 | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 | 0.01 (0.00) | 1.01 | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 |
| Codification | -0.83 (0.12)*** | 0.44 | -1.32 (0.26)*** | 0.27 | -0.83 (0.12)*** | 0.44 | -1.37 (0.26)*** | 0.25 |
| Issue salience | 0.25 (0.09)*** | 1.29 | 0.17 (0.15) | 1.18 | 0.25 (0.09)*** | 1.29 | 0.16 (0.15) | 1.18 |
| Euroscepticism | -0.01 (0.02) | 0.99 | 0.02 (0.01)*** | 1.02 | -0.01 (0.02) | 0.99 | 0.02 (0.01)*** | 1.02 |
| Amended proposal | 0.43 (0.11)*** | 1.54 | 0.52 (0.23)** | 1.68 | 0.44 (0.11)*** | 1.56 | 0.49 (0.23)** | 1.63 |
| Constant | -3.58 (0.67)*** | 0.02 | -4.02 (0.46)*** | 0.02 | -3.65 (0.51)*** | 0.03 | -5.17 (0.36)*** | 0.01 |
| EPG dummies | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | |
| Country dummies | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | |
| N | 44,659 | | 67,504 | | 44,659 | | 67,504 | |
| Log-pseudolikelihood | -9790.37 | | -12928.356 | | -9789.30 | | -12928.64 | |
| Wald χ^2 | 1608.83 | | 2490.42 | | 1614.58 | | 2548.98 | |

Note: Robust standard errors, clustered by legislative file; ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10 (two-tailed)

The last two models in Table 4, which include dummies for campaign periods, further corroborate our findings. In the six months before national elections, delegations are significantly more likely to vote against their political group, by a 1.17 factor. Similarly, in the two months before EP elections, the likelihood of disloyalty is 1.38 times larger. The control variables show no major differences over time. The negative effect of *early agreement* in EP5 and EP6 is no longer significant in EP7, most probably because early agreements have become the norm, with little legislation agreed at second or third reading. Interestingly, *Euroscepticism* is only significant in EP7, while *issue salience* only matters in the early period. This may underline increasing contestation since mid-2009, with opposition targeted at the EU as such—rather than at specific policies—affecting legislative behaviour.

In sum, based on different operationalisations and model specifications, we find support for the hypothesised effect of election proximity, both national and European. This effect is stronger for delegations from party-centred electoral systems; these seem to incentivise parties to strive for visible coherence across levels of governance, not least by monitoring and controlling their MEPs. Moreover, contestation over Europe seems to have mattered before the 2014 EP election and, to a relatively lesser extent, in the lead-up to national elections since 2009.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the political conditions under which legislators choose between competing principals in multi-level systems, with a focus on the impact of election proximity—national and European—on the EP's delegations. Drawing from the established comparative and Europeanist literatures on competing principals, legislative voting and politicisation, we argued that elections shape legislators' and parties' time-horizons and political pressures and, thus, their cost-benefit calculations around defection, control, and accommodation. Elections are key political events in democracies, which, we suggested, can compress a competing principals scenario into a *de facto* one-principal set-up. We theorised election proximity as a main effect and as conditioned by two related political factors: party-centred electoral rules and the politicisation of Europe. Our hypotheses were tested on a new dataset including roll-call votes cast under codecision by delegations in EP plenaries between July 1999 and July 2014.

Our analysis shows that both national and European elections matter: the EP's delegations become significantly more disloyal when planned elections approach, and particularly so in the run-up to European elections. As expected, election proximity impacts particularly on delegations from

countries with party-centred electoral rules; we argued that national parties, campaigning in such systems, are more interested in the visible coherence of the party brand across levels of governance, and use their power to control and sanction Europarliamentarians. Our results also support a politicisation effect: in general, delegations have become more loyal over time, but during EP7—with contestation over Europe increasing—elections cast a particularly prominent shadow over legislative behaviour. Finally, delegations are more disloyal on contested and salient legislation, on amended Commission proposals, and under Euroscepticism; by contrast, they are more loyal on codification files, when they own the report, and when their national party is in government. In a nutshell, we show that ‘politics matters’ across democratic arenas in the EU’s multi-level system, and this finding has implications for the study both of legislative behaviour under competing principals and of multi-level democracy—in the EU and beyond.

Most generally, we demonstrate that complementing and interacting established explanations of legislative voting—institutional, party-organisational, ideological, file-level—with dynamic and multi-level political factors is fruitful. Our focus on collective legislative behaviour, on (electoral) politics, and on the interplay between democratic arenas could also illuminate political dynamics in other multi-level or federal systems, with their multiple—and competing—layers of party organisation, leadership and loyalty. The German *Bundesrat*—where *Länder* delegations are collectively accountable to both federal and regional parties, and where pressures change before federal and regional elections—springs to mind. By uncovering the interconnectedness between competitive arenas in a multi-level system, our research can also speak to scholarship on representation in comparative federalism.

Turning to the EU’s legislative politics more specifically, in direct contrast to established expectations, national elections do matter for supranational actors and drive up collective signalling in EU legislative politics. For Europarliamentarians the domestic democratic arena seems to have first-order importance, and national electoral cycles have a direct—if temporally asymmetrical—impact on supranational decision-making. However, the effect of upcoming EP elections is even stronger. This may not surprise: after all, European elections directly affect MEPs’ future office, and Europarliamentarians may, therefore, be even more invested in campaigning and signalling before these votes. In addition to uncovering a first-order importance of national elections for supranational actors, our findings, once again, underline the second-order nature of European contests. Indeed, only when EP elections are lost and won at home, and only when delegations are incentivised to not just campaign domestically but to also promote their national—rather than

European—party brand, does it pay to use EU-level votes as collective signals in support of campaigns led by national parties. The fact that election proximity matters in particular for MEPs from party-centred member states further supports this interpretation.

We also show that the EP's delegations are key players of multi-level politics and act as conduits between the domestic and the supranational democratic arenas. Delegations' legislative voting—loyal and disloyal—is highly collective and sensitive to domestic political pressures, including proximate elections and Eurosceptic public opinion. This suggests, in turn, that delegations contribute to translating their voters' preferences into the EU policy-process; offer familiarity in representation; alert their domestic political base to EU-level developments; and communicate national concerns 'upwards'. Delegations thus provide a crucial vertical link between two distinct democratic arenas, each relying on parties to aggregate voters' preferences and to deliver public policy. Yet, if EP groups routinely 'tolerate' disloyalty in the run-up to elections so as to increase their chances of representation, the asymmetrical electoral cycles running across the Union also disrupt the horizontal development of a truly supranational party system.

Finally, our analysis suggests that politicisation is at work in the EU, and increasingly so. As expected, disloyalty is particularly high before the 2014 EP election; collective signalling increases before national elections held since 2009 and, thus, during the EU's most politicised parliamentary term; and disloyalty goes up in response to rising Euroscepticism. These findings are particularly important because the politicisation effect of 2014 is likely to be underestimated: our data include all roll-calls on final legislative votes in EP7 but only on more contested votes in EP5 and EP6. In short, the 'arrival of politics' to the EU's multi-level system, and its travels across democratic arenas, has become visible in EP7 but may well become much more prominent in EP8 and beyond.

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ONLINE APPENDIX

Table A. Coding of electoral systems in EP and national elections

| Component | Farrell & Scully (2007) <i>EP election rules</i> | Johnson & Wallack (2008) <i>National election rules</i> |
|-----------------|---|--|
| <i>Ballot</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ballot access dominated by parties; voters may not disturb order of list 2 Ballot access dominated by parties, but voters may disturb list 3 Ballot access nearly unrestricted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 Parties control both access and order 1 Parties control access but not order 2 Parties control neither access nor order |
| <i>Vote</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Vote for list only 2 Vote is list or nominal, but list votes predominate 3 Vote is nominal or list, but nominal votes predominate and pool to other candidates 4 Vote is nominal only, but vote may pool or transfer to other candidates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 Voters have one vote for a party 1 Voters can vote for a party or a candidate (as in open and flexible lists), where votes for a party or candidate are observationally equivalent, or where voters have multiple votes for multiple candidates 2 Voters vote for one individual candidate |
| <i>District</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 District magnitude is greater than one, with $\text{Vote} < 3$ 2 District magnitude is greater than one, with $\text{Vote} > 2$, provided that $\text{Ballot} > 1$ | |
| <i>Pool</i> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 Across all members in a district 1 Across some but not all members in a district, or across fewer than 5% in a tier 2 No pooling across candidates |

Table B. Summary of the operationalisation

| Variable | Expected direction | Description | Data source |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Proximity national elections | + | Number of days (logged) between the date of the vote in the EP and the date of parliamentary or presidential elections in the EU member countries. Reversed (times -1) | www.parties-and-elections-eu |
| Proximity EP elections | + | Number of days (logged) between the date of the vote in the EP and the date of the EP elections. Reversed (times -1) | |
| National campaign | + | Vote in the six months before the national elections (1) | |
| EP campaign | + | Vote in the two months before EP elections (1) | |
| Party centredness (national) | + | Party-centeredness of electoral rules for the lower/only chamber | Schwindt-Bayer & Tavits (2016) |
| Party centredness (EP) | + | Party-centeredness of electoral rules for EP elections | Farrell & Scully (2007) |
| Rapporteur's party | - | The rapporteur belongs to a national party delegation (1) | OEIL |
| Government party | - | The national party is in government (1) | ParlGov |
| Euclidian distance | + | Euclidean distance between a national party and a political group on the left-right and the EU integration dimensions | Euromanifestos |
| Early agreement | - | Files concluded at first or early second reading, agreed informally | OEIL |
| Duration | + | Number of months between the Commission proposal and the conclusion of legislation | OEIL |
| Codification | - | Files replacing existing legislation without substantive changes | OEIL |
| Issue salience | + | Average number of articles naming a codecision file in English, French, German and Italian language newspapers | LexisNexis Business & News |
| Euroscepticism | + | Percentage of citizens for whom the EU has a fairly or very negative image | Eurobarometer |
| Trend | - | Time trend, by year | |
| Amended proposal | + | Vote on the amended Commission proposal (1) | VoteWatch |

Table C. Descriptive statistics

| | Mean | SD | Min | Max | N |
|---|--------|--------|-------|-------|---------|
| Disloyalty | 0.07 | 0.26 | 0 | 1 | 112,163 |
| Proximity national elections | 718.42 | 467.68 | 0 | 1825 | 112,163 |
| Proximity national elections (log & reversed) | -6.24 | 1.02 | -7.51 | 0 | 112,163 |
| Proximity EP elections | 506.34 | 461.05 | 32 | 1732 | 112,163 |
| Proximity EP elections (log & reversed) | -5.68 | 1.17 | -7.46 | -3.50 | 112,163 |
| National campaign | 0.14 | 0.35 | 0 | 1 | 112,163 |
| EP campaign | 0.15 | 0.36 | 0 | 1 | 112,163 |
| Party centredness (national) | -4.45 | 3.63 | -13 | -1 | 112,163 |
| Party centredness (EP) | -4.96 | 1.89 | -9 | -3 | 112,163 |
| Rapporteur's party | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0 | 1 | 112,163 |
| Government party | 0.33 | 0.47 | 0 | 1 | 112,163 |
| Euclidean distance | 2.62 | 1.61 | 0 | 11.63 | 112,163 |
| Early agreement | 0.71 | 0.46 | 0 | 1 | 112,163 |
| Duration | 19.60 | 10.66 | 1 | 121 | 112,163 |
| Codification | 0.03 | 0.16 | 0 | 1 | 112,163 |
| Saliency | 0.12 | 0.39 | 0 | 3.1 | 112,163 |
| Euroscepticism | 20.08 | 10.49 | 3.9 | 59.41 | 112,163 |
| Trend | 11.08 | 3.59 | 0 | 15 | 112,163 |
| Amended proposal | 0.08 | 0.27 | 0 | 1 | 112,163 |

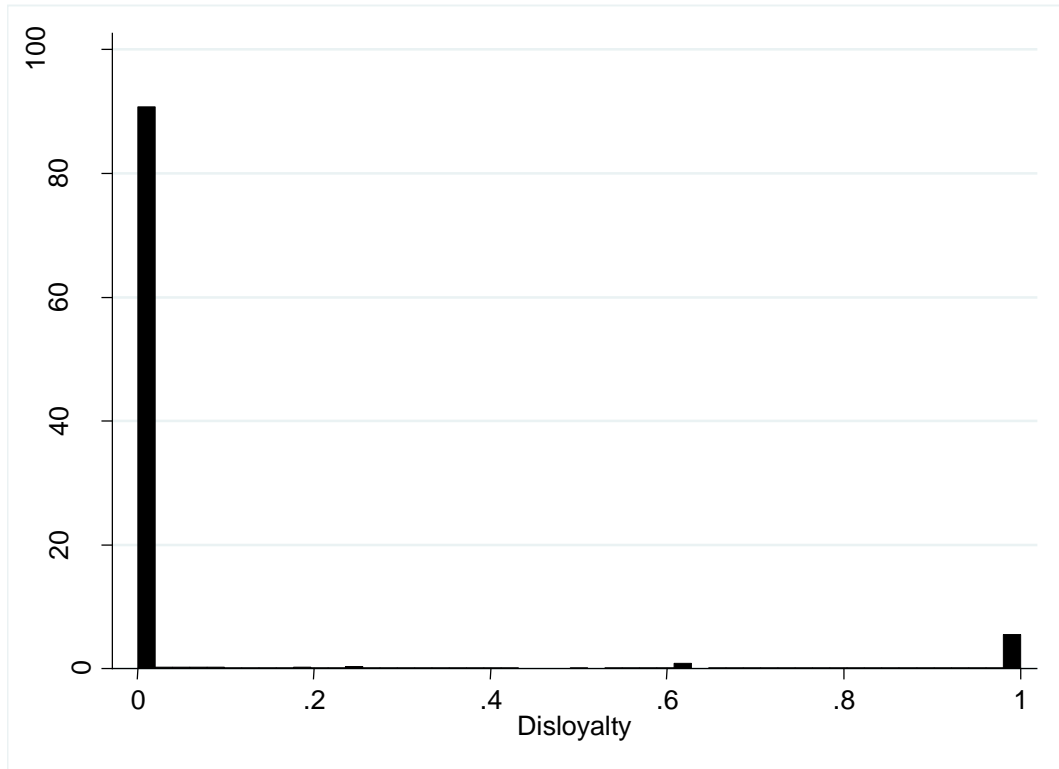


Figure A. Distribution of disloyalty

Note: Disloyalty (our DV) of a national delegation to its political group has been presented here as a continuous variable bounded between 0 and 1. A party delegation is fully disloyal (1) when its members all vote against the political group. Disloyalty takes the value 0 when all the members of a national delegation vote with the political group majority (in other words, when the national delegation is loyal in its entirety). As Figure A very clearly shows, national delegations tend to vote *en bloc*, either against or with their political group (the high bars at the extremes of the scale). The frequency of voting options between 0 and 1 – with national delegations breaking up, and members voting in different ways – is much lower.

Table D. The likelihood of disloyalty (1999-2014), including unplanned elections

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | | Model 5 | | Model 6 | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β |
| Proximity national elections | 0.04 (0.02)** | 1.04 | 0.04 (0.02)** | 1.04 | 0.12 (0.02)*** | 1.12 | 0.10 (0.02)*** | 1.11 | -0.00 (0.02) | 1.00 | 0.04 (0.02)*** | 1.04 |
| Proximity EP elections | 0.04 (0.03) | 1.04 | 0.10 (0.03)*** | 1.11 | 0.04 (0.03) | 1.04 | 0.13 (0.03)*** | 1.13 | 0.10 (0.03)*** | 1.11 | 0.20 (0.04)*** | 1.22 |
| Prox nat X party centred | | | | | 0.02 (0.00)*** | 1.03 | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 | | | | |
| Party centredness (national) | | | | | 0.12 (0.03)*** | 1.13 | 0.05 (0.03)** | 1.05 | | | | |
| Prox EP X party centred | | | | | | | | | 0.02 (0.01)** | 1.02 | 0.02 (0.01)** | 1.02 |
| Party centredness (EP) | | | | | | | | | 0.16 (0.05)*** | 1.18 | 0.13 (0.05)*** | 1.13 |
| Rapporteur's party | | | -2.25 (0.50)*** | 0.11 | | | -2.28 (0.50)*** | 0.10 | | | -2.30 (0.50)*** | 0.10 |
| Government party | | | -0.21 (0.04)*** | 0.81 | | | -0.19 (0.03)*** | 0.82 | | | -0.18 (0.03)*** | 0.84 |
| Euclidean distance | | | -0.01 (0.01) | 0.99 | | | -0.01 (0.01) | 0.99 | | | -0.01 (0.01) | 0.99 |
| Early agreement | | | -0.10 (0.08) | 0.90 | | | -0.10 (0.08) | 0.91 | | | -0.10 (0.08) | 0.91 |
| Duration | | | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 | | | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 | | | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 |
| Codification | | | -1.00 (0.13)*** | 0.37 | | | -0.93 (0.13)*** | 0.39 | | | -0.94 (0.13)*** | 0.39 |
| Issue salience | | | 0.20 (0.07)*** | 1.22 | | | 0.20 (0.07)*** | 1.22 | | | 0.20 (0.07)*** | 1.22 |
| Euroscepticism | | | 0.02 (0.00)*** | 1.02 | | | 0.03 (0.00)*** | 1.03 | | | 0.03 (0.00)*** | 1.03 |
| Trend | | | -0.04 (0.01)*** | 0.97 | | | -0.06 (0.01)*** | 0.94 | | | -0.06 (0.01)*** | 0.94 |
| Amended proposal | | | 0.44 (0.10)*** | 1.55 | | | 0.42 (0.10)*** | 1.52 | | | 0.42 (0.10)*** | 1.53 |
| Constant | -3.56 (0.26)*** | 0.03 | -3.42 (0.33)*** | 0.03 | -2.73 (0.23)*** | 0.06 | -2.33 (0.31)*** | 0.10 | -2.56 (0.23)*** | 0.08 | -2.00 (0.31)*** | 0.14 |
| EPG dummies | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | |
| Country dummies | Yes | | Yes | | No | | No | | No | | No | |
| N | 130,416 | | 130,416 | | 130,416 | | 130,416 | | 130,416 | | 130,416 | |
| Log-pseudolikelihood | -27086.81 | | -26710.14 | | -27715.90 | | -27102.97 | | -27745.6 | | -27210.42 | |
| Wald χ^2 | 2990.42 | | 3667.77 | | 2333.64 | | 3147.89 | | 2203.58 | | 3139.19 | |

Note: Robust standard errors, clustered by legislative file; ***p<0.01, **p<0.05 *p<0.1 (two-tailed test)

Table E. The likelihood of disloyalty, campaign effects including unplanned elections

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| | Coef (SE) | e^β | Coef (SE) | e^β |
| National campaign | 0.10 (0.05)** | 1.11 | 0.10 (0.05)** | 1.10 |
| EP campaign | 0.19 (0.08)** | 1.21 | 0.29 (0.08)*** | 1.34 |
| Rapporteur's party | | | -2.25 (0.50)*** | 0.11 |
| Government party | | | -0.21 (0.04)*** | 0.81 |
| Euclidean distance | | | -0.01 (0.01) | 0.99 |
| Early agreement | | | -0.07 (0.08) | 0.93 |
| Duration | | | 0.01 (0.00)*** | 1.01 |
| Codification | | | -0.97 (0.14)*** | 0.38 |
| Issue salience | | | 0.21 (0.07)*** | 1.23 |
| Euroscepticism | | | 0.02 (0.00)*** | 1.02 |
| Trend | | | -0.03 (0.01)** | 0.97 |
| Amended proposal | | | 0.42 (0.10)*** | 1.53 |
| Constant | -4.03 (0.19)*** | 0.02 | -4.34 (0.24)*** | 0.01 |
| EPG dummies | Yes | | Yes | |
| Country dummies | Yes | | Yes | |
| N | 130,416 | | 130,416 | |
| Log-pseudolikelihood | -27077.18 | | -26713.03 | |
| Wald χ^2 | 2907.44 | | 3673.56 | |

Note: Robust standard errors, clustered by legislative file; ***p<0.01, **p<0.05 *p<0.1 (two-tailed)