

Political Ambition and Legislative Behavior in the European Parliament*

Stephen A. Meserve

meserve@uiuc.edu

Daniel Pemstein

dbp@uiuc.edu

William T. Bernhard

bernhard@uiuc.edu

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Department of Political Science

361 Lincoln Hall

702 S. Wright Street

Urbana, IL 61801

Tel: 217.333.3881

Fax: 217.244.5712

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Abstract

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) typically follow one of two career paths, either advancing within the European Parliament itself or returning to higher offices in their home states. We argue that these different ambitions condition legislative behavior. Specifically, MEPs seeking domestic careers defect from group-leadership votes more frequently and oppose legislation that expands the purview of supranational institutions. We show how individual, domestic-party, and national level variables shape the careers available to MEPs and, in turn, their voting choices. To test the argument, we analyze MEPs' roll-call voting behavior in the 5th session of the EP (1999-2004) using a random effects model that captures idiosyncrasies in voting behavior across both individual MEPs and specific roll-call votes.

Politicians are ambitious. Some legislators wish to remain in their current positions for multiple terms, others aspire to other offices, and still others expect to serve in politics for only a short time (Schlesinger 1966). Those career ambitions shape behavior. A legislator's expectations about future office affect the choices she makes while serving in her current position (Hibbing 1986). Demonstrating empirical support for the impact of political ambition on behavior, however, is not straightforward. While research has focused on behavior across legislatures with a variety of career ladders (see e.g. Black 1972, Rhode 1979, Epstein, Brady, Kawato & O'Halloran 1997, Samuels 2003), those studies each center on a single country, limiting the possible variation in career-oriented behavior. Since only a small number of other positions are likely to arouse the ambitions of serving legislators, it is difficult to disentangle how the characteristics of the legislature, its members, and the opportunity structure interact to influence legislative behavior.¹

We take advantage of a unique institutional laboratory to investigate how ambition affects vote choice: the European Parliament (EP). The EP houses politicians from all member states of the European Union (EU), each with a different set of national political institutions, party systems, and political opportunity structures. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) typically follow one of two career paths (Stolz 2001, Scarrow 1997). Some MEPs prefer to advance within the EP itself, gaining seniority and access to key leadership positions. Other MEPs view their time in the EP as a valuable stepping-stone to higher office in their home state. We argue that these different career ambitions condition legislative behavior within the EP. Those MEPs seeking to remain in the EP further their careers by pleasing EP group leaders and will work to expand the authority of Europe's supranational institutions relative to member-state governments. MEPs expecting to return to domestic political positions, in contrast, have less reason to abide their parliamentary groups. They also have incentives to preserve member-state powers and prerogatives at the expense of supranational institutions. Because MEPs have the opportunity to pursue a variety of future offices, their behavior illuminates the role of institutional variables in the ambition calculus—such as electoral institutions and political party characteristics—which do not generally vary within national legislatures.

We contend that individual, domestic-party, and national level variables shape career opportunities available to MEPs and, in turn, their legislative behavior. To test the argument, we analyze MEPs' roll-call voting behavior in the 5th session of the EP (1999-2004). The data indicate substantial variability in behavior across both individual MEPs and roll-call votes. Traditional approaches typically consider only

¹Over-time analysis provides one technique for overcoming this shortcoming, and such research has helped to explain phenomena like the rise of careerism in American politics (Brady, Buckley & Rivers 1999).

across-legislator variability and ignore the differences between votes. We demonstrate that across-vote differences can significantly outweigh between-legislator variation. Ignoring either factor may lead to overconfidence in the results. Therefore, we use a crossed random-effects model to account for idiosyncrasies in voting behavior across both individual MEPs and specific roll-call votes. Substantively, the results indicate that nationally ambitious MEPs change their voting behavior in anticipation of national elections, demonstrating how politicians' time horizons interact with their progressive ambition. Further, MEPs planning moves to national office oppose legislation that expands the purview of supranational institutions, strengthening their expected future offices and prioritizing future constituencies. The personal ambition of MEPs, therefore, has a critical effect on European lawmaking and the pace of integration.

Political Ambition and the European Parliament

Americanist scholars first argued for political ambition's important role in conditioning legislator behavior (Schlesinger 1966, Black 1972, Rhode 1979). They contended that "almost all elected officials have progressive ambition" and hope to move upward to more powerful, prestigious offices (Copeland 1989, 552). To ensure success, these politicians make policy choices that satisfy not only their own current constituents, but also potential future constituents (Hibbing 1986). Politicians anticipating only minor chances to move to more important offices, however, have little incentive to support legislation specifically targeting future constituents. Instead, they seek to maximize the influence of their current positions by climbing the legislature's internal hierarchy and expanding the policy authority of those institutions (Hibbing 1999, Squire 1988). In either situation, ambition strongly shapes current behavior. More recently, scholars have applied these insights to legislatures in other countries, showing how the institutional environment determines opportunities for advancement (Samuels 2003, Carey 1996, Epstein et al. 1997, Cox, Rosenbluth & Thies 2000).

The institutional structure of the EP is unique in how it shapes legislative careers. MEPs are elected in national-level elections to serve five-year terms in the EP. Currently, all member states use proportional representation in "European" elections. National-level parties control nominations to European elections. Candidates in EP elections, therefore, owe allegiance to their national party. Further, if a candidate seeks to return to domestic politics, she will have to seek her party's nomination in the domestic election. Once elected to the EP, however, MEPs sit in "groups." Groups are composed of MEPs from different parties across member states. The largest group in the 5th EP, the Group of the European People's Party (EPP-

ED), includes members from more than 30 national-level parties. These groups structure the agenda and determine parliamentary leadership within the EP, much as political parties do in national-level parliaments.

In general, MEPs have strong incentives to vote with their group leaderships. While EP groups have little control over electoral nominations, they maintain impressive powers within the EP itself. The groups employ whips to coordinate and monitor the voting behavior of members and “coordinators” who serve a similar function within committees (Hix, Noury & Roland 2007, 134). Group leaders influence committee assignments and bill rapporteurships, control the speaking agenda within the parliament, propose bill amendments, and nominate MEPs to the Parliamentary Bureau, the body responsible for administration and organization of the EP’s budget and staff. Furthermore, during personal interviews,² a number of MEPs noted that the groups’ role in the allocation of bill reports affects their behavior within the EP. Acting as a rapporteur is one of the best ways for an MEP to influence legislation and raise her public profile and multiple MEPs voiced the opinion that group leaders can and do limit an MEP’s access to her most preferred reports. In fact, quantitative evidence supports this perception: Hausemer (2006) finds that MEPs who toe the group line obtain more salient reports than those who frequently vote against the group. Therefore, while national party delegations play an important role in group decision making (Kreppel 2002) and can instruct their members to contravene the group leadership, group leaders have tools to help them maintain discipline at the group level.

Indeed, since MEPs were first directly elected in 1979, groups have become increasingly fractionalized, both in terms of the number of national parties represented within each group and the ideological dispersion of their members. Yet, over this same time period, intra-group cohesiveness in roll-call voting has increased, implying a concomitant increase in group leaders’ ability to coordinate the legislative activity of members across national party lines (Hix, Noury & Roland 2007, 104). Furthermore, national delegations only rarely vote against their overarching groups. Given the diversity of many of the groups this implies a great deal of compromise between group and national delegation leaderships (Hix, Noury & Roland 2007, 145). In short, EP leaders may often induce MEPs to favor positions for which their national delegations provide only tacit support. Indeed, one Swedish member of the Socialist Group (PSE) credited a perceived increase in her group’s cohesiveness in the 6th Parliament directly to the efforts of PSE president Martin Schultz.³

Ambition affects the willingness of MEPs to follow their group because MEPs face a distinct choice

²We conducted all interviews in Brussels between November 5 and December 7, 2007.

³Interview with MEP Inger Segelström, November 27, 2007.

of career paths. Descriptive evidence shows that some MEPs desire positions of power within European institutions while others seek a return to domestic office. In the years following the advent of direct election to the EP,⁴ it was conventional wisdom that MEPs were strongly motivated by a wish to return to national politics. To test this, Scarrow (1997) compiled data on pre- and post-EP offices for MEPs elected between 1979 and 1994. She observes that, over time, the EP attracted more legislators interested in a European career rather than in returning to a domestic office. Stolz (2001) uses similar data to calculate “exchange rates” between domestic and European levels of legislative office. His results also detail the existence of a European career track, suggesting that “parliaments on the regional and European level also function as career arenas in their own right” (2).

We contend that ambition influences MEPs’ legislative behavior. Specifically, MEPs cast their legislative votes to maximize their career expectations. MEPs focused on advancing within the EP must balance the expectations of their national parties with those of the EP group. The group leadership influences MEPs’ access to resources and prerogatives within the EP. Secondly, as multiple MEPs stressed in interviews, the utility of membership in a group is largely a function of group cohesiveness. An MEP who plans a long career in Brussels is best served by belonging to a tightly knit coalition capable of maintaining a largely united front during contentious votes. MEPs on national career arcs, on the other hand, must prioritize home constituency preferences above all else, especially the preferences of those bodies responsible for national candidate nominations.⁵ When group leadership and domestic-level constituency clash, nationally ambitious MEPs look to domestic interests to determine their behavior. MEPs with national ambitions, therefore, are more likely to vote against their group leaders than MEPs inclined to build a career at the European level.

Ambition theory helps to predict not only those constituencies that MEPs will seek to please but the policy areas in which they will attempt to distinguish themselves. We expect behavioral differences between nationally ambitious MEPs and European careerists to be particularly pronounced for issues relating to the power and authority of European institutions. MEPs who plan to remain in Brussels benefit from stronger European institutions. By expanding the powers of European institutions, careerist MEPs enhance their own influence and prestige as they work their way up the EP hierarchy. MEPs hoping for future national office, on the other hand, need to appeal to domestic parties and voters. They

⁴The EP was established in 1957. Direct election to the EP, however, commenced only in 1979. Before this it was composed of appointed national delegations.

⁵Note that we use the term constituency quite generally here. While constituency might refer directly to the voting public in single member district systems like France, Great Britain, and Ireland it can also refer to national party leadership or candidate selectors at the national, regional, or district level.

work to advantage member states in terms of policy and spending and to preserve member sovereignty within the structure of EU institutions. Therefore, we expect these MEPs to support fewer powers for supranational institutions.

Determinants of Ambition in the European Parliament

Ambition theory predicts that politicians make decisions based on the potential benefits of alternative offices and the probability of achieving those positions. If opportunities to move up the ladder are plentiful or if politicians think they are likely to succeed, politicians behave in a manner that appeals to future constituents. If there are few opportunities to succeed or if the probability of achieving those positions is low, politicians focus on satisfying the policy demands of their current constituents.

For MEPs, therefore, observed behavior reflects a calculation about the relative merits of a career in Brussels against a career in the home country. If an MEP believes that political opportunities in her home state are few, if those opportunities possess only limited importance, or if she has little chance of succeeding in attaining them, then a career in Brussels becomes relatively more attractive. In turn, she is more likely to go along with her parliamentary group and to support policies that enhance the power and influence of European institutions. On the other hand, MEPs may view domestic office as a more attractive career option, one that provides more policy influence than serving as an MEP. If the possibility of a domestic career is relatively high, then MEPs tailor their behavior toward the concerns of national constituents, being both more willing to defy the EP group leadership and more antagonistic toward augmenting the power of European institutions.

We argue that individual characteristics, domestic party structures, and national institutions influence an MEP's career prospects and, in turn, her legislative—specifically voting—behavior.

Age, Ambition, and Group Vote Defection

Researchers attempting to test theories of ambition are faced with a fundamental challenge: how does one measure someone's personal goals? Traditionally, scholars of political ambition have used actual career paths to proxy for this unobservable variable. While useful, this approach ignores the fact that career ambition and career attainment are two different things. A group of MEPs with designs on national careers may behave similarly to one another in parliament but only a small subset of these MEPs are likely to get the chance to run for national office. Thus, if we compare the behavior of future national

nominees to those who never stand for office in their home states we will underestimate the differences in behavior across the groups simply because we have included a—potentially large—number of nationally ambitious legislators in the European careerist group.

Fortunately, the unique characteristics of the EP allow us to leverage an observable variable, age, to provide a window into politicians' ambitions. We argue that age influences the career opportunities of MEPs. Specifically, the proportion of nationally ambitious MEPs in the EP should quickly decrease as a function of age. For young MEPs, the doors to a successful career either in Brussels or at home are wide open. Young MEPs looking to move up the European hierarchy can pursue group objectives and participate in group activities. In contrast, young MEPs could instead view their time in the EP as way to prove their worth to their domestic parties by securing EU spending for their member-state and promoting national party objectives at the European level. Indeed, some political parties use service in the EP as a way to groom up-and-coming talent, providing potential candidates with valuable legislative experience and an important line on their political resumes.

As MEPs age, however, the opportunities to return to domestic level office diminish. While serving in the EP for a short time may be a benefit to running for domestic office, an older MEP is not as attractive to a national party. Working in Brussels can foster a perception of being out of touch with domestic issues. Other potential candidates will have spent the same time in local and regional offices, building ties to constituents and the party hierarchy. In fact, some political parties view MEP positions as a last stop for older politicians rather than a proving ground for up-and-coming candidates.⁶ As candidates age, therefore, the possibility of domestic office diminishes and the appeal of a career in the EP increases. Consequently, the proportion of nationally ambitious legislators will be lower among middle-aged and older MEPs than within the more youthful ranks.⁷ Available quantitative evidence supports this argument. The European Candidate Study (Thomassen, Geurts & van der Kolk 1994) asked candidates to the 4th EP where they would most like to be, career-wise, in ten years. While 44 per cent of 18–35 year olds indicated that they would like to be in national legislature or government in 10 years, only 34 per cent of 36–55 year olds, and 32 per cent of candidates over 55 had similar goals. Furthermore, respondents' age did not reduce their European ambitions as quickly as their national aspirations: 45 per cent of 18–35 year olds reported a desire to serve in the EP 10 years after the survey,

⁶This was particularly true prior to the advent of the Codecision procedure. Codecision, introduced with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993, greatly increased the powers of the EP and with it the prestige and importance of EP positions.

⁷Note that this argument does not imply that national nominees will be drawn predominantly from the ranks of the young. In fact, the best time to jump to national office may be in middle age, after a MEP has spent their youth proving her worthiness in the EP.

compared with 41 per cent of 36–55 year olds, and 29 per cent of those over 55. While the ambitions of European careerists wane only as retirement looms, nationally ambitious politicians residing in European politics are forced to rethink their goals much earlier in life.⁸

The distinguishing characteristic of ambition in the EP—that MEPs answer to two distinct leaderships—allows us to use this basic observation to create a powerful tool for testing ambition theory. In a traditional legislature, both progressively ambitious legislators and parliamentarians who are content in their current roles have incentives to please a single party leadership. Under certain electoral systems, such as plurality rule, progressively ambitious politicians may change their behavior somewhat to appeal to future constituents as they prepare to jump to a new office, but they will have obtained a great deal of the political capital necessary to make that jump—including such prerequisites for office as nomination, campaign resources, and party endorsement—through consistent service to their party. Similarly, legislators with static ambitions will attempt to appeal to the same set of party leaders to improve their lots within their current institution. In the EP progressively ambitious MEPs will differentiate themselves from their static colleagues throughout their careers. From the time they enter parliament, national careerists will prioritize their home parties’ wishes over those of group leadership. Conversely, European careerists will, on average, position themselves best to move up within the EP hierarchy by balancing their support for national party delegations with loyalty to EP group leaders and the group as a whole.

Therefore, a focus on political ambition suggests that the relationship between age and group voting discipline in the EP is curvilinear. Young MEPs face two potential career paths and may more plausibly expect to return home than MEPs in other age groups. Therefore, young MEPs will, on average, vote against group leadership and expanding European powers more than middle-aged legislators. MEPs who are neither particularly old nor young have had a chance to update their prior beliefs about their long-term careers. Realistic middle-aged MEPs will not hold onto ambitions for national office without some sign from the national party that a jump is imminent. Many MEPs who might have optimistically looked forward to national careers in their youth will have resigned themselves to European careers, further reducing the pool of nationally ambitious MEPs in the middle age group. These MEPs, while likely past the point of running for national office, are not so far along in their careers that they do not strive to improve their standing within the EP itself. These MEPs should be the most likely to support group

⁸Other individual characteristics may shape electoral fortunes and the possibility of changing careers, and may also help to drive ambitious behavior in the EP. Women MEPs, for instance, may have different career strategies than their male counterparts. While many European parliaments, notably in Scandinavia, have made great strides in promoting the representation of women, women typically have fewer opportunities to attain national-level offices (IPU 2006). As a result, women may find planning a career in Brussels more appealing. Consequently, we expect women to defect less from group votes. Therefore, we include a dummy variable for gender in our analysis.

directives and expansions of EU power. MEPs closer to retirement, however, face the same sort of end-game incentives present in any legislature. With retirement on the horizon, it becomes less important to satisfy leaders by following either group or national party directives. Instead, the MEP's own ideology and immediate personal goals take greater precedence in shaping behavior. These MEPs are relatively immune to both group and domestic party pressures. These older MEPs are more likely to defect from group votes, but not necessarily in a manner that favors national constituencies. At the same time, we expect that they will continue to support the strengthening of European institutions simply because they have served in the EP and may experience short term benefits from this expansion.

This predicted relationship between age and group discipline is distinct from what we would expect to observe in states with traditional, single-track, career paths. In such systems backbencher discipline decreases monotonically with age because young parliamentarians must cull favor with their party leadership whether they plan on static or progressive careers and politicians' reliance on the party is highest when they are least established.

Age, Ambition, and Support for European Integration

We refine our hypotheses by considering how age and legislative issue area interact in determining vote defection. We argue nationally ambitious MEPs tend to support legislation that limits centralized European power, favoring member states, while European careerists will do the opposite. Because group leaders are, by and large, European careerists, we expect them to push to deepen integration when possible. Therefore, when voting on bills that deal with integration issues, we expect young MEPs to vote against group leaders at higher rates than middle-aged and older MEPs, focusing their defections to protect their long-term interests. Additionally, we expect middle-aged MEPs and older MEPs to defect at similar rates on integration bills. Both groups have career reasons to support the strengthening of European institutions. Although older MEPs have less incentive to obey group leaders, their European experience should push them into the pro-integration camp.

On non-integration bills, we expect a different pattern of defection rates. Given their career ambitions, young MEPs should still defect at higher rates than middle aged MEPs on these votes. But there should be no difference between younger and older MEPs' group discipline on such measures.⁹ On these votes, older MEPs with little to fear from the group leadership, will tend to follow their personal preferences. This important caveat adds nuance to our argument that older MEPs defect more as their fears of

⁹This implies that older MEPs should defect more than middle-aged MEPs on non-integration votes.

long-term repercussions diminish: they will target their defections away from integration bills.

Age, Ambition, and National Election Timing

Age should also interact with the timing of national elections in determining group vote defections. National elections structure the timing of any potential return to domestic office.¹⁰ As elections approach, parties can call MEPs home to serve as candidates. For politicians using the EP as a stepping-stone to domestic positions, therefore, it is important to please national parties and domestic constituents in the period leading up to elections. MEPs who are confident that they will enter national office will value the preferences of their expected future constituents—be they party leaders, candidate selectors, or the voting public—above directions from group leaders. We expect nationally ambitious MEPs to vote against their groups more frequently in the run-up to national elections, especially on legislation that expands EU power. This implies that the impact of the proximity of a MEP’s national election on her likelihood of voting against her group will decrease with age: young MEPs who are most likely to covet national office will become increasingly likely to defect as national elections approach, older MEPs with no interest in national elections should be impervious to their proximity, and middle-aged MEPs, some of whom may still pursue national positions, will fall somewhere in between.

National Party Characteristics

The characteristics of an MEP’s national party shape career opportunities and, in turn, MEP behavior.

Size of the National Party

The size of a legislator’s national party affects an MEP’s political ambition. On the one hand, MEPs that are members of large and powerful national parties would wield more legislative power if they returned home, implying that a career in Europe might be less attractive to them than to MEPs from small national parties. Under this scenario, one might expect MEPs from large parties to defect from group votes more often.

But while seats in a large party may be more valuable, the probability of serving in them is often smaller. MEPs from large parties have relatively less hope of returning to national politics because of

¹⁰National elections provide important opportunities to return to national politics for MEPs from all member states. In some member states, local or regional elections may also provide the possibility of domestic office. Nonetheless, because the importance of these local and regional opportunities varies considerably across member-states, we leave a direct analysis of their impact to future research.

extensive within-party competition for candidate nominations. MEPs face home-party politicians who have built reputations and ties at the local and regional levels. Compared with these politicians, an MEP—serving in Brussels, away from the domestic political scene—may have difficulty building the networks of support necessary to earn a nomination.

For MEPs from smaller national parties, in contrast, seats in the national party may be less valuable, but serving in the EP may enhance a potential candidate's stature within the party. Smaller parties have fewer domestic-level opportunities for potential candidates to prove themselves. Therefore, small parties may rely more heavily on alternative institutions, such as the EP, to draw candidates for national positions. Additionally, MEPs from small national parties already represent some of the most experienced politicians in their parties. These experienced politicians are likely to be tapped for national service. Therefore we expect that MEPs from small national parties will be more likely to defect from group votes than MEPs from large national parties.

Party's Presence in Government

Whether or not the MEP's party participates in government at the national level affects the MEP's calculations. Holding a legislative post in a party that serves in government makes a domestic level career goal an attractive option. Sitting with a party in power translates to a greater chance of affecting policy and holding a plum government position.

The governing status of the MEP's home party has another influence on MEP behavior. When an MEP's national party serves in government, party ministers participate in the Council of the European Union, the institution where member states bargain directly over policy. Many bills that come before the EP, therefore, have been vetted by the Council and, as a result, already have the national governing party's approval. An MEP who wishes to return home has incentives to support bills that have been approved by the home party. Indeed, work on voting in the EP suggests that votes frequently split between "parties represented in the Council voting one way and parties not voting in the Council voting the other way" (Hix, Noury & Roland 2006, 509). In this situation, both group and national party pressures align to encourage the maintenance of group discipline. Therefore, we predict that MEPs are less likely to defect when their home party serves in the government.

Member State Characteristics

We argue that national election timing affects ambitious behavior in the EP. Other state-level attributes also play into MEPs' career expectations, conditioning their behavior.

Electoral System

The electoral system conditions the nature of an MEP's future constituents. MEPs seeking a return to proportional representation systems have their fate controlled almost entirely by party leaders. Ambitious politicians who wish to return home to a country with a majoritarian electoral system, on the other hand, must satisfy both their party leaders, who will choose if and where to run them, and local voters, who will decide whether or not to vote for them. These MEPs should be especially focused on ensuring member state benefits in order to win future elections in particular home districts, rather than supporting supranational institutions.¹¹ Such MEPs will have frequent reason to vote against their group leaderships (Hix 2004), especially on legislation where EP leaders and national constituencies are likely to have differences of opinion, such as measures expanding the influence of the EU.

Data

To evaluate how political ambition shapes MEPs' voting behavior, we collected vote-MEP observation data on each roll-call vote in the 5th term of the European parliament (1999-2004). We supplemented the basic voting records with descriptions of the bills considered by the MEPs, information about the votes themselves, MEP biographies, and data describing the political situations in the MEPs' home parties and nations. The data vary at the daily level.

Roll Call Votes and Bill Descriptions

We collected roll call tallies from the Official Journal of the European Union (European Union 2006). These data consist of yes-votes, no-votes, and abstentions recorded by a total of 875 MEPs¹² participating in each of 5778 roll call votes.

¹¹Scholl (1986) argued a similar logic and showed that British MEPs coming from majoritarian European Parliament districts (before the elimination of those districts in the 1990s) were markedly more constituency and nationally oriented than their PR counterparts.

¹²Although at least 875 MEPs served in the EP over the course of the 5th term, only 626 members were active at any single given point in time. We include in the analysis only MEPs representing those countries that were EU members at the beginning of the 5th term: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and The United Kingdom.

The Official Journal provides identifying bill codes for 5644 of these votes, covering 670 unique pieces of legislation. By cross-referencing these identifiers with the EP’s online Legislative Observatory (OEIL) (European Parliament 2006*a*) we obtained four-level descriptive codes of bill issue areas. For the purpose of this project, we focus on only the first level of the issue coding, grouping the bills into eight issue areas: citizens’ rights, internal market, agricultural fisheries and economies, economic and social cohesion, economic and monetary system, common foreign and security policy, justice, and the state and evolution of the Union. The last classification listed here, the state and evolution of the Union, is key to our analysis. These “European integration” bills have the potential to expand EU influence over member states and should often split group leaderships and nationally ambitious MEPs. These bills, which comprise 290 of the 1248 pieces of legislation in the dataset, include legislation to create a Union-wide maritime safety and ship pollution prevention agency, a law overseeing the funding of European political parties, a measure harmonizing the reporting of economic data cross EU nations, and numerous initiatives stating Parliament’s position on various aspects of the expansion of the Union. While certainly more limited in scope than EU treaty revisions, these bills allow MEPs to stake positions on legislation that modulates the relative power of national and EU institutions.

Finally, we augmented our data with Hix, Noury & Roland’s (2006) measures of the EP group sponsoring the roll call vote and the voting rule—simple or absolute majority—governing the vote.

Dependent Variable: Group Vote Defections

Our dependent variable, voting defections, is not directly recorded in our data set. To operationalize this variable, we first constructed a technique for measuring group votes, those votes which a given EP parliamentary group values highly, and on which it is thus unlikely to lightly tolerate member deviation. Following Cox & McCubbins (1993, 145–147) we use group leader activity to assess the importance of votes across groups. When the group leadership votes in unison, it stands to reason that they expect the rank and file to fall in line. Therefore, we code each vote at which two thirds of the group leadership attended and at which at least 90 per cent of the attending leaders voted together as a group vote for the given group.¹³ We drop all observations that did not correspond to group votes from the analysis.¹⁴

Coding defections from group votes is not straightforward because of varied voting procedures in the EP. On votes that were decided by simple majority we code only those MEPs that directly voted

¹³We code group presidents and vice-presidents as group leaders. In the 5th EP, a group’s leadership can contain as many as 16 individuals.

¹⁴Because a given vote can be a group vote for one or two groups but not for others, there are many votes that only influence our results through the actions of a subset of the active MEPs.

against their group leaders as defectors, because abstentions have no influence on the outcome of such votes. When MEPs missed simple majority votes altogether, we treat their behavior as a missing value. On absolute majority votes, where abstaining and missing MEPs can affect the outcome, we code MEP behavior as a defection when the group leaders voted nay and the MEP voted yea, or when the MEP voted nay, abstained, or was absent from a pro-measure group vote.¹⁵

MEP Characteristics

We require information describing individual MEP's career situations to explore the connections between legislative voting behavior and political ambition. To this end, we collected biographical data on all 875 MEPs from the EP web site (European Parliament 2006*b*). We recorded each MEP's age, gender, and nationality. In addition, we collected daily time-varying data covering MEPs' EP group membership and leadership positions, and also coded their national party memberships.¹⁶

MEP Ideology

While ambition theory seeks to explain politicians' behavior in terms of office payoff, ideology also influences their decisions. Therefore, it is important to control for MEPs' underlying policy preferences when examining the behavioral implications of career ambitions. To do so, we employ W-NOMINATE procedures to calculate spatial estimates of legislator ideal points from divisions of roll call votes (Poole & Rosenthal 1985, Poole 2005).¹⁷ In order to avoid endogeneity issues, we split the set of roll call votes in the 5th parliament in half randomly. We then generated two-dimensional W-NOMINATE scores for each MEP on the first half of the data.¹⁸ We used these estimates of MEP ideology from the first half of the data to fit our model of vote defection using the second half of the data. As a robustness check, we repeated our analysis, generating W-NOMINATE scores from the second half of the data and using these scores in models fit to the first half. We present only one half of this process here, but results are similar across both orders of operation.¹⁹

¹⁵We had difficulty choosing an appropriate deviation variable. Missing MEPs, while often simply on vacation or in the restroom, may skip votes in a strategic fashion. We replicated the substantive results of our analysis across four versions of the dependent variable: in addition to the defection variable described in the text we tried coding all missing MEPs as defectors, all missing MEPs as missing values, and missing MEPs on simple majority votes as non-defectors.

¹⁶Unfortunately, we were unable to gather national party membership data at daily frequency and instead treat these memberships as non-varying over the course of the term.

¹⁷By contrast, other studies use expert placements (e.g. Marks, Wilson & Ray 2002, Ray 1999), party manifestos data (Gabel & Hix 2002, Pennings 2002), or self report (Hix 2002) to place parties and MEPs on various policy dimensions.

¹⁸Votes only enter NOMINATE scores when at least 2.5 per cent of voters were in the minority and we included MEPs only if they recorded a minimum of 25 votes.

¹⁹We think it important to control for MEP ideology when explaining defection rates. Yet we recognize that our measure of ideology also relies on roll-call votes. Since the votes used to measure defection rates and ideology are a product of

Current research indicates that two voting dimensions separate MEPs: the traditional left-right dimension and a European integration dimension.²⁰ We include both measures of ideology in our model. First, we include the first-dimension, left-right position. There is little a priori reason to expect that MEPs from the left will defect at different rates than MEPs on the right. Thus, we do not expect that this variable will have any consistent effect on group defections.

Second, we include each MEP's NOMINATE score on the second-dimension, support for integration. Higher values on this dimension indicate stronger support for integration and expanding the role of supranational institutions. Lower values suggest a preference for maintaining member-state prerogatives. MEPs who ideologically support European integration vote for supranational prerogatives at a higher rate than those who prefer greater national sovereignty. Because group leaders are generally European careerists and support legislation that expands the power of European institutions, we expect pro-Europe MEPs to vote with the group leadership more often, especially on bills related to European integration.

Finally, for both dimensions, we include a measure of the absolute value of the distance between the individual MEP and the score of the median group member. MEPs who are ideologically distant from their fellow group members are less likely to maintain group discipline than those MEPs who have preferences that are in line with the leadership. Greater distance between the MEP and her group median should translate into a greater probability of defection.

National and Home Party System Variables

We gathered a number of daily-varying indicators of domestic member-state politics, including the percentage of legislative seats held by each MEP's home party, national party cabinet membership, electoral system (majoritarian or proportional representation), and the time each MEP expected to pass until her next national election. Data at this granularity is necessary to effectively measure the influence of variables that change regularly over the course of the EP's 5-year term, especially in the case of the time until national elections which is, of course, constantly changing in addition to varying across MEP nationality. We coded expected time until national election as the number of days (the resulting variable is scaled to years) until the election associated with the end of the nation's constitutionally mandated

the same data-generating process, it is likely that they are not independent. That is, one could argue that our tests have roll-call votes on both the left hand and right hand sides, leading to biased results. To deal with this, we also run all our models without the ideology measures. The results on our variables of interest are substantively equivalent across both specifications.

²⁰Hix (2001) and Hix, Noury & Roland (2006) fit models predicting these two primary NOMINATE dimensions with expert evaluations of issue positions and find that "the second dimension is strongly related to the EU integration dimension [of expert evaluations]."

election period (CMEP). In cases with early elections, we coded expected days until national elections in terms of the CMEP until the date at which the national government announced early elections; at this point we updated the variable to reflect the early election date set by the government.²¹

Voting Defection, Member Age and Nationally Ambitious MEPs

Before moving on to a multivariate analysis, it is useful to subject our basic theoretical expectation—that nationally ambitious MEPs will tend to vote with their group leaderships less than other parliamentarians—to a simple descriptive test. To this end, we gathered candidate electoral nomination data for national legislative elections in five EU countries from the beginning of the 5th term of the EP onward. The sample includes some of the EP’s largest national delegations and covers France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. These countries employ a variety of electoral systems, from single member district plurality to the single transferable vote and closed list proportional representation, among others. We matched national-election candidate lists with the membership of the EP and determined which 5th term MEPs stood for national office during or after the 5th parliament. Future national nominees represent a potentially small subset of nationally ambitious MEPs. Nonetheless, we can be reasonably certain that future nominees desire national office above European careers; if our theory is correct these MEPs dissent on group leadership votes at a higher rate than their counterparts.²²

[Table 1 about here.]

Table 1 displays group-vote defection rates for national nominees and non-nominees hailing from the five countries in the sample. The 91 nominees in the sample defect 9.7 per cent of the time, substantially more than the 252 non-nominees who dissent on 5.3 per cent of group votes ($p < .01$). This pattern is replicated across three of the five nations in the sample, although the small sample sizes make it difficult to distinguish between nominees and non-nominees within countries at conventional levels of statistical significance. We must take care, however, in interpreting these results. While the multivariate analysis that follows takes the panel structure of the data into account, the defection rates we report here summarize behavior across the length of the entire parliament. As a result, MEPs who served in the EP for only a short time are given the same weight as MEPs who voted throughout the term. Furthermore,

²¹We obtained election and election announcement dates from the *European Journal of Political Research* and *Electoral Studies*.

²²Note that the deck is stacked against finding such a result because the presence of nationally ambitious legislators among non-nominees will tend to attenuate the differences between the two groups.

in a few cases, these short-term MEPs voted against their groups in a large proportion of the votes they attended. Therefore, while the average MEP in the five country sample defected on 6.5 per cent of group votes, a few MEPs defect 100 per cent of the time. The relationship between nomination and group vote defection is robust to dropping these outlying observations from the analysis ($p < .01$).²³ In fact, as table 1 shows, although removing outliers reduces the overall difference in defection rate between nominees and their sedentary counterparts, only Irish nominees defect less than their countrymen after the correction. These results provide descriptive evidence that corroborates our story and motivate the full-fledge statistical analysis that follows.

Method: Individual Level Voting Behavior

The data set is characterized by a complicated hierarchical panel structure. Our unit of observation is the MEP-vote. The MEP-votes are clustered within EP groups, national parties, and countries. Complicating matters further, national parties are nested within countries, but group members are unevenly distributed across parties and countries; that is, group is crossed with party and nation. Additionally, votes are clustered according to bill. And, of course, votes and bills are crossed with every other level in the analysis. This convoluted clustering makes it easy to generate overly optimistic estimates of the strength of the statistical relationships between variables. It confronts us with difficult choices about which hierarchical levels to model explicitly and which groupings to control for statistically.

Binary response models (BRMs) are useful tools for analyzing the relationships between our hypothesized determinants of career ambition and MEP defections (Long 1997). Nonetheless, a basic BRM cannot adequately model the hierarchical nature of our data without a number of modifications. First, we include a battery of dummy variables to model the marginal effects of EP group, national party, and country on MEP deviation probability, effectively dealing with these aspects of the complicated nesting structure by brute force. It is critical that we control for the effects of groups, parties, and countries because it is easy to develop accounts of defection behavior that rely on the impact of exceptional cases like small national parties or systematic differences between European groups or entire national delegations. And, because we are uninterested in explicitly modeling these idiosyncrasies, a simple dummy-variables

²³To identify outliers we regressed defection rate on nomination status and then calculated the Cook's distances of every observation. We classified observations with Cook's distances greater than $\frac{4}{N}$ as outliers ($N = 343$). These included five French MEPs who participated in between two and 69 group votes and defected between 55 and 100 per cent of the time, two Germans who defected on all of 77 and 157 group votes respectively, and three British MEPs who defected on 31 per cent of 406 group votes, 43 per cent of 119 group votes, and 73 per cent of 45 group votes respectively. For reference, the average MEP in the sample participated in 2247 group votes.

approach serves our purposes perfectly.

It is more difficult to model the data’s panel structure. We observe the behavior of each of M MEPs repeatedly across each of V roll call votes (RCVs), with only some subset of the MEPs voting on each vote. It is reasonable to expect substantial variation in defection tendency across MEPs, even after explicitly modeling determinants of political ambition: idiosyncratic differences among MEPs influence their voting behavior. Further, there is likely to be variation in defection rates across roll-call votes: some RCVs are far more contentious than others. Unfortunately, a simple fixed effects approach—where the analyst includes dummy variables for each of the M observational units (MEPs) and/or each of the V observations (RCVs)—will not work in this case. Even if we were to follow standard panel data conventions and include fixed effects only for units, the sheer number of parameters involved would prove an insurmountable obstacle. Perhaps more importantly, fixed effects BRMs generate biased parameter estimates when V is fixed and $M \rightarrow \infty$ (Neyman & Scott 1948, Lancaster 2000, Hsiao 2003).²⁴ But, if we do not take these two important sources of variation into account, we will underestimate the standard errors of our coefficients of interest (Guo & Zhao 2000).²⁵

To overcome this problem, we estimate two-way random effects models (see e.g., Baltagi 2005), otherwise known as crossed random effects models (CREMs). The dataset contains $i = 1, \dots, N$ observations, with each y_i recording the behavior of a single MEP on a given vote. When the MEP defects on the vote, $y_i = 1$ and it equals zero otherwise. We model the probability of MEP defection on group votes using probit CREMs of the form

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr(y_i = 1 | \boldsymbol{\beta}, \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)}, \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)}) &= \Phi \left[\mathbf{x}_i \boldsymbol{\beta} + \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)} + \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)} \right], \\ \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)} &\sim N(0, \sigma_m^2), \\ \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)} &\sim N(0, \sigma_v^2) \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where \mathbf{x}_i is the vector of observed values of the fixed predictors—including group, party, and country dummies—for observation i , $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ is a vector of fixed coefficients to estimate, $\zeta^{(m)}$ and $\zeta^{(v)}$ are vectors of random intercepts for each of the M MEPs and V RCVs, respectively,²⁶ σ_m^2 represents the between-MEP variance while σ_v^2 corresponds to the between-RCV variance. This approach uses MEP-

²⁴In simple terms, when including dummy variables for units over a set number of panels in a BRM, bias increases as the number of units becomes large.

²⁵The textbook solution to the incidental parameters problem in BRM models, employing conditional logit, will not work here. Conditional logit requires balanced panels, an ideal that our dataset does not even begin to approximate.

²⁶The functions $m(\cdot)$ and $v(\cdot)$ subscripting the random intercept components in Equation 1 map each observation i to its respective MEP and VOTE intercepts. Browne, Goldstein & Rabash (2001) introduce this notation.

and RCV-specific intercepts to capture the unmodeled role of individual MEP and RCV characteristics in the probability that a particular MEP defects on a given vote. It assumes that these effects are drawn from a pair of independent normal distributions.

CREMs are especially difficult to estimate when the models contain binary response variables. Nonetheless, there exist both frequentist maximum likelihood based techniques and Bayesian approaches to estimating these models. Maximum-likelihood based methods for CREM estimation fall into two broad categories, quasi-likelihood estimation and exact maximum likelihood estimation, while Bayesian procedures are based on Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) methods. Rodriguez & Goldman (2001) show that MCMC and exact maximum likelihood estimation techniques outperform quasi-likelihood approaches in random effects BRM estimation and provide evidence that quasi-likelihood estimation underestimates both fixed and random effects when random effects are substantial. Furthermore, exact maximum likelihood estimation is extremely computationally expensive, rendering its use impractical with our large dataset. Therefore, we use MCMC methods to estimate our models. The appendix provides specific estimation details.

Results

[Table 2 about here.]

Table 2 displays the results of three random effects models examining the relationship between ambition and roll call voting behavior in the EP. Model 1 is a baseline main effects model and operationalizes age continuously. Models 2 and 3 use a trichotomous operationalization of age to investigate the interactions between age and other variables. The estimates of the MEP and vote random intercept variances, σ_m^2 and σ_v^2 , are consistent across all three models. In each case, the total proportion of the error variance explained by individual random intercepts is about five per cent, while vote random intercepts explain almost 25 per cent of the variance. These findings reflect the fact that our covariates directly model a variety of individual factors—such as ideology—while vote-specific factors are largely absent from the specifications. Table 3 presents deviance information criteria (DICs)²⁷ for our three fixed covariate specifications, across a variety of possible statistical approaches, including basic probit models with no random

²⁷The DIC (Spiegelhalter, Best, Carlin & van der Linde 2002) is a goodness of fit statistic that, like the Akaike information criterion (AIC) or Bayesian information criterion (BIC), balances a model’s fit to data with its complexity, in terms of number of parameters. The DIC is specifically designed for comparing hierarchical models and is especially well suited to Bayesian MCMC models.

intercepts, 1-way random intercepts models for both MEPs and votes, and CREMs. These statistics indicate that the CREMs fit the data best and that this improvement in fit outweighs the added complexity of these models. The DICs further emphasize the importance of explicitly modeling variation across both MEPs and votes: while the MEP random intercepts significantly improve model fit, including the vote intercepts generates a more substantial improvement in predictive accuracy. Finally, the DICs indicate that Model 3 fits the data best, but the difference in fit across the three specifications is minimal.

[Table 3 about here.]

Overall, the average MEP is unlikely to deviate on the average group-vote. Indeed, only 3.8 per cent of the observations in the dataset represent defections. It is important to note that the predicted effects scale with the baseline probability of defection for a given MEP-vote. That is, for an average observation with a low probability of defection, many covariate effects are substantively modest. Nevertheless, for an MEP-vote where the baseline probability of defection is high, the predicted effects can be quite substantial, several orders of magnitude higher than the average.²⁸

We first turn to the results in Model 1. We argue that age is a key determinant of ambitious behavior in the EP. The effect of age is negative and statistically significant while the squared term is positive and statistically significant, indicating a U-shaped relationship between age and vote defection. As hypothesized, the effect of age on vote defection is curvilinear.

Figure 1 displays Model 1’s average within-sample predictions for the probability of defection as a function of age.²⁹ Middle-aged MEPs are the least likely to vote against their leaders with the likelihood of defection minimized in an MEP’s mid-fifties. In turn, young MEPs—especially below 40—and older—especially above 65—are more likely to deviate on group votes. This finding is consistent with progressive ambition theory: young MEPs are more likely to deviate from the group in their pursuit of national careers, middle-aged MEPs maximize their chances in the EU by pleasing the leadership, and older MEPs serve only themselves.

[Figure 1 about here.]

²⁸The models generate numerous in-sample predictions of the probability of defection in excess of 0.5.

²⁹To compute average within-sample predicted probabilities we calculate the predicted probability of defection for each observation in the dataset and then average the predictions. This produces a representative estimate of predicted effects in contrast to choosing a single “representative” MEP-vote or setting covariates at their means. Because of the size of our dataset, we performed this operation on a random sub-sample of 10000 MEP-votes from the dataset, rather than on all of the data.

The effect of gender is statistically insignificant, indicating little difference in vote deviation—and perhaps ambition structure—across men and women. Left-right ideology, on the other hand, is statistically significant. Somewhat surprisingly, MEPs with right-wing leanings show a marked propensity for disregarding their group leaders’ directions even after controlling for nation, party, EP group, and integration ideology. This may reflect policy differences across different right parties in the member states—liberal parties and Christian Democratic parties often have different economic and social policy preferences. The parameter estimate for integration ideology is negative and significant. As hypothesized, MEPs who value European integration and who presumably also value careers at the European level, are less likely to defect on group votes than other MEPs. This effect is substantial: the average predicted probability of defection for an MEP with an integration ideology score one standard deviation above the EP mean is between 1.7 and 3.8 times less than that of an MEP with a score one standard deviation below the mean.³⁰ Finally, as expected, the distance between an MEP’s ideal point on the left-right dimension and that of her group’s median member strongly predicts vote deviation. Serving as a group leader also significantly decreases the probability of defection.

National characteristics also influence MEP vote deviation in a manner consistent with ambition theory. The coefficient for time until an expected national election is negative and statistically significant, indicating that as the time until the next election decreases, the probability of an MEP defection increases. Clearly, the behavioral implications of future office expectations change over time. Legislators focus their energies on progression within their current institution when no immediate chance to jump ship presents itself; only as potential career changes draw near do MEPs position themselves for the future.

The results provide mixed support for our expectations about the relationship between national-level party characteristics and MEP behavior. The results indicate a statistically significant negative relationship between national party size—in terms of percentage of legislative seats—and MEP defection on group votes. This finding is consistent with the idea that small party MEPs represent an attractive pool of candidates to their national party leaders while MEPs from large parties are operating in a legislative hinterland, under the radar of their national parties who draw from other sources when promoting candidates. On the other hand, MEPs representing governing national parties are no less likely to vote against group leadership than MEPs from opposition parties.

Finally, we include three variables to capture the nature of the roll-call vote. The parameter estimate for European integration bills is positive and significant, indicating that MEPs are more likely to defect

³⁰All reported effect ranges are based on 95% credible intervals around average predicted probabilities.

on these bills than on bills in other substantive areas. The statistically significant coefficients for absolute majority votes indicate that MEPs defect more on these votes than on those conducted under simple majority rule. This result may in part stem from our operationalization of defection, which counts missing MEPs as defectors on absolute majority votes but not on simple ones. Absolute majority votes are also generally employed for more substantial pieces of legislation, such as bills operating under the codecision procedure. MEPs defecting for reasons of ambition have reason to focus their behavior around especially important and visible votes. Lastly, the models indicate that MEPs are more likely to deviate on roll call votes called by their own groups than on those requested by other factions. This result is somewhat surprising, but it may indicate that EP group leaders call RCVs precisely when they expect dissent in the rank and file.

Model 2 extends the analysis of age in Model 1 to examine how an ambitious politician's age interacts with the institutional and voting environment when influencing group vote defection. Model 2 uses dummy variables for young and old MEPs, instead of continuous operationalizations of age and its square, to aid in the estimation and interpretation of these age interactions. Based on the results in Model 1, we classify MEPs as young when they are 40 years old or less and old when they are 65 or greater.³¹ We interact the age dummies with national election time and European integration bills. The estimates for the main effects remain similar to those in Model 1.

[Figure 2 about here.]

Figure 2 presents the overall relationship between age, bill type, time until national election, and vote defection graphically, in terms of average predicted probabilities from Model 2. The solid lines in Figure 2 represent middle-aged MEPs, the dashed lines correspond to the defection probabilities of younger MEPs, and the dotted lines display predictions for older MEPs. The gray lines describe predicted behavior when MEPs vote on European integration bills, while black lines predict defections on all other bills.

The results indicate that young MEPs are responsive to variations in bill type and national election timing. The average young MEP's predicted probability of defection is between 0.4 and 1.4 points higher for European integration bills than others, when elections are 2.4 years away (the dataset mean). For a young MEP with a high baseline defection rate, the probability of defecting on a European integration bill is as much as 14 points higher than on a non-integration bill. For middle-aged and older MEPs, the type of bill has substantially smaller predicted impacts.

³¹MEPs under 40 represent approximately 12% of the total while those over 65 include about 5% of the population. We experimented with age cutoffs at 35 and 60 with similar results.

The results also predict that a young MEP is between 1.3 and 1.6 times as likely to defect on a group vote right before a national election than three-and-a-half years before an election. Again, the national election proximity effects for middle-aged and older MEPs are more modest. As Model 2's coefficients for the interactions between age and national election timing demonstrate, young MEPs are significantly more sensitive to upcoming elections than middle-aged and older MEPs. For all types of bills, therefore, young MEPs time their defections, focusing their deviations to coincide with national elections. Further, younger MEPs defect at significantly higher rates when voting on integration bills than when considering other forms of legislation. That is, young MEPs focus their vote defections on exactly those pieces of legislation that are most likely to erode the powers of national political offices and displease national constituents and party functionaries.

Our predictions about when and how older MEPs defect also bear fruit. Unlike their younger counterparts, old MEPs have little incentive to consider the timing of national elections when pursuing their career goals. The predicted probability of defection for an older MEP does not differ significantly across expected national election times. On the other hand, the hypothesis that old MEPs will jealously guard the power of EU institutions because they are likely to remain in them for the rest of their careers is not so clearly supported by the model's results. Unlike their younger colleagues, old MEPs defect somewhat less on integration bills than they do on other legislation, but those differences are not statistically significant. Nonetheless, older MEPs have no incentive to undermine EP prerogatives and thus exhibit none of the anti-integration tendencies of their younger colleagues.

Figure 3 breaks down the information in Figure 2 via pairwise comparisons, allowing us to evaluate the interactive influence of age, bill type, and national election timing on vote defection more precisely. The solid lines in Figure 3 are the point estimates of the average probability of defection presented in Figure 2 while the dashed lines are 95% credible intervals. Black lines represent middle-aged MEPs, gray lines correspond to young MEPs, and light gray lines depict older MEPs' predicted behavior. The top row of panels show average predicted probabilities for votes on European integration bills while the bottom set of panels represent votes on other bills.

[Figure 3 about here.]

Panels a and b show that young MEPs are significantly more likely to defect on integration-focused votes than both middle-aged and older MEPs, especially as national elections near. On non-integration bills, however, voting behavior across the age cohorts is different. While panel d indicates the probability

of defection on non-integration bills differs significantly between young and middle-aged MEPs throughout their national election cycles, panel e shows that young and old MEPs differ in their predicted defections only as elections approach. Panels c and f compare middle-age and old MEPs. On integration bills (panel c), the predicted defection rates for middle-age and old MEPS are statistically indistinguishable. For non-integration bills (panel f), however, old MEPs are significantly more likely to defect when elections are not imminent.

The predicted probabilities in Figure 3 are strikingly consistent with the logic of progressive ambition. While the previous within-group comparisons showed that middle-aged MEPs—a minority of whom may still covet national office—are nominally responsive to both election timing and bill type, younger MEPs—those parliamentarians most likely to seek national posts—defect more often than middle-aged MEPs across all forms of legislation, once national elections draw near enough. Furthermore, end-game considerations allow older MEPs to defect at reasonably high rates, eclipsing middle-aged MEPs and equaling younger parliamentarians on much legislation, but the likelihood that the EP will be their last political workplace discourages them from focusing those defections on integration bills or paying any attention to election timing, as the other age cohorts do.

Finally, Model 3 extends Model 2 to investigate the impact of electoral system on MEP voting. Again, the estimates for the main effects remain similar across models. We hypothesized that MEPs from nations holding majoritarian elections would exhibit a greater sensitivity to national prerogatives than their counterparts in proportional representation (PR) systems, especially on legislation dealing with EU expansion. The statistically significant and positive coefficients for the interaction between majoritarianism and European integration bills in Model 3 support this hypothesis. While a majoritarian MEP is more likely to defect on a European integration vote than an MEP from a PR or mixed system is to defect on any piece of legislation, that same MEP is no more likely to defect from the group than her non-majoritarian counterparts when considering other bills. This effect may also be substantively significant; on European integration votes, a majoritarian MEP is between 1.1 and 5.3 times more likely to defect than an MEP from a PR or mixed system, on average.

Conclusion

By taking advantage of the unique institutional structure of the EP, we are able to identify how different career paths shape behavior while holding the legislative agenda and macro-political conditions constant.

Our results support the primary pillar of ambition theory: MEPs are forward-looking. Young MEPs have the largest potential to return to national politics and are more likely than their colleagues to contravene the dictates of EP group leaders. But the relationship between ambition and behavior is not simply a function of a politician’s stage in life; we show that the political opportunity structure also shapes how MEPs vote. National election timing, size of the national party, and the electoral system all shape incentives to defect from group votes. Perhaps most importantly, ambitious MEPs position themselves for national careers in a focused manner, breaking with EP leaders on legislation that determines the relative strengths of EU and national institutions. That is, their career goals lead them to work to the detriment of their current office since they believe that the resulting long-run distribution of power will benefit them more.

Substantively, the results imply a link between the candidate nomination strategies of national-level parties and the pace of integration in the EU. Parties have two basic nomination choices for European elections. First, they can use European elections as a dumping ground for candidates who have little future in national politics. For instance, they can nominate older politicians to the EP, rewarding them with “retirement” positions. Or parties can try to kick difficult and undisciplined national-level politicians upstairs to the EP. As MEPs, however, these politicians have little incentive to preserve member state powers and will instead support increased authority for supranational institutions. Alternatively, parties can use European elections as a proving ground for young politicians. These parties take the work of the EP seriously and value service there as an important stepping-stone to a national career. Ironically, it is the MEPs from these parties who have the most incentive to weaken Europe’s supranational institutions in favor of member state prerogatives. As service in the EP becomes more useful for many nationally-ambitious politicians, therefore, pressure to expand the powers of European institutions generally, and the EP specifically, will decrease. Developing a fuller theory of candidate nomination strategies and empirically tracing the careers of individual MEPs will help identify the causal relationships between progressive ambition, legislative behavior, and European integration.

Further, ambition politics within the EP may shape interactions between EU institutions. Our results indicate that incentives for defection vary according to the timing of national-level elections. As a national election draws near, MEPs from that member state are more likely to defect from their group. This raises the possibility of agenda manipulation by the Commission, which initiates all European legislation, and the Council, the institution for direct member state bargaining. The Commission and the Council may attempt to time the delivery of legislative bills to the EP to take advantage of MEP’s incentives. The

Commission may delay pro-integration legislation until just after a national election in a key member-state as a way to insure the most support. Alternatively, the Council might send pro-member state bills to the EP as national elections approach. Our results, therefore, suggest that it might be possible to link episodes of conflict between the Commission and the Council to the timing of national elections.

Finally, the results have broader implications for the study of legislative behavior. From a theoretical perspective, we highlight the importance of political ambition in determining behavior. Other research emphasizes the importance of ideology in shaping vote choice, relying on the same voting records to generate estimates of legislators' ideal points (Hix, Noury & Roland 2006). Yet, in isolation, neither of these factors can adequately explain legislative voting. Just as we incorporated ideology in our model of political ambition, so too must one explicitly model ambition when extracting ideological content from votes. Disentangling the influence of ideology and ambition represents a challenge not only for the study of the EP, but for legislative studies more generally. By doing so, we may very well reveal very different maps of the ideological space of legislative behavior.

Appendix

Bayesian CREM estimation requires the analyst to specify prior probability distributions for the model parameters $\boldsymbol{\beta}$, σ_m^2 , and σ_v^2 in Equation 1. Following Browne & Draper (2000) and Browne, Goldstein & Rabash (2001), we adopt a diffuse multivariate normal prior for the p fixed effects, $\boldsymbol{\beta} \sim N_p(\boldsymbol{\mu}_0, \boldsymbol{\Sigma}_0)$, where $\boldsymbol{\mu}_0 = \mathbf{0}$ and $\boldsymbol{\Sigma}_0 = 10^6 \mathbf{I}$. Similarly, we select scaled inverse χ^2 priors for the variance terms, $\sigma_m^2 \sim \text{SI}\chi^2(v_m, s_m^2)$ and $\sigma_v^2 \sim \text{SI}\chi^2(v_v, s_v^2)$, where $v_m = v_v = 2 \cdot 10^{-3}$ and $s_m^2 = s_v^2 = 1$. By choosing these prior distributions we indicate that we are uncertain about $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ and assume that the random intercepts are all close to zero, a priori.

Rabash & Browne (In Press) describe a Gibbs sampling algorithm for estimating a CREM with continuous responses. We take advantage of the latent variable interpretation of binary regression and a data augmentation (Tanner & Wong 1987) technique introduced by Albert & Chib (1993) to convert this continuous response estimation algorithm into one that can estimate the BRM in Equation 1. This algorithm treats the random intercepts $\zeta^{(m)}$ and $\zeta^{(v)}$ as latent variables and introduces a new vector of latent variables \mathbf{z} , such that

$$z_i = \mathbf{x}_i \boldsymbol{\beta} + \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)} + \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)} + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where we assume each independent and identically distributed $\epsilon_i \sim N(0, 1)$ and

$$y_i = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } z_i \leq 0 \\ 1 & \text{if } z_i > 0. \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

This is the familiar latent variable specification of the probit BRM and implies that

$$\Pr(y_i = 1 | \boldsymbol{\beta}, \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)}, \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)}) = \Phi \left[\mathbf{x}_i \boldsymbol{\beta} + \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)} + \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)} \right]$$

or, in other words, the latent variable specification in equations 2 and 3 is equivalent to the binary response CREM described by Equation 1. This parameterization of the model in Equation 1 suggests a Gibbs sampling algorithm³² that incorporates the following steps in each iteration ($n_k^{(c)}$ is the number of

³²Gibbs samplers iteratively sample from the posterior distributions of subsets of the model parameters conditional on current simulated values of the remaining parameters—a process that eventually converges to the model parameters' joint posterior distribution. For an introduction to Gibbs samplers, and MCMC in general, see Gelman, Carlin, Stern & Rubin (2004) or Gill (2002).

observations in the k th unit of classification c , n_m is the number of MEPs and n_v is the number of votes):

1. Simulate $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ from $f(\boldsymbol{\beta}|\mathbf{z}, \sigma_m^2, \sigma_v^2, \boldsymbol{\zeta}^{(m)}, \boldsymbol{\zeta}^{(v)}) \sim N_p(\hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}, \hat{\mathbf{D}})$, where

- $\hat{\mathbf{D}} = [\mathbf{X}'\mathbf{X} + \boldsymbol{\Sigma}_0^{-1}]^{-1}$
- $\hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}} = \hat{\mathbf{D}} \left[\sum_{i=1}^N \mathbf{x}_i' d_i + \boldsymbol{\Sigma}_0^{-1} \boldsymbol{\mu}_0 \right]$
- $d_i = z_i - \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)} - \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)}$

2. Simulate each $\zeta_k^{(m)}$ from $f(\zeta_k^{(m)}|\mathbf{z}, \boldsymbol{\beta}, \sigma_m^2, \sigma_v^2, \boldsymbol{\zeta}^{(v)}) \sim N(\hat{\mu}_k^{(m)}, \hat{D}_k^{(m)})$, where

- $\hat{D}_k^{(m)} = \left[n_k^{(m)} + \frac{1}{\sigma_m^2} \right]^{-1}$
- $\hat{\mu}_k^{(m)} = \hat{D}_k^{(m)} \left[\sum_{i \text{ s.t. } m(i)=k} \left(z_i - \mathbf{x}_i \boldsymbol{\beta} - \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)} \right) \right]$

3. Simulate each $\zeta_k^{(v)}$ from $f(\zeta_k^{(v)}|\mathbf{z}, \boldsymbol{\beta}, \sigma_m^2, \sigma_v^2, \boldsymbol{\zeta}^{(m)}) \sim N(\hat{\mu}_k^{(v)}, \hat{D}_k^{(v)})$, where

- $\hat{D}_k^{(v)} = \left[n_k^{(v)} + \frac{1}{\sigma_v^2} \right]^{-1}$
- $\hat{\mu}_k^{(v)} = \hat{D}_k^{(v)} \left[\sum_{i \text{ s.t. } v(i)=k} \left(z_i - \mathbf{x}_i \boldsymbol{\beta} - \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)} \right) \right]$

4. Simulate σ_m^2 from $f\left(\frac{1}{\sigma_m^2}|\mathbf{z}, \boldsymbol{\beta}, \sigma_v^2, \boldsymbol{\zeta}^{(m)}, \boldsymbol{\zeta}^{(v)}\right) \sim \text{Gamma}\left[\frac{n_m+v_m}{2}, \frac{1}{2} \sum_{j=1}^{n_m} (\zeta_j^{(m)})^2 + v_m s_m^2\right]$

5. Simulate σ_v^2 from $f\left(\frac{1}{\sigma_v^2}|\mathbf{z}, \boldsymbol{\beta}, \sigma_m^2, \boldsymbol{\zeta}^{(m)}, \boldsymbol{\zeta}^{(v)}\right) \sim \text{Gamma}\left[\frac{n_v+v_v}{2}, \frac{1}{2} \sum_{j=1}^{n_v} (\zeta_j^{(v)})^2 + v_v s_v^2\right]$

6. Simulate each z_i from the truncated normal distributions

$$f(z_i|y_i, \boldsymbol{\beta}, \sigma_m^2, \sigma_v^2, \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)}, \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)}) \sim \begin{cases} N_{(0,\infty)}(\mathbf{x}_i \boldsymbol{\beta} + \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)} + \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)}) & \text{if } y_i = 1 \\ N_{(-\infty,0)}(\mathbf{x}_i \boldsymbol{\beta} + \zeta_{m(i)}^{(m)} + \zeta_{v(i)}^{(v)}) & \text{if } y_i = 0 \end{cases}$$

This algorithm directly simulates from the posterior distributions of not only the fixed coefficients and random effects variances but also from the posteriors of all three sets of latent variables, allowing the analyst to work with the estimated posterior distributions of the random intercepts and to perform residual analysis based on \mathbf{z} using familiar techniques from linear regression modeling.

In our analysis of MEP voting behavior, we estimated each model by running the Gibbs sampler for 60,000 iterations, discarding the first 10,000 iterations and retaining every 50th iteration for a final posterior sample of 1,000 observations. Standard diagnostic tests generated results consistent with chain convergence for all three models and results are robust to variation in chain starting values and prior

specification. In addition, penalized quasi-likelihood estimates of logistic versions of these models produce substantively similar results to the MCMC probit approach. We performed all MCMC computation in C++ using the Scythe Statistical Library (Pemstein, Quinn & Martin 2007).

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Table 1: Average Group Vote Defection Percentages by National Nomination Status

Country	Whole Sample		Outliers Removed	
	Nominees	Non-Nominees	Nominees	Non-Nominees
France	11.8 (50)	6.8 (49)	5.2 (46)	4.8 (48)
Germany	2.8 (6)	4.5 (97)	2.8 (6)	2.5 (95)
Ireland	4.6 (5)	5.6 (11)	4.6 (5)	5.6 (11)
Netherlands	3.6 (2)	2.9 (33)	3.6 (2)	2.9 (33)
United Kingdom	8.8 (28)	6.7 (62)	6.7 (26)	5.6 (61)
Total	9.7 (91)	5.3 (252)	5.4 (85)	3.9 (248)

Numbers of observations listed parenthetically.

Table 2: Determinants of Vote Defection in the European Parliament, 5th Term

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Age ^a	-0.352	(0.067)*				
Age Squared	0.033	(0.006)*				
Young ^b			0.142	(0.033)*	0.139	(0.033)*
Old ^c			0.039	(0.031)	0.033	(0.031)
Gender	0.001	(0.019)	-0.003	(0.020)	-0.002	(0.019)
Left-Right Ideology	0.399	(0.149)*	0.441	(0.150)*	0.453	(0.147)*
Integration Ideology	-0.506	(0.116)*	-0.496	(0.117)*	-0.484	(0.117)*
Left-Right Distance	1.003	(0.211)*	0.966	(0.214)*	0.953	(0.218)*
Integration Distance	-0.021	(0.149)	0.006	(0.141)	0.022	(0.147)
Group Leader	-0.374	(0.030)*	-0.380	(0.030)*	-0.381	(0.029)*
Natn'l Election Time ^d	-0.033	(0.003)*	-0.032	(0.003)*	-0.030	(0.003)*
Majoritarian					0.366	(0.271)
Nat'l Party Seat %	-0.004	(0.001)*	-0.004	(0.001)*	-0.004	(0.001)*
Nat'l Party in Gov't	0.012	(0.015)	0.012	(0.017)	0.015	(0.016)
Integration Bill	0.071	(0.023)*	0.073	(0.023)*	-0.002	(0.025)
Absolute Majority	1.001	(0.028)*	1.003	(0.028)*	1.000	(0.026)*
Group RCV Sponsor	0.061	(0.011)*	0.061	(0.011)*	0.061	(0.011)*
Young × Natn'l Election Time			-0.029	(0.010)*	-0.028	(0.011)*
Young × Integration Bill			0.047	(0.029)	0.040	(0.029)
Old × Natn'l Election Time			0.007	(0.009)	0.007	(0.010)
Old × Integration Bill			-0.089	(0.033)*	-0.056	(0.031)*
Majoritarian × Integration Bill					0.224	(0.019)*
σ_m^2	0.054	(0.004)*	0.054	(0.004)*	0.054	(0.004)*
σ_v^2	0.245	(0.009)*	0.245	(0.009)*	0.245	(0.009)*

We present estimated posterior means and, in parentheses, standard deviations. All models include full batteries of fixed effects for EP group, nation, and national party (when more than one MEP represented that party in the 5th EP) and an intercept term (not shown). $M = 573$; $V = 2124$; $N = 618828$.

* The 95% Bayesian credible interval for this coefficient excludes zero. Note that the Young × Integration Bill coefficient in Model 2 is statistically significant at the 90% level.

^a Age is scaled to tens of years.

^b Young MEPs are 40 years old or less.

^c Old MEPs are 65 years old or more.

^d Time until national election is in years.

Table 3: Deviance Information Criteria Across Specifications

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
No Random Effects	179,483	179,460	179,295
MEP Random Effects Only	176,126	176,105	175,938
Vote Random Effects Only	158,438	158,431	158,275
Crossed Random Effects	154,793	154,785	154,631

Figure 1: Average Predicted Probability of Defection as a Function of Age

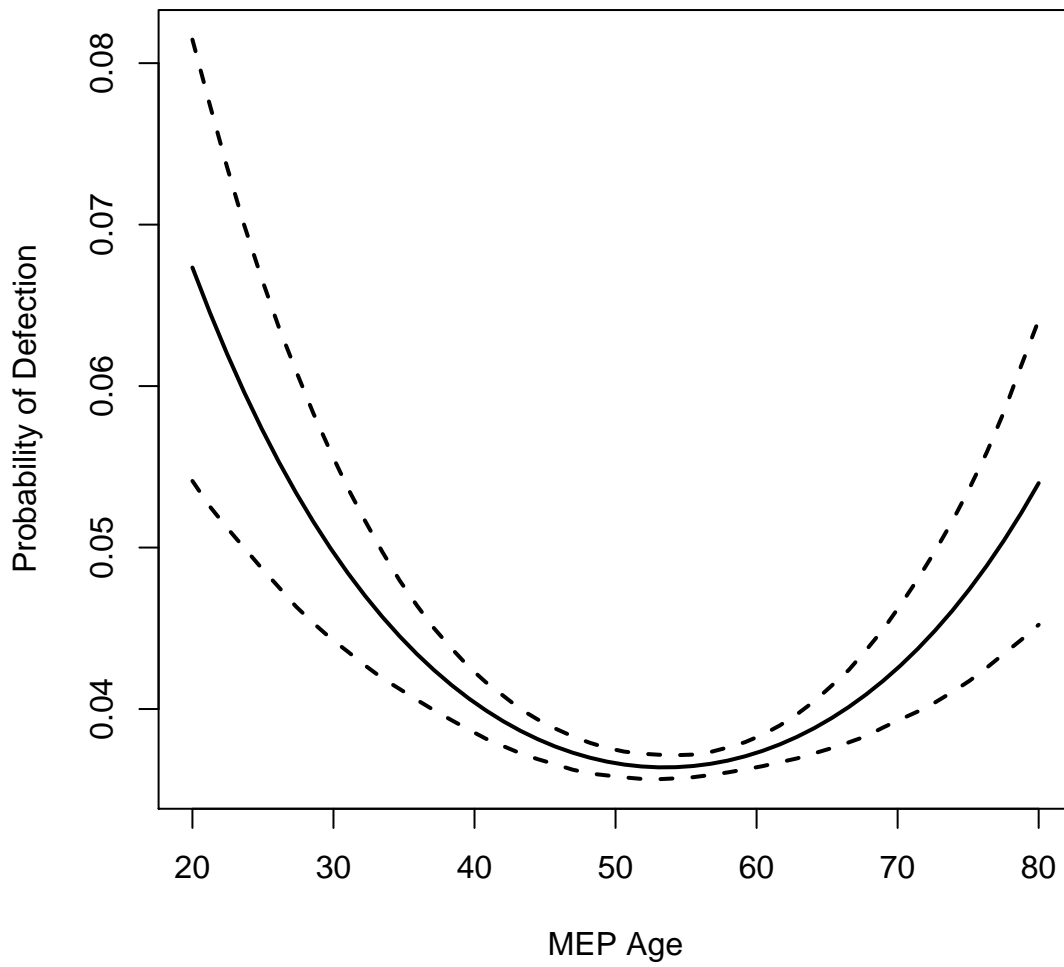


Figure 2: Average Predicted Probability of Defection as a Function of Age, Bill Type, and Proximity of National Elections

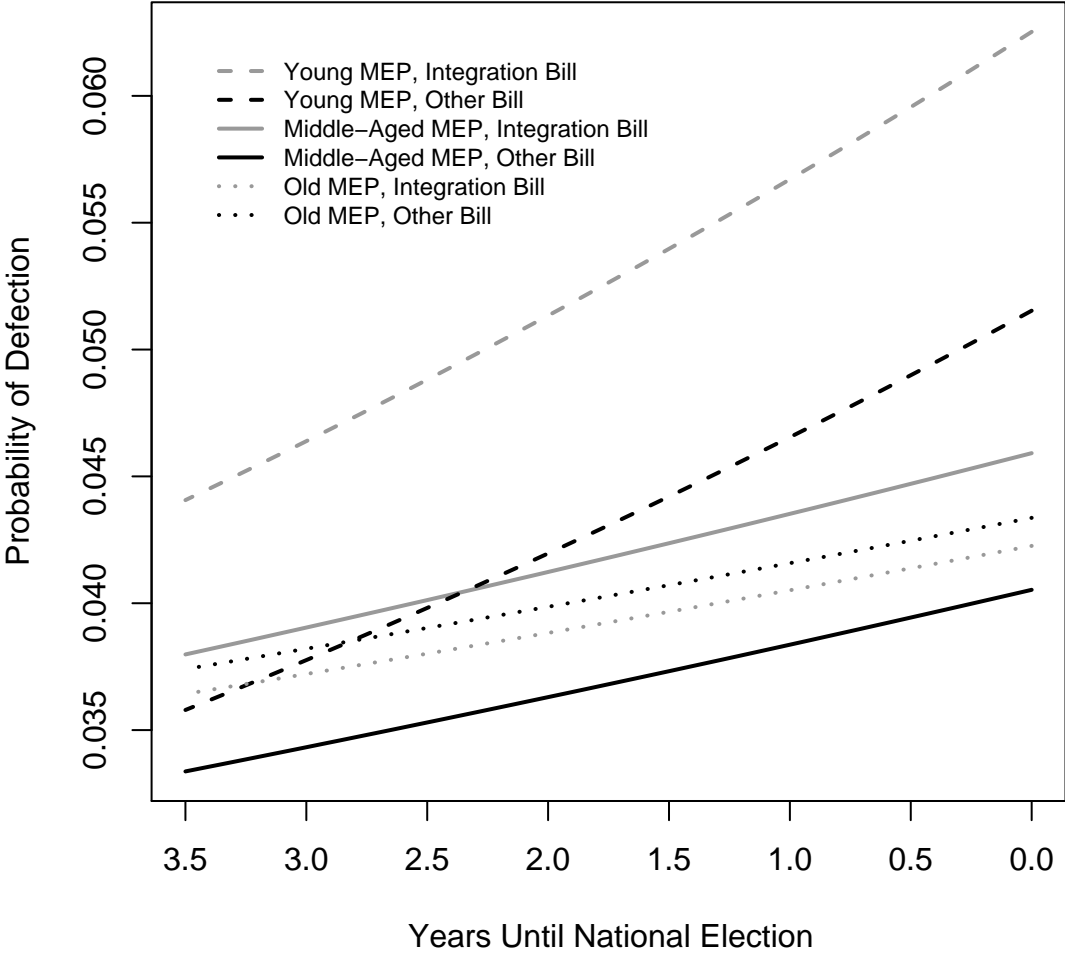


Figure 3: Average Predicted Probability of Defection as a Function of Age, Bill Type, and Proximity of National Elections: Pairwise Comparisons with 95% Credible Intervals

