

The Dynamics of Voting Behaviour in the Post-2004 European Parliament

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Siim Trumm

Signature:

Abstract

The European Parliament offers a unique setting for studying the behaviour of elected representatives and the way they interpret their mandate. In contrast to national legislatures, where legislators face domestic geographical and partisan pressures, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) must balance both national and supranational loyalties. While existing studies on MEPs' parliamentary behaviour provide useful insight into the voting dynamics in the European Parliament, few scholars address the heterogeneity of the post-2004 parliaments, and how it shapes the approach of contemporary MEPs to representation in the European Parliament.

This dissertation uses the changes in the European Parliament's institutional make-up that occurred over the last decade to explore MEPs' voting behaviour in the Sixth and Seventh Parliaments. In particular, I focus on how the diversity among MEPs and the variety of voting procedures used in the European Parliament affect MEPs' voting behaviour. Combining post-2004 MEPs' individual-level roll call voting data and original MEP survey data, I explore the following questions:

- (i) How likely are post-2004 MEPs to vote with their European Parliament party group, national delegation, and national party delegation?
- (ii) How do individual- and contextual-level characteristics shape the voting behaviour of MEPs?
- (iii) How is MEPs' approach to parliamentary representation influenced by the choice of voting procedure?

The findings indicate that national parties remain post-2004 MEPs' primary principal, and that MEPs continue to hold their secondary loyalty to their supranational party group. I also find that diversity among MEPs shapes how they approach parliamentary representation; individual- and contextual-level characteristics, such as MEPs' role perception and the degrees of ideological diversity within the parliamentary sub-groups, provide incentives for MEPs to alter their voting behaviour. Finally, a noteworthy voting procedure effect is visible within MEPs' self-perceived approach to parliamentary representation. The findings suggest that a univocal interpretation of the European mandate may be misplaced given that significant systematic differences exist, both across MEPs and voting procedures, in post-2004 voting dynamics.

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