

NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION:
HYPOTHESES AND EVIDENCE

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How do political parties position themselves on new issues arising on the political agenda? In previous papers we have explored the institutionalist argument that parties have “bounded rationalities” that shape the way they come to terms with new challenges and uncertainties (Marks and Wilson 1999; Marks and Wilson forthcoming). Most political parties have established constituencies and long-standing agendas that reflect intense commitments on the part of leaders and activists. The range of likely responses of a political party to a new issue is, therefore, a product of the ideologies of party leaders and the reputational and cognitive constraints imposed by prior policy positions. We may therefore expect political parties to assimilate and exploit new issues within existing ideologies, which in Western European party systems are summarized by the social cleavages that give rise to party families (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Mair 1997).

In this paper we evaluate the explanatory power of this theory against three plausible alternative hypotheses. The first is that the positions taken by political parties on a new issue depend on *national context*. If the national states, cultures, societies, or economies that mediate the response to a new issue are sufficiently distinctive, so variation among individual parties may have a strong cross-national component. This line of explanation expresses conventional wisdom about how political parties will respond to the particular issue dealt with in this paper—European integration. International relations scholars have long conceptualized European integration as the product of bargaining among governments representing the distinctive national interests of each member state (Hoffmann 1966; Moravcsik 1999). From this standpoint, the most important determinant of a political party's position on European integration is not its ideological caste or its electoral strategy, but its national location.

A second alternative approach to cleavage theory connects party positioning on an issue to *voters' issue positions*. To the extent that parties strategize for votes, so one might expect them to try to influence and respond to voters (Iversen 1994; Kitschelt 1994). There are many possible ways to model strategic interaction of parties in relation to voters, but few produce unique equilibrium predictions for party positioning under the multi-party competition that characterizes European party systems. But it is possible to elaborate a plausible hypothesis that is consistent with spatial theory and yields point predictions in multi-party systems.

Finally, we elaborate a third set of hypotheses based on the notion that political parties strategize about *dimensions of party competition* in adopting positions on new issues. Mainstream parties are likely to try to suppress the salience of a new issue that cuts across existing dimensions of party competition by taking a moderate position, while small or excluded parties have an incentive to take an extreme position in an effort to refocus party competition (Hix forthcoming; Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1989).

The issue we are concerned with in this paper is European integration in the period 1982 to 1996. These are years in which the European Union developed rapidly as an integrated economy and a multi-level polity (Marks, Hooghe, and Blank 1996; Hooghe and Marks, 1999). The Single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (1993) created the basis for economic and monetary union within a supranational polity that explicitly weakened national sovereignty. As a result, European integration became increasingly salient for national political parties and mass publics.

Drawing on data from Eurobarometer surveys and an expert survey of party positions in the 15 member states of the European Union over the period 1984 to 1996 (Ray 1997; Ray forthcoming), we find empirical support for each of the approaches outlined above. However, by

far the most powerful explanation of party positions is the institutionalist hypothesis. While European integration places a new set of issues on the political agenda, political parties strive to encapsulate it in their established ideologies. The range of likely responses of political parties to this new issue appears to be bounded by their history and the issues and conflicts that define them. These are summarized in the political cleavages on which a party stands. To the extent that electoral pressures influence party positions on European integration, we find that they are filtered through pre-existing ideologies.

The first section of this paper sets out the hypotheses that motivate our analysis. The following section explains how we operationalize these hypotheses and sets out the data we use to evaluate them. The final section summarizes our statistical analysis and its implications.

HYPOTHESES

Cleavage theory

Cleavage theory claims that the positions of political parties on a range of issues reflect basic group divisions in the social structure and the ideologies that motivate and express those group divisions (Zuckerman 1975; 1982).

This theory draws on the institutionalist insight that organizations assimilate and exploit new issues within existing schemas or "ideologies" (North 1990; Hall and Taylor 1996; Kitschelt, Lange, Marks, and Stephens [hereafter KLMS] 1999). Most political parties have established constituencies and long-standing agendas that mobilize intense commitments on the part of leaders and activists. From this standpoint, political parties are not empty vessels into which issue positions are poured in response to electoral or constituency pressures, but are organizations with historically rooted ideologies that guide their response to new issues. As a

recent analysis of party manifestos puts it, political cleavages give rise to “essential and indelible associations with particular issues and policies” (Klingemann et. al. 1994, 24). In the words of Lipset and Rokkan, voters “are typically faced with choices among historically given ‘packages’ of programs, commitments, outlooks, and sometimes, *Weltanschauungen*, and their current behavior cannot be understood without some knowledge of the sequences of events and the combinations of forces that produced these ‘packages’” (1967, 2). We hypothesize that these cleavages constitute institutional frameworks or “prisms” through which political parties respond to the issue of European integration.

Cleavage theory applies Anthony Downs’ observation that voters find ideology useful as a heuristic for intuiting party positions on a wide range issues, a valuable tool given the costliness of gaining (and, one might add, retaining) information about the diverse issue positions of political parties (1957, 98). Downs’ basic insight is bolstered by the role of ideology in creating credible commitments. Whereas citizens are likely to distrust the commitment of parties to issue positions selected merely because they are vote maximizing, issue positions that are implied by ideological commitments suggest that parties really will carry out the policies on which they campaign (Hinich and Munger 1994, 73ff). A reputation for doing what one says is particularly important in a setting where citizens realize that they can exert little effective control over a government once it is elected, beyond changing their vote several years hence.

In Western Europe, political cleavages, and the party families that arise from them, encapsulate the historically rooted ideological and constituency bases of political parties as they have developed. Party competition is no longer “frozen” along the cleavages diagnosed by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan in the mid-1960s. Class, religious, and center/periphery cleavages they described, along with a recent postindustrial

traditionalist/libertarian cleavage. summarize political parties' ideological underpinnings and bounded rationalities (Inglehart 1990; Kitschelt 1994). Cleavages provide voters with manageable, compressed, information about the issue positions of parties; they represent reputational sunk costs which sustain credible commitments; they describe the deeply rooted ideologies that structure electoral competition; and, most relevant for this paper, they arguably filter the response of parties to new issues that arise on the agenda.

H₁: Political cleavages. *Established political cleavages expressed in party families determine party positions on European integration.*

National location

Political parties are rooted in national political systems with distinctive national cultures and institutions. To the extent that voters' interests or perceptions are shaped by their location in a particular country, so one might expect to find national variation in party positions across the 15 countries we survey.

European integration is an example of an issue where national context is hypothesized to be crucial. The European Union brings together countries with deeply rooted national histories, identities, and institutions. A new over-arching polity has been created, but there are reasons for believing that national contexts are as important as ever in mediating (or "refracting") the domestic impacts of international events and processes (KLMS 1999; Soskice 1999; McKeown 1999; Héritier, Knill and Mingers 1996). Many, perhaps most, scholars have argued that the interplay of national interests is the most important factor shaping basic institutions and policy

making in the European Union. National location, according to this approach, makes all the difference: "You stand where you sit."

The national view of European integration is rooted in several literatures. It informs most studies of identity. Discourse theorists argue that citizens in different countries have deeply rooted national identities that shape their views of European integration (Hedetoft 1995). This assumption is present also in standard accounts of European integration that describe contrasting orientations with the modifiers "British," "French", "German," etc.

This view is logically consistent with international relations literatures that view European integration as an outcome of bargaining among states representing national interests. There are two main streams of theorizing here: realism and intergovernmentalism. Realism conceives European integration in terms of power relations among individual states (Waltz 1979). States are perceived to have particular geopolitical interests arising from relative power concerns that determine national policy. From a realist perspective, responses to a new international issue like European integration reflect its impact on the distribution of power in the international system. A state's support or opposition to increased integration is a function of the effect of regional integration on that state's geopolitical position relative to other states. Because national states are the core units of this system, the policy responses of leaders are likewise national.

Intergovernmentalist approaches to European integration also imply that variation among political parties will generally reflect their national location. Intergovernmentalists pose economic preferences, not relative power, as the motor of inter-state relations. Economic national interest is given by the degree of competitiveness of an economy, the effects of integration on its distinctive system of economic governance, and its macroeconomic

performance (Moravcsik 1999, 28ff). Alongside such national sources of variation are sector by sector variations in the competitiveness of producers. Political parties, however, aggregate interests across many such groups and respond to the net national impact of such variations in competitiveness. Hence, intergovernmentalists, such as Andrew Moravcsik, ignore the effect of changes in party composition of national governments in evaluating the policies of national governments. From an intergovernmentalist standpoint, the economic logics of regional integration give rise to distinctly national, not party-political, variations in position.

H₂: National location. *National context determines party position on European integration.*

Median supporter

A second alternative to cleavage theory is that political parties position themselves in relation to voters' issue positions to maximize their share of the vote given the expected platforms of competing parties. However, few spatial models yield unique predictions for individual party positions in multi-party systems. In general, formal treatments of multi-party competition conclude that party positions will tend to spread across the available issue space assuming that citizens vote sincerely, not strategically, and that parties maximize votes irrespective of coalition potential.¹ We assume that the way in which parties spread out reflects "the central tendency of attitudes of their electorates" (Iversen 1994). That is to say, the positions taken by political parties will mirror that of their median voter (H₃).

There are several paths by which this hypothesis has been argued, but a common element is the observation that positions taken by political parties on most issues are sticky over time. A plausible reason for this is that competition among political parties is segmented because the

electorate itself is balkanized into mutually exclusive groups of party supporters. Despite increased electoral volatility at the individual level in western democracies in recent years, majorities or large minorities of citizens across Western European societies have durable party attachments. Correspondingly, political parties tend to have long-standing ties to particular socio-economic groups. Social democratic parties have close ties to labor, conservatives to employers, Christian democratic parties to the Catholic church, and so forth. The upshot of this is that electoral competition may be conceived as two-sided. On the one hand, political parties must appeal to their long-term supporters. This becomes particularly important if one admits the possibilities of voting abstention and the role of the financial and human resources provided to parties by their supporters in turning out the vote. On the other hand, parties appeal to the least committed supporters of competing parties. The formal literature on the topic suggests that it is rational for a vote-maximizing party to locate its issue positions near that of its median supporter across a range of assumptions concerning the distribution of voter issue preferences and the trade off for individual citizens between issue proximity and party support (Adams 1998).

There is also the possibility, raised in the literature investigating party-citizen links, that causality here may run in both directions. That is to say, voters may follow parties, as well as parties voters (Iversen 1994). This possibility is all the more plausible for a new issue, like European integration, in which party leaders are bound to have far more developed preferences than citizens. Recent statistical analyses find evidence consistent with the view that partisanship influences citizen orientations to the EU, though it is extremely difficult to dissect the direction of causality (Gabel 1988; Scott and Steenbergen 1988; Ray 1997).

It is worth stressing that our formulation of the partisanship linkage hypothesis avoids assumptions about the direction of causality in the relationship of political parties to their

constituencies. It allows for the possibility that parties influence the issue positions of their supporters as well as respond to them. Given that it is extremely difficult to fathom the causal nexi between political parties and their supporters in the absence of reliable panel data, we have posed this hypothesis in a way that is agnostic in this regard. The partisan linkage hypothesis suggests that a variety of forces will draw together the issue positions of political parties and their supporters. While the directional causality of linkages between parties and supporters is complex, the expected result of these is unambiguous: the issue position of a political party will be the same as that of its median supporter.

H₃: Median supporter. *The position of a political party on European integration will correspond to that of its median supporter.*

Strategic competition

The position that a political party takes on a new issue may be influenced by its attempt to raise or lower the salience of that issue in competition with other parties. That is to say, parties may seek to reinforce or challenge existing dimensions of party competition when they formulate their issue positions. One might expect mainstream parties to try to defuse the salience of a new issue by taking median positions with respect to it, while parties that are peripheral will try to raise the heat of competition by taking more extreme positions. A hypothesis along these lines is a logical corollary to the directional theory of party competition. This theory holds that parties take extreme positions on issues that they wish to compete on, in order provide clear cues for attracting voters who find the issue important, but take median positions on issues where they wish to avoid competition (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989).

The basic point that parties do not seek to compete on the entire range of issues is also grounded in research on party strategies in election campaigns and in research on party manifestos (Budge, Robertson and Hearl 1987; Klingermann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994). Ian Budge and David Robertson summarize the argument: "Parties compete by accentuating issues on which they have an undoubted advantage, rather than by putting forward contrasting policies on the same issues" (in Budge, Robertson and Hearl 1987, 391). The left/right extremism hypothesis extends this line of argument to competition on different dimensions, based on the idea that parties have different preferences for competition on different issue dimensions.

Several writers have hypothesized that major parties will be generally supportive of European integration, while minor parties will take critical positions in an effort to shake up the party system (Hix and Lord 1997; Marks and Wilson 1999; Taggart 1998). Issue convergence among mainstream parties minimizes competition among them, and thereby minimizes intra-party tensions that would result from staking out distinctive positions. As for minor parties, they have little to lose in formulating an extreme position on the new issue. In this way they can "set themselves apart from the 'centre' of politics" (Taggart 1998, 384), and in the process compete on a new dimension of contestation that is tangential to the established left/right dimension on which they are minor players.

There are three ways to formulate this hypothesis depending on whether one conceptualizes "mainstream" party in terms of votes, left/right position, or government participation. First, one might expect electoral successful parties, that is parties with a large share of the vote, to converge on more positive positions with respect to European integration and less electorally successful parties to be Euro-skeptical (H₄). Second, parties that are centrally located on the left/right dimension of party competition may seek to minimize the

salience of European integration as an issue by taking positive positions, while parties that are located towards the left or right extremes may take correspondingly critical positions on European integration (H₅). Finally, parties that have played a role in government may be hypothesized to take positive positions on European integration, while those that are excluded from government to take negative positions (H₆).

H₄: Left/right extremism. *The greater the absolute distance between a party's position on the left/right dimension and the median party position for the relevant party system, the less the party will support European integration.*

H₅: Electoral support. *The smaller a party's electoral support, the less a party will support European integration.*

H₆: Government participation. *Parties that participate or have participated in government will be more supportive of European integration, while perennial opposition parties will be Euro-skeptical.*

MODELS AND DATA

Party Position

Our dependent variable is party position on European integration for political parties in EU member states at four time points: 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996.² The hurdle for inclusion of a party in the data set is three percent of the vote in a national legislative election for the lower house prior to December of these years. The data points we use are averages of evaluations in an expert survey conducted by Leonard Ray (forthcoming). 8 to 10 experts for each country

evaluated the position of each national party along a scale from strongly opposed to European integration to strongly in favor. In our data analysis we scale these positions from 0 (strongly opposed) to 1 (strongly in favor).

Cleavage Theory

We operationalize political cleavages by creating dichotomous variables for the eight party families that are generally recognized in the relevant party literature: extreme right, conservative, Christian democratic, liberal, green, regionalist, social democratic, and extreme left/communist. The anticipated relationship between political cleavages and parties' positions on European integration is expressed in the following model:

$$H_1: \text{ Party Position} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ Party Family} + e$$

National Location

National location refers to the country in which a party is situated. The following fourteen countries of the European Union are included in this analysis: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The model is as follows:

$$H_2: \text{ Party Position} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ Country} + e$$

Median supporter

Data on median supporter are provided by Eurobarometer surveys for Spring 1984, Spring 1988, Spring 1992, and Fall 1995. To calculate the position of the median voter we summarize scores for individuals who express an intention to vote for a given party on the

following Eurobarometer questions: MEMBERSHIP: Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership in the Common Market/European Community/European Union is "a good thing," "a bad thing," or "neither good nor bad?" UNIFICATION: In general, are you for or against efforts made to unify Western Europe? "For very much," "for to some extent," "against to some extent," or "against very much?" When these responses are combined into a single variable, the result is a six point scale that has similar range to the scale adopted in Ray's expert survey.

The median supporter hypothesis is represented as follows:

$$H_3: \text{ Party Position} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ Median Supporter} + e$$

Strategic Competition

Data on the left/right position of political parties is provided by Castles and Mair (1984) for 1984 and Huber and Inglehart (1995) for 1996. We interpolate data linearly between these years to yield scores for 1988 and 1992. The degree of *left/right extremism* for a party is the absolute distance of the party from the median party position for that country at that time. Given our expectation of an increasing effect of left/right distance as a party moves to an extreme, we square the left/right distance to yield expectations about position on European integration.

$$H_4: \text{ Party Position} = \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{Distance from the Median Party in a Party System})^2 + e$$

Electoral support is the share of the vote a party receives in the national legislative election for the lower house prior to the end of the survey year.³

$$H_5: \text{ Party Position} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ Party Vote Share} + e$$

Government Participation is a dummy variable which takes the value of unity for political parties that have participated in at least one national government over the period 1965-1995 and zero for parties that have not been in government during that period.

$$H_6: \text{Party Position} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ Participation in Government} + e$$

Time and Cross-Sections

Given the structure of our data, we do not discount the possibility there are dynamic processes occurring over time and/or violations of error assumptions in regression analysis when data is pooled for cross-sections through time. We assign dummy variables for country and time to minimize errors of inference given that techniques such as panel corrected standard errors (PCSE) and generalized least squares error components (GLSE) are infeasible or inappropriate for our data.

DISCUSSION

We evaluate cleavage theory, national location, median supporter, and strategic competition in turn. Each of these hypotheses finds support in the evidence that we bring to bear, but cleavage theory is singularly powerful in explaining party position. Our final equation, which explains slightly more than three-quarters of the variance in party position, includes variables drawn from all four hypotheses, while cleavage theory alone explains 65 percent of the variance in party position.

[Tables 1 and 2 about here]

Cleavage theory

Our statistical analysis strongly confirms the hypothesis we have drawn from cleavage theory. The party families that have arisen from the political cleavages that have shaped Western Europe from the Protestant Reformation to the present—the extreme right, conservative, Christian democratic, liberal, social democratic, regionalist, green, and the extreme left—are coherent categories describing the positions of parties on the issue of European integration. The categorical variables describing party family explain a total of 65.2 percent of the variance in the issue positions of political parties on European integration (Table 2, Model 5). The coefficients for the categorical variables in this model represent the difference between the means for the category and the control (or reference) group, and are therefore an artifact of our selection of control variable. In Model 5 and all subsequent models this the communist/extreme left, which is the party family nearest the negative extreme that contains more than ten cases (parties by year). As a consequence, any party family that tends to be similarly Euro-skeptic will have a small and insignificant coefficients. The fact that only one category (the extreme right) out of the eight presented in Model 5 is insignificant testifies to the underlying strength of cleavage theory.

Before we evaluate cleavage theory under controls, let us examine the data for party families visually. Figures 1 and 2 represent party families and the range of parties within them in a two-dimensional space described by orthogonal axes for left/right position and position on European integration. Party positions along the left/right axis are measured on a ten-point scale (Huber and Inglehart 1995 and Castles and Mair 1984). Those on the European integration axis are measured on Leonard Ray's seven-point scale with the lowest score representing strong opposition to European integration and the highest score representing strong support for European integration. The points depict the mean scores for party families for 1984 and 1996 and

ellipses describe the entire range of individual party positions within each party family. Only party families having two or more parties with electoral support of at least three percent are represented.

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

As one would expect, party families are much more coherent on the left/right dimension than on the European integration dimension. The left/right dimension of party competition helps to define party families in the first place and is the most important single dimension differentiating political parties in western European societies. For both 1984 and 1996 one can see an inverted horseshoe (Hix and Lord 1996). This pattern is a logical implication of the extremism hypothesis set out above. As parties are located further to the left and the right away from the median in their respective party systems, so they tend to be more skeptical of European integration. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate this pattern for parties aggregated into party families. The most extreme party families on the left/right scale, the new right and the extreme left, are by far the most Euro-skeptic, followed by green parties. More moderate parties tend to be the most pro-integration.

Left/right extremism is closely associated with position on European integration, but party family accounts for the lion's share of the variance when both are present in the same equation. Table 3 presents ANOVA (analysis of variance) models that allow us to measure the extent to which variation on our continuous dependent variable, party position, is explained by continuous and sets of categorical variables. Unlike the coefficients for the categorical variables reported in Table 2, the results in Table 3 are impervious to which reference variable one selects in the categorical analysis. The omega-squared for party family is consistently high in relation to those for all other variables in our analysis, including left right extremism. In the model that

encompasses every variable discussed above (Model 10, Table 3) the net effect of party family is more than double that of the next most powerful variable and four times that of left/right extremism.

[Table 3 about here]

One reason for this can be gleaned from Figures 1 and 2. While the extreme right, extreme left, and Green party families create a distinctive horseshoe pattern, the more centrist party families, which contain more than 70 percent of the cases in our analysis, are not identically situated. Conservative parties are distinctly less pro-European than the other three, as revealed in the lower coefficients for conservatives in Table 2, Models 5, 7, and 8. While the class cleavage which underlies the left/right dimension of party competition is uniquely influential in western Europe, party families also express religious, center/periphery, and traditionalist/postmaterialist cleavages, and these have an independent impact on party position.

National location

Model 6 in Table 2 describes results for categorical variables for individual countries with Denmark as control. As explained above, the coefficients for countries which, like Denmark, are Euro-skeptic, fall into insignificance, while those for countries that contrast most sharply with our reference category—i.e. Belgium, Spain, and Italy—are large and highly significant. When considered as a group, country variables are highly significant, though their combined effect is small (adj. $R^2 = 0.07$). Models 7 and 8 in Table 2 place these variables under controls. Caution is warranted in interpreting coefficients for dummy variables representing countries in a multivariate analysis in which we have also dummy variables for party families.

In effect, the reference categories against which we can interpret dummy coefficients is the interaction of the Denmark and the extreme left, which is our party family control.

More revealing are ANOVA models (Table 3) that allow one to evaluate how much variation on party position is accounted for by the set of country variables. Given the weakness of national location when viewed in isolation from controls, it is noteworthy that it is the second strongest source of party position in our fully specified models (Table 3, Models 10 and 11). The omega-squared for our country dummy variables (0.04) is greater than that for any variable with the exception of party family. The reason for this is not difficult to understand. While other variables compete directly with party family in explaining EU party position, the pattern of variation captured by the country in which a party is located is distinct. Although its net effect is not particularly large, territorial location adds to the total amount of variance that we can explain. The upshot of this is that territorial location and political cleavages do not appear to be contending sources of orientation to European integration. For Lipset and Rokkan, as in more recent analyses (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Hix forthcoming), political cleavages and territorial location are interactive rather than competing influences on party position. In other words, political cleavages vary in systematic ways across the national political systems of Western Europe. While we do not model such complexity in this paper, it is perfectly possible that more sophisticated modeling of the *interaction* of territorial location and political cleavages may yield even more powerful results.

Given the weight of expectations in the scholarship of European integration, it is surprising that territorial location is not a more powerful source of party position than political cleavages. As noted above, many observers have argued that territorial identity is likely to be the strongest source of division in the Euro-polity. European integration has brought diverse polities,

societies and cultures into an overarching polity. If it can be said that in the United States "All politics are local," how much more true is this of the European Union? Why is national location not a stronger predictor of party position?

One reason for this is that national political parties do not change their stripes when they engage new political issues. This is the basis for the speculation offered in 1996 (Hooghe and Marks 1996; 1999) that trans-national coalitions would arise at the European level based on the left/right dimension of party competition that has long structured national party systems in western Europe. The European Union has "domesticated" international relations among states, and has, as Simon Hix and others have argued, been infiltrated by the conflicts that characterize liberal democracies; "Who gets what (and how)?" (Hooghe 1998; Hix 1995; 1999; Schmitt and Thomassen 1997).

This is not to deny that nationality shapes European politics. One should bear in mind that in this paper we are concerned with party positions in *national* polities, and it is precisely in such arenas that national identity is likely to be taken for granted. The cleavages that are politically salient in a society are not a simple function of the characteristics of individuals, but are mobilized in particular political settings. Among the diverse identities that characterize individuals (gender, race, nationality, religion, etc) only a small subset become the basis for politically salient cleavages, and that subset may differ across European, national, and regional arenas as the characteristics that unite and divide groups vary. Our finding concerning national location—and our results in general—cannot be transposed to political parties operating at the European level without taking into account the additional sources of conflict at that level. What one can say, however, is that the conventional expectation that national location shapes positions on European integration is only weakly confirmed for national political parties.

Median supporter

The hypothesis that a political party will approximate the issue positions of its median supporter is confirmed in our analysis. In simple regression this variable accounts for 17.3 percent of variance in party position on European integration (Table 1 Model 1) and under the controls exerted in Models 7 and 8 in Table 2, it is highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and substantively strong. In our final model (Model 8), a one unit change in the issue position of the median voter is associated with a 0.32 change on a similarly configured scale measuring party position.

The performance of the median voter as a predictor of party position is impressive, particularly in relation to other variables that attempt to capture the electoral dynamics of party positioning. While left/right extremism is about three times more powerful than median supporter in simple regression (Table 1, Models 1 and 2), it is median supporter that is more influential when they are combined in Models 10 and 11 in Table 3. The reason for this is that left/right extremism generates its power mainly from the relatively small number of parties that lie at the left/right extremes. While median supporter is somewhat inferior in predicting these cases, it does a little better for the bulk of parties that are located towards the middle of the left/right continuum.

However, categorical variables for party families capture much of the power of median supporter as they do for left/right extremism. Party families are associated with particular constituencies—social democratic parties with unions, Christian democratic parties with churches, and so forth—and to the extent that information about individual parties is not lost by aggregating parties into families, so party family picks up a sizeable portion of the variance explained by median supporter.

Strategic competition

Variables tapping party left/right extremism, participation in government, and electoral support are highly significant ($p < 0.001$) in simple regressions on party position (Table 1, Models 2, 3, and 4). Political parties that are nearer to the median party position on the left/right dimension in their respective party systems, that have participated in government, and that have greater electoral support tend to be more favorably oriented to European integration. Variables describing left/right extremism and party size survive the controls we exert in the models described in Tables 2 and 3.

The most powerful of these variables is left/right extremism. In simple regression this variable accounts for 58.4 percent of variance within party position. When one exercises controls in multivariate analysis, left/right extremism retains its significance, though its causal effect is severely attenuated. The reason for this is that the left/right extremism hypothesis competes directly with the political cleavage hypothesis, and when the two variables feature in the same equation, it is the latter that captures the bulk of the association. In Table 3, Model 10, which is our fully specified model, the omega-squared for left/right extremism is 0.02 compared to 0.09 for party family.

There are three reasons for this. In the first place, the left/right extremism hypothesis is virtually a sub-set of the political cleavage hypothesis. When arrayed on a left/right dimension, party families form almost perfectly coherent groupings of individual political parties. The overall association between left/right position and party family for 1984, 1988, 1992 and 1996 is 0.87. So party family captures the bulk of the power of the left/right dimension of party competition in accounting for variance in position on European integration.

Second, party family provides a more accurate representation of the effect of variation in the middle range of the left/right scale for party position on European integration. The left/right extremism hypothesis asserts that a party's position on European integration is a function of squared distance from the median party on the socio-economic cleavage in the relevant party system. Dummy variables for individual party families are able to tap additional information concerning party position even when parties are equidistant from the median party. This is the case for social democratic parties, liberal parties and Christian democratic parties, which have significantly different positions on European integration across time, but which are not accurately differentiated by the left/right extremism hypothesis.

Finally, the power of party family is by no means exhausted by the left/right cleavage. Party families are the outcome of religious, territorial, and post-industrial cleavages in addition to the socio-economic left/right cleavage, and to the extent that these cleavages provide additional information about a party's position on European integration, so the power of party family is enhanced.

The left/right extremism hypothesis is highly efficient in terms of the ratio of information to predictive power. On the basis of a very small amount of information, this hypothesis captures slightly more than half of the variance of party position on European integration. In a nutshell, this is because that it correctly diagnoses the EU positions of a relatively small number parties at either end of the left/right spectrum in relation to the much larger number parties in between. This is an important finding, but it is not the last word in the matter. A somewhat more complex hypothesis rooted in cleavage theory explains a considerably greater amount of variance, and unlike that explained by left/right extremism, it is not tapped by other variables set

out here. The chief virtue of the left/right extremism hypothesis is its parsimony. The chief virtue of party family is its accuracy.

CONCLUSION

Each of the hypotheses evaluated in this paper provides insight into the positioning of political parties on new issues that arise on the political agenda. The issue preferences of party supporters are closely associated with party positions. Even stronger is the connection between a party's position on the left/right cleavage and its position on European integration. Far stronger yet is the effect of party family. Differences in the relative causal efficacy of these variables are magnified under controls. Party family captures the bulk of variance in multiple regression models, and this finding is robust across the models we report here and those we do not have space to report. Apart from party family, only territorial location, which taps a causal influence that is unique among the variables evaluated here, survives controls unscathed. Alone, territorial location explains seven percent of variation in party position, and when this variable is combined with party family the resulting model explains 69 percent of variation, compared to 65 percent for party family alone. No other duo of hypotheses is as powerful.

These are suggestive findings. They confirm that the response of political parties to new issues arising on the political agenda is shaped chiefly by party family location. Political parties have bounded rationalities that shape how they process incentives in competitive party systems. In the language of party politics, political cleavages give rise to ideological commitments or "prisms" through which political parties respond to new issues, including that of European integration.

When Ernest Haas set out his neofunctional theory of European integration in the late 1950s he scrutinized party orientations in great detail because he was convinced that the fate of European integration was in the hands of domestic actors, parties chief among them, who would press their governments to integrate further or hold back (Haas 1957). To what extent, Haas asked, was a European polity emerging in which political actors across different countries were driven by similar interests? The question remains a vital one. The answer offered in this paper is that political parties across Western Europe—across diverse polities, economies, societies and cultures—are driven by similar and explicable historical forces to take particular positions on the issue of European integration. The reason for this takes one to the core of western European experience. Variations among European party systems are variations on a set of themes, themes that have deep and common historical roots. The fact that one can speak meaningfully of party families that stretch right across western Europe, from Iberia to Scandinavia, from Ireland to Austria (and beyond), speaks volumes about the commonalities that underly the variations that usually dominate party political analysis.

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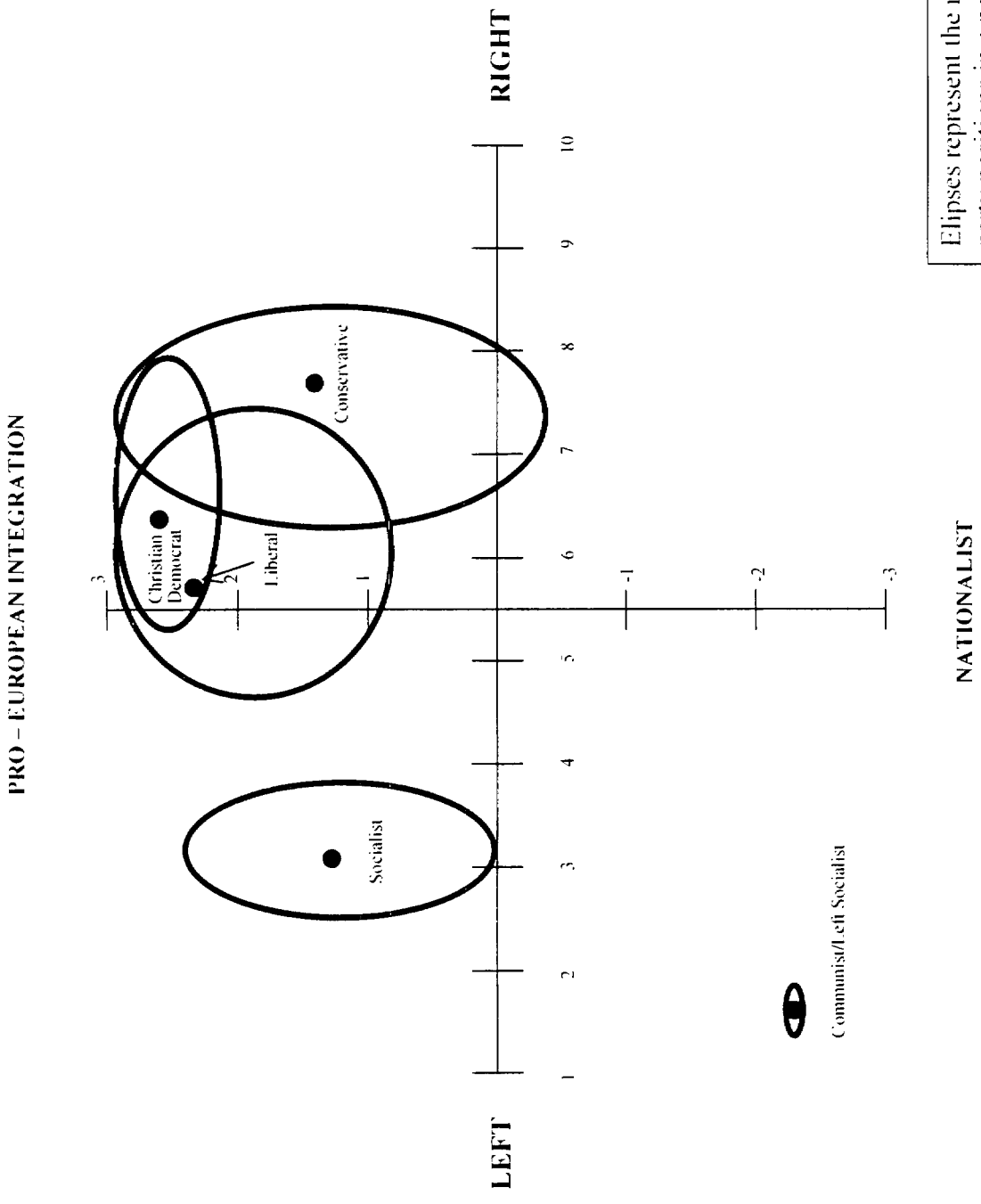
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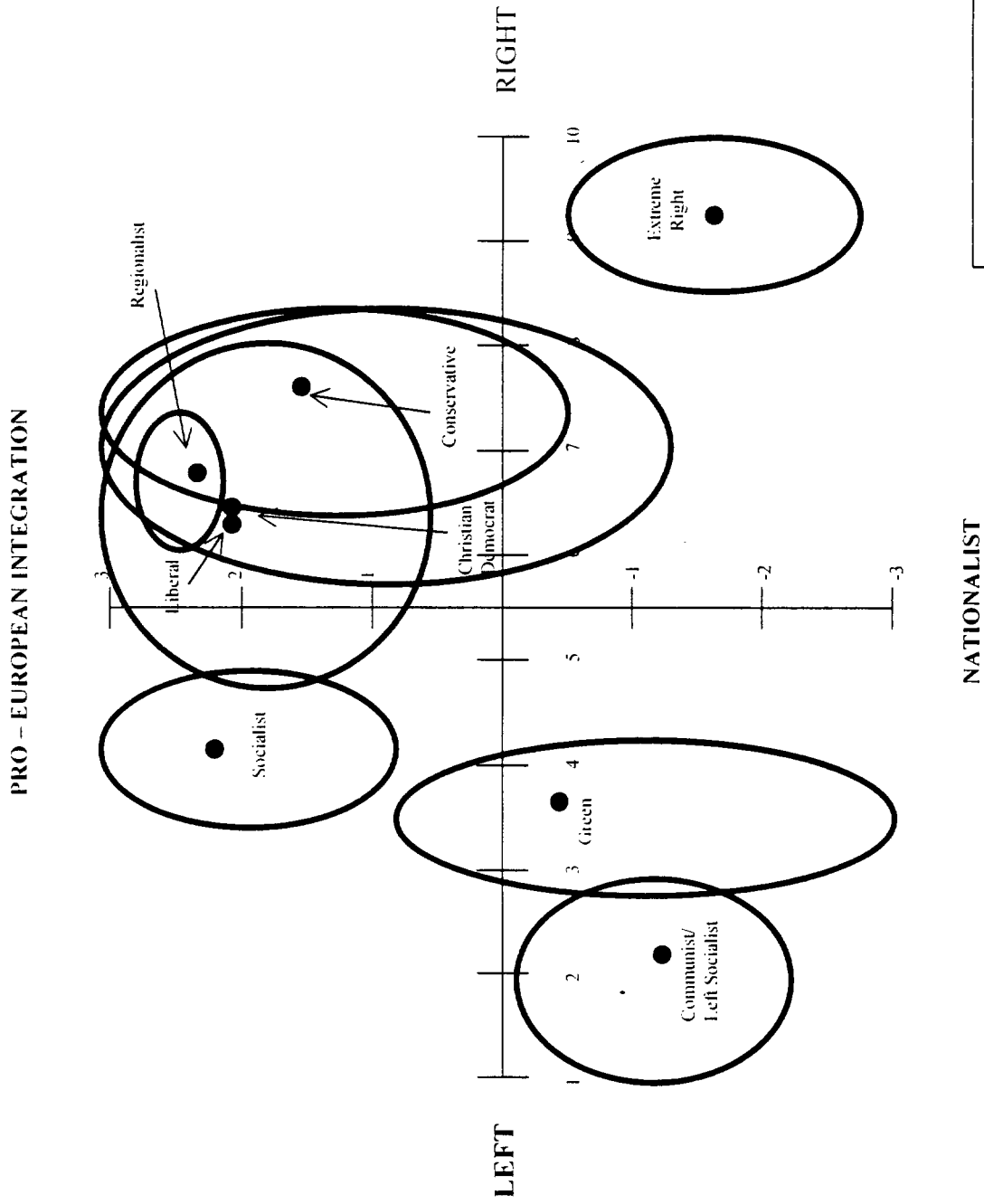
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FIGURE 1 : EUROPEAN PARTY FAMILIES (1984)



Elipses represent the range of party positions in a party family. The centerpoint is the mean of the party positions.

FIGURE 2 : EUROPEAN PARTY FAMILIES (1996)



Elipses represent the range of party positions in a party family. The centerpoint is the mean of the party positions.

TABLE 1: BIVARIATE OLS REGRESSION MODELS

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.
<i>Median Supporter</i>	0.65**	0.09						
<i>Left/Right Extremism</i>			-3.59**	0.20				
<i>Electoral Support</i>					0.01**	0.001		
<i>Government Participation</i>							-0.27**	0.03
<i>Constant</i>	0.21**	0.07	0.91**	0.02	0.61**	0.03	0.79**	0.02
Adjusted R-squared	0.17		0.58		0.08		0.20	
N	273		221		227		373	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

TABLE 2: MULTIVARIATE OLS REGRESSION MODELS

Independent Variables	Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.
<i>Party Family</i>								
Extreme Right	-0.08	0.05			-0.06	0.06	-0.03	0.05
Conservative	0.45**	0.04			0.29**	0.06	0.29**	0.06
Liberal	0.59**	0.04			0.44**	0.06	0.43**	0.06
Christian Democratic	0.55**	0.04			0.35**	0.06	0.34**	0.06
Social Democratic	0.53**	0.04			0.37**	0.05	0.36**	0.05
Green	0.23**	0.04			0.13*	0.06	0.15**	0.06
Regionalist	0.54**	0.05			0.34**	0.08	0.33**	0.07
<i>National Location</i>								
Austria			0.05	0.13	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.06
Belgium			0.27**	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.07	0.04
Germany			0.15*	0.08	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.04
Greece			0.05	0.07	-0.01	0.06	0.002	0.06
France			0.10	0.07	-0.10*	0.05	-0.11*	0.05
Finland			0.05	0.10	-0.03	0.06	-0.04	0.06
Ireland			0.05	0.07	-0.10*	0.05	-0.09*	0.05
Italy			0.22**	0.07	-0.02	0.05	-0.01	0.05
Netherlands			0.07	0.07	-0.07	0.04	-0.06	0.04
Portugal			0.04	0.08	-0.16	0.06	-0.14*	0.05
Spain			0.29**	0.07	0.04	0.06	0.09	0.05
Sweden			0.12	0.12	-0.02	0.06	-0.02	0.06
UK			0.18*	0.08	-0.15**	0.05	-0.13**	0.05
<i>Left/Right Extremism</i>					-1.17**	0.30	-1.17**	0.29
<i>Median Supporter</i>					0.32**	0.06	0.32**	0.06
<i>Electoral Support</i>					0.003**	0.001	0.003**	0.001
<i>Government Participation</i>					0.05	0.04		
<i>Year</i>								
1984					0.003	0.03		
1988					0.001	0.03		
1992					0.02	0.03		
Constant	0.30**	0.03	0.53**	0.05	0.19*	0.08	0.21**	0.07
Adjusted R-squared	0.65		0.07		0.77		0.77	
N	279		373		192		192	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ Reference values for categorical variables are: Communist/Extreme Left (Political Cleavages), Denmark (National Location) and 1996 (Year).

TABLE 3: ANOVA MODELS

Independent Variables	Model 9 ω^2	Model 10 ω^2	Model 11 ω^2
<i>Party Family</i>	0.62**	0.09**	0.10**
<i>National Location</i>	0.04**	0.04**	0.04**
<i>Left/Right Extremism</i>		0.02**	0.02**
<i>Median Supporter</i>		0.03**	0.03**
<i>Electoral Support</i>		0.01**	0.01**
<i>Government Participation</i>		0.00	
<i>Year</i>		0.00	
Adjusted R-squared	0.69	0.77	0.77
N	279	192	192

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

¹ The extent to which parties spread out is positively related to the effective number of parties competing, and negatively related to single peakedness of voter issue preferences, barriers to new entrants, and the costs imposed on parties by proximity (e.g. as expressed in voting abstention) (Kitschelt 1994).

² We exclude Luxembourg on grounds of feasibility. Only member states in the year of evaluation are included.

³ Parties that compete as part of electoral coalitions are excluded when it is impossible to portion the vote.