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Decoupling is in the Eye of the Beholder? European Parliament Voting and Perceptions of Economic Indivisibility in Europe

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Abstract: The rise of Euroskeptic or anti-European Union (EU) parties in the European Parliament (EP) has been popularly attributed to citizens' frustrations with economic stagnation and an out-of-touch, pro-EU political elite. The EU's defenders have, in turn, argued that policies promoted by anti-EU parties, such as leaving the euro or rolling back the EU's single market, are economically irrational due to the deep interdependence of EU economies. Do voters actually perceive their national economy to be linked to that of the EU, and do pro-EU parties fare better or worse in countries where such a linkage is more extensively perceived? This paper examines the conceptual and empirical contours of Euroskepticism in EP elections, and assesses the possible effects of publically perceived economic interdependence on these election results. The paper ultimately aims to speak to the EU's popular legitimacy and the status of Robert Schuman's goal to attain "concrete achievements which...create a *de facto* solidarity."

Keywords: European Union, economic integration, democratic deficit

The serial crises buffeting Europe—including financial and economic instability, intercommunal violence, military conflict on its borders, and a possible “Grexit”—are sufficiently grave that some have questioned the European Union’s (EU’s) capacity to recover (e.g., Hansen & Gordon 2014). Popular discontent with EU policy responses to these challenges—observable both in recent national and EU elections as well as ongoing protests in creditor and debtor members alike—further sharpens questions about the implications of the Union’s growing politicization. It would seem the time of functionalist integration—envisioned by Robert Schuman as political elites crafting “concrete achievements which...create a *de facto* solidarity,” aided by a “permissive consensus” among quiescent publics (Lindberg & Scheingold 1970)—has passed. What is less clear is just how restrictive, or even threatening, the current “constraining dissensus” is to the European project (Hooghe & Marks 2009; c.f. Schimmelfennig 2014).

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections, which were contested during a period of grinding (if variable) economic adversity and returned Euroskeptical parties to Strasbourg in record numbers, offer a particular lens through which to evaluate the politicization and ultimately the popular legitimacy of the European Union. This paper asks two related questions. First, how do we understand this outcome? One interpretation would be that voters are rejecting the EU’s policy solutions to its members’ struggles, and maybe even the EU itself. Others have seen a silver lining in such results and in the EU’s politicization generally. I suggest the result can be interpreted to some extent as a popular acceptance of the EP as legitimate target of a *European* protest vote.

The second question is what is driving the rise of Euroskeptical parties in the European Parliament. The paper examines cross-national data on EP voting over the past three European elections (2004, 2009, 2014), considering factors that might influence voting for pro- and anti-EU parties. In particular, it begins to examine a factor Ecker-Ehrhardt (2012) associated with “cosmopolitan politicization”: voters’ perceptions of the *economic indivisibility* of the European Union (and euro area). That is, do publics, like political elites, perceive supranational EU governance as necessary to manage extensive interdependence among member states (see Hooghe 2003)—or do they perceive their country as economically “decoupled” from certain EU members or the EU as a whole? And if publics perceive their national economy to be tightly tied to that of the EU, do they tend to vote for pro-EU parties in the EP (and thus for a form of solidarity) or for anti-EU parties (and thus to break free from the “chain gang” that might pull them over the cliff)? The answer to this question should give us some insight into whether the European Union will “hang together” in its time of troubles more resolutely than pessimists might believe.

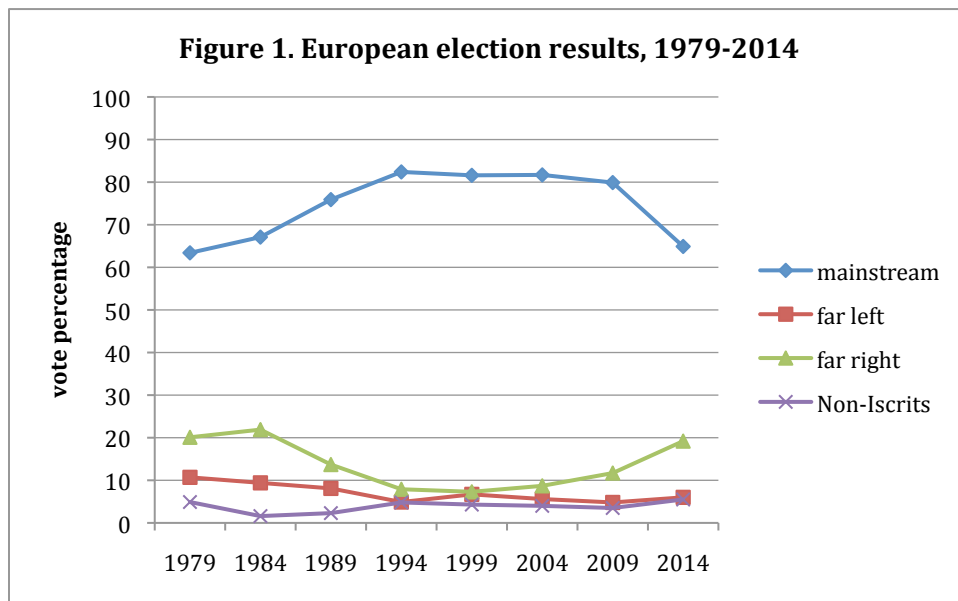
European Parliament elections and the EU’s popular legitimacy

The European Union’s current difficulties constitute a comprehensive challenge to both its output and input legitimacy. While disagreements regarding the appropriateness of austerity—and ultimately the effectiveness of the EU’s policy response to the debt crisis—dominate headlines, the rise of anti-EU parties and more general politicization of EU policymaking tap into a venerable debate about the Union’s input legitimacy. Academic and political commentators have long debated the scope of the EU’s democratic deficit, and

some prescribe a stronger European Parliament as a solution thereto (see, among others, Risse 2014; Majone 2014, 2005; Moravcsik 2004, 2012; Crum 2012; Rodrik 2011; Follesdal & Hix 2006). This paper examines EP election outcomes as an indicator of the popular legitimacy—input *and* output legitimacy, as perceived by the voting public—of the European Union and its policy response to the EU’s economic struggles in particular.

2014 European Parliament elections outcomes in historical context

If the 2014 European elections were a verdict on the European Union itself, the judgment would be a grim one. As shown in Figure 1, Euroskeptical parties received over 25 percent of the vote, up from a post-1979 average of just below 21 percent (and about 15 percent in 1990s and 2000s); mainstream parties saw their share fall 10 points to 69 percent, almost six below their historical average. Far-right nationalist parties did particularly well in 2014, capturing 19.2 percent of the vote—up 7.5 percent from the 2009 European elections. At 6 percent, far-left parties received their highest support since 1999.



Note: Europarties coded “mainstream” include the center-right European People’s Party, the liberal ALDE/ELDR/EDP bloc, the center-left Socialist & Democrats Party, and the left-progressive Green and European Free Alliance parties. The Europarties coded “Euroskeptical” include the leftist PEL and GUE-NGL and the various nationalist and far-right parties (ECR, EFD, AEN).¹

Overall turnout, at 42.5 percent, was at its lowest level since 1979. This low turnout, while only slightly below the 43 percent in 2009, came despite the mainstream Europarties’ attempt to raise the stakes of the election (and enhance their own prerogatives) by inaugurating the *Spitzenkandidaten*—the automatic EP support for the head of the party receiving the most votes to become the next president of the European Commission. These

¹ Party names and blocs have changed over time. I have not attempted to code Non Iscrips—unaffiliated representatives that may or may not be associated with far-right nationalists—which received an average of 3.9 percent of the European vote during 1979-2014 (5.5 percent in 2014). Treib (2014) offers a more nuanced coding, distinguishing between “hard” and “soft” national Euroskeptical parties. While my focus remains on Europarty groupings, future iterations of this paper may adopt a finer-grained categorization.

candidates held a number of debates regarding European issues, including the merits of austerity and free trade talks with the United States. According to the *Economist*, the chair of the EPP “detected the emergence of pan-European debates for the first time,” though polls in Germany and Austria suggested voters were not deeply influenced by these debates or the *Spitzenkandidaten*.² Indeed, Treib (2014) argues that, despite their reduced overall majority, the mainstream parties will seek to continue to sideline Euroskeptic parties—which could in turn induce an even stronger Euroskeptic backlash in the 2019 elections.

EP election outcomes and the EU’s popular legitimacy

Why observe European Parliament election results as an indicator of the EU’s popular legitimacy? One goal is to sidestep the prescriptive quality of the democratic deficit debate, wherein more EP authority “solves” (or not) the problem.³ More importantly, by evaluating EP election results as snapshots of general public attitudes (as opposed to voting behavior) we address the essential question of legitimacy of “governance beyond the nation-state.”

The European Union is a special case of supranational governance in part because the interaction of—and perhaps tradeoff between (see Crum 2012)—uniquely high levels of supranational authority and democratic governance. While occasional referenda on EU treaties offer *ad hoc*, country-specific insights into public attitudes toward the EU, EP elections offer regular, EU-wide indicators thereof. There are a number of reasons why EP voting is not just a *possible* indicator of public attitudes toward the EU, but an important—and valid—one.

The main reason to be cautious in interpreting results of EP elections as a reflection of public attitudes toward the EU or its policy regimes is that they might be “second-order elections”—indicative of voters’ relative satisfaction with national rather than EU-wide leadership and broader political and economic conditions (Reif & Schmitt 1980; Hix & Marsh 2007). This claim cannot simply be dismissed. EP elections still tend to go well for Europarties whose national affiliates are popular at home and poorly for those that are not, and turnout remains lower than most parliamentary elections within the member states.

Focusing on low turnout in EP elections, however, obscures two key points. First, turnout—42.5 percent overall in 2014, ranging from 90 percent in Belgium to 13 percent in Slovakia—is not significantly lower than in other comparable democracies (Corbett 2014). Turnout in US Congressional elections in 2014 were 36.4 percent. As Kriesi (2012) notes, voters use all elections—European, national, or local—to register their level of satisfaction with general political, economic, or other conditions. Second, from a methodological perspective, voting is a costly signaling mechanism for citizens and thus potentially more representative of “true opinion” than opinion surveys. Because voting is more costly responding to survey questions, election results may well be a more valid indicator of

² *Economist*, “The will to power,” 4 October 2014.

³ It is unclear whether greater authority for the European Parliament increases or decreases the EU’s democratic deficit if this authority is shifted upward from national parliaments, as opposed to horizontally from the European Council or European Commission. See Winzen et al. 2015. Fogarty & Wallsten 2013 question whether supranational institutions are the best focus for measuring the EU’s democratic deficit.

public attitudes toward the EU and its policies than Eurobarometer, European Social Survey, and Pew polls (which may have response rates lower than EP election turnout).

More importantly, EP elections may offer a valid indicator of public perceptions of both EU policies and its authority overall.⁴ Common arguments reinforcing the second-order election perspective focus on the absence of a single European *demos*⁵ or “public sphere” (Schlessinger 1999; Follesdal 2014) to truly Europeanize national political dynamics.⁶ Yet as several scholars have noted, the increasing politicization of the EU may transform simultaneous national elections into something more like a single European poll. The EU issue voting approach posits that EP elections increasingly reflect popular opinion about the nature and extent of European integration as opposed to national issues (see, for example, de Vries et al. 2011), and votes that seem to punish national governments might reflect voters’ discontent with national governments’ agreement to certain *European* policies (Treib 2014). Indeed, in a highly integrated EU (and especially euro area), both empirically and in the minds of voters, a sharp distinction between “national” and “European” policies may be increasingly difficult to discern.

The euro crisis intensified the connection between growing EU authority and politicization. As Kern et al. (2015) argue, the nature of political action in much of Europe may be shifting from “civil participation” to “grievance participation,” with communal grievances (such as those held by citizens of either “debtor” or “creditor” countries) shared across borders. From a broader perspective, Zürn and his collaborators (Zürn et al. 2012; de Wilde & Zürn 2012) argue that, like with other international institutions, politicization of the European Union is caused primarily by the growing scope of its authority—which in the EU has increased significantly with new fiscal and financial regimes adopted during the euro crisis.

Politicization has hampered functionalist EU integration and ushered in a constraining dissensus (Hooghe & Marks 2009). Yet, as Risse (2014) has argued, politicization might spur development of a European *demos* and public sphere. To the extent that citizens feel *European* grievances as a result of increasingly authoritative EU institutions’ policy choices, they may increasingly view EP elections as the appropriate mechanism to hold European (versus national) elites accountable for European policies—and, especially if they support far-right parties, to promote renationalization of certain policy areas. Thus it is appropriate to treat European Parliament elections as “first-order” elections that reflect public attitudes toward the EU, its leaders, and the supranational policy regimes they pursue.

⁴ Like de Wilde & Zürn (2012, 140), who address politicization in terms of “reactions to the EU policies and the polity,” I do not attempt to distinguish here between public attitudes toward EU policies on the one hand and overall EU authority on the other.

⁵ See the *Journal of European Public Policy*’s special issue on “*demoi-ocracy*” in the EU (22, 1, January 2015).

⁶ Abbornó & Zapryanova (2013) show how elite messaging at the national level can capitalize on (and reinforce) the absence of a European public sphere. They argue that publics are highly responsive to Euroskeptic messages from political elites, whether these messages emphasize “cultural threat” (particularly from immigration) or the democratic deficit (and the loss of national, popular sovereignty). This claim mirrors that of Frank (2004) vis-à-vis the American context. Frank argued Republican Party elites, though messaging, caused middle class and lower-middle class Kansans to vote against their economic interests.

Explaining public support for EU authority

How do we account for over-time and cross-national variation in EP voting outcomes? Here it is useful to connect literatures addressing general public support for the EU and specific voting behavior, distinguishing between approaches emphasizing economic versus non-economic factors.

A longstanding approach emphasizing economic conditions claims that citizens' relative support for EU integration reflects the extent to which it serves their economic interests. Rational voters are expected to reward political leaders when the economy is good and punish them when it is bad, whether at the local, national, or European level. This expectation undergirds neofunctionalism's emphasis on the "permissive consensus" for European integration: generally improving economic conditions lead the public to acquiesce to EU integration initiatives, and integration slows when economic conditions are more adverse (Lindberg & Scheingold 1970, Eichenberg & Dalton 1993, 2008).⁷ Thus we should expect EP elections to tilt toward pro-EU parties (especially incumbent ones) during times of broad-based economic expansion and against such parties during economic downturns.

Among noneconomic factors, the status of European (versus national-only) identity at the individual level and a collective European *demos* may also drive public support for the European Union. Some leading scholars argue (or strongly imply) individuals indicating some sense of European identity are more likely to support EU integration generally (Risse 2014, 2003; Stoeckel 2012; Habermas 1991). The nature of "strong" national identities may also affect support for the European Union: Hooghe & Marks (2004) demonstrated that individuals with a "positive" sense of national identity also tended to support European integration, while those with a "national-only" identity—i.e., denying any identification with Europe—tended toward Euroskepticism (see also Ecker-Ehrhardt 2014). Thus the broad expectation emerging from this literature is that pro-EU parties should fare better where and when levels of identification with the EU is comparatively higher.

Others have put forth a variant of the "contact hypothesis": longer or more intensive exposure to the European Union should increase public support for it (see Niedermayer & Sinnott 1995). Addressing international institutions generally, Ecker-Ehrhardt (2014: 8-9) argues, "societal actors...become more positive about international governance as the scope of international governance to which they are exposed widens." From this perspective, two distinct expectations emerge: levels of support for pro-EU parties should increase as the EU's authority increases, and citizens of more longstanding members of the European Union should be more supportive of pro-EU parties than those of newer members.

⁷ A major strand of the International Political Economy literature takes a more micro-level approach to societal preferences regarding international economic integration, emphasizing splits between labor and capital (Rogowski 1989) or between export-oriented and import-competing sectors (Frieden 1991).

Economic indivisibility

At this incipient stage, this paper does not attempt to test the above hypotheses, but rather uses them to define the ground for an alternative claim: that public support for the EU is shaped by citizens' perceptions of the extent to which their national (and personal) economic circumstances cannot be "decoupled" from that of their European partners. This approach implies a community built less on shared communal identities than on a shared perception of economic common fate—which Theiler (2012) called "instrumental loyalties" and I refer to as *economic indivisibility* (see Fogarty 2011).

The specific effect of economic indivisibility on support for the EU and pro-EU parties is currently held to be indeterminate. Citizens perceiving a high degree of indivisibility may support more intensive supranational management of economic interdependence, and thus support mainstream pro-EU parties. Alternatively, a strong sense of indivisibility may cause citizens to seek separation—to support nationalist parties that aim to renationalize policymaking authority, limiting or reducing vulnerability to externalities from other Europeans' policy choices.

Indivisibility—the impossibility of dividing the constituent parts of an integrated whole—is, like solidarity, a term with great rhetorical value but lacking conceptual clarity. Ruggie (1993) was among first to specify indivisibility in a multilateral governance context, claiming that multilateral institutions such as the UN Security Council and NATO were built on the principle of the indivisibility of security in the postwar world.⁸ He argued that indivisibility was "a social construction, not a technical condition: in a collective security scheme, states behave as if peace were indivisible and thereby make it so."

Economic indivisibility is thus the perception of a common economic fate, one that can be seen as positive or negative. The positive perception would induce *solidarity*: the belief that citizens of Europe cannot enjoy economic security unless all those within the community do, and thus mutual assistance must occur during times of distress. The negative perception would follow the logic of a *chain gang*: the belief that firm ties to distant others increases one's vulnerability to threats encountered (or initiated) by others in the gang. What connects these divergent vectors of indivisibility is the assumption that European citizens have an underlying sense of economic vulnerability—that economic security is fragile, and threats exist either "out there" (inducing solidaristic responses) or "in here" (inducing chain gang responses).

Essential to this conception of perceived common fate is the *actual* level of economic interdependence among European countries. Liberal and neofunctionalist theories posit that economic interdependence gives states incentives to sustain institutions that can manage interdependencies to mutual benefit (Keohane 1998; Stone Sweet & Sandholtz 1998; Schimmelfennig 2014). Yet as others (e.g., Milward 1993; Moravcsik 1998) have shown, economic interdependence is not a sufficient condition for European governments to choose to increase supranational economic management.

⁸ Prior to Ruggie, Deutsch et al. 1957 articulated the concept of "we-feeling" that comes closer to an identity-oriented community than "instrumental loyalties."

Hooghe (2003) offered an essential empirical insight into distinctions between elite and public views of the EU's role in managing mutual vulnerability. Whereas mainstream political elites tend to support European integration to manage interdependence and resulting policy externalities, European publics prefer European integration that sustains the welfare state—i.e., are focused on preserving existing national protections, rather than managing mutual sensitivity at the European level. Thus an increase in a *positive* sense of indivisibility among these publics would imply a convergence toward elite attitudes regarding the rationale for supranational economic management and perhaps a looser popular constraint in the EU's "constraining dissensus." An increase in a *negative* sense of indivisibility would imply divergence from elites and a turn toward Euroskepticism, based on fears that "European" problems (whether the euro crisis, immigration, or other status quo-upsetting dynamics) could undermine valued national protective structures.

Ecker-Ehrhardt's (2012, 2014) work on "cosmopolitan politicization" offers a clue as to the conditions under which economic indivisibility induces support for pro- v. anti-EU parties. Ecker-Ehrhardt demonstrates that rises in supranational institutions' authority (or "institutional gravity") tend to induce politicization (see also Zürn et al. 2012), and that this politicization has particular effects on the European electoral arena. In his study of German citizens' attitudes, Ecker-Ehrhardt (2012) found that people may, "believe that international institutions are desirable because of their superior capacity to solve transnational problems." More specifically, he claims,

German citizens' perceptions of transnational interdependencies (in terms of functional sensitivity as well as moral commitments) foster beliefs in the capacity of international institutions to solve problems. Remarkably, this relationship is moderated by citizens' sense of their own vulnerability, that is, their beliefs that the national government is incapable of solving such problems. (481)

In turn, Ecker-Ehrhardt (2014) found that one element of politicization, (national) political parties' adoption of platforms regarding international institutions, reflects these institutions' growing authority and the increasing salience of this fact for the public—and dissent from citizens with an exclusive national identity. Following Ecker-Ehrhardt's logic, we should expect publics with greater perceptions of economic indivisibility to offer greater support to pro-EU parties, except in places where a national-only identity is strongest.

Interdependence, indivisibility, and EP election results, 2004-2014

An initial presentation of descriptive data here aims to do three things. First, it establishes a baseline for *actual* economic interdependence over the last decade, demonstrating a mixed picture in which some decoupling seems to be occurring. Second, it presents an initial measure of economic indivisibility among citizens of the EU27, based on data drawn from the Eurobarometer. Third, it presents vote percentages for pro-EU parties over the last three European Parliament elections, and offers a few initial observations regarding a possible relationship with economic indivisibility.

EU interdependence, 2004-2014

Recently released fourth quarter 2014 data showed the two largest European economies, Germany and France, on divergent growth paths: the German economy expanded robustly, while the French economy stagnated. Is this reflective of a general decoupling of EU economies? Two indicators, GDP growth and intra-EU trade, offer a mixed picture.⁹

In an integrated European economy, one expectation is that the economic cycle affects member states' economies in similar ways. That is, while growth rates will necessarily vary based on different fundamentals, shared governance structures (especially in the euro area) as well as sensitivity to intra-EU trade should cause economies to move in tandem. A snapshot of EU economic growth since 2004 suggests decoupling has been limited.

Table 1. GDP growth in Europe, 2004-2014¹⁰

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Belgium	3.4	1.9	2.6	3.0	1.0	-2.6	2.5	1.6	0.1	0.3	1.0
Bulgaria	6.6	6.0	6.5	6.9	5.8	-5.0	0.7	2.0	0.5	1.1	n/a
Czech Rep	4.9	6.4	6.9	5.5	2.7	-4.8	2.3	2.0	-0.8	-0.7	2.2
Denmark	2.6	2.4	3.8	0.8	-0.7	-5.1	1.6	1.2	-0.7	-0.5	0.9
Germany	1.2	0.7	3.7	3.3	1.1	-5.6	4.1	3.6	0.4	0.1	1.6
Estonia	6.5	9.5	10.4	7.9	-5.3	-14.7	2.5	8.3	4.7	1.6	n/a
Ireland	4.6	5.7	5.5	4.9	-2.6	-6.4	-0.3	2.8	-0.3	0.2	n/a
Greece	5.0	0.9	5.8	3.5	-0.4	-0.4	-5.4	-8.9	-6.6	-3.9	0.8
Spain	3.2	3.7	4.2	3.8	1.1	-3.6	0	-0.6	-2.1	-1.2	1.3
France	2.8	1.6	2.4	2.4	0.2	-2.9	2.0	2.1	0.3	0.3	0.4
Italy	1.6	0.9	2.0	1.5	-1.0	-5.5	1.7	0.6	-2.3	-1.9	n/a
Cyprus	4.4	3.7	4.5	4.9	3.6	-2.0	1.4	0.3	-2.4	-5.4	n/a
Latvia	8.9	1.6	11.6	9.8	-3.2	-14.2	-2.9	5.0	4.8	4.2	2.4
Lithuania	n/a	0.9	7.4	11.1	2.6	-14.8	1.6	6.1	3.8	3.3	n/a
Luxembourg	4.9	3.9	4.9	6.5	0.5	-5.3	5.1	2.8	-0.2	2.0	n/a
Hungary	4.8	10.2	4.0	0.5	0.9	-6.6	0.8	1.8	-1.5	1.5	3.0
Malta	0.4	3.8	1.8	4.0	3.3	-2.5	3.5	2.2	2.5	2.5	n/a
Netherlands	1.9	2.3	3.8	4.2	2.1	-3.3	1.1	1.7	-1.6	-0.7	0.8
Austria	2.7	2.1	3.4	3.6	1.5	-3.8	1.9	3.1	0.9	0.2	0.3
Poland	5.1	3.5	6.2	7.2	3.9	2.6	3.7	4.8	1.8	1.7	3.3
Portugal	1.8	0.8	1.6	2.5	0.2	-3.0	1.9	-1.8	-3.3	-1.4	n/a
Romania	8.4	4.2	8.1	6.9	8.5	-7.1	-0.8	1.1	0.6	3.4	n/a
Slovenia	4.4	4.0	5.7	6.9	3.3	-7.8	1.2	0.6	-2.6	-1.0	n/a
Slovakia	5.2	6.5	8.3	10.7	5.4	-5.3	4.8	2.7	1.6	1.4	n/a
Finland	3.9	2.8	4.1	5.2	0.7	-8.3	3.0	2.6	-1.4	-1.3	n/a
Sweden	4.3	2.8	4.7	3.4	-0.6	-5.2	6.0	2.7	-0.3	1.3	1.9
UK	2.5	2.8	3.0	2.6	-0.3	-4.3	1.9	1.6	0.7	1.7	2.6
EU average*	2.5	2.0	3.4	3.1	0.5	-4.4	2.1	1.7	-0.4	0	
Std deviation	2.07	2.45	2.52	2.81	2.87	3.98	2.35	2.96	2.47	2.13	

Two initial observations pertain here. First, the standard deviation of GDP growth rates in 2013 was similar to that of 2004, suggesting variability isn't on an obvious upward trend.

⁹ There are, of course, many other vectors of economic (and especially financial) interdependence among EU member states, such as capital investment, bank lending, and other financial flows. The focus on GDP growth and trade emphasizes the "real" economy, whose dynamics are more likely to be felt by ordinary citizens.

¹⁰ Sources: World Bank, Eurostat, *Economist*. Note: EU average is for the EU28.

Growing variability between 2004 and 2008 followed from higher growth rates—and thus convergence toward western living standards—in central and eastern European countries. The higher dispersion in 2009 reflects different depths of economic contraction during the nadir of the global recession, and in subsequent years is swollen by Greece’s struggles. Second, among the largest EU economies, Germany and France in 2013 were both close to the EU27 mean (zero growth), while Italy and the UK were more divergent. To the extent that Franco-German connection is the most politically consequential, one will want to observe whether the end-2014 divergence is merely a blip or part of an emerging trend.

Table 2. Intra-EU exports as a percentage of total exports¹¹

	<u>2004</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>change, 2004-2014</u>
Belgium	77.1	75.7	70.1	-7.0
Bulgaria	n/a	65.5	60.1	-5.4
Czech Rep	87.7	85.2	81.1	-6.6
Denmark	70.8	67.7	63.5	-7.3
Germany	64.9	62.6	57.0	-7.9
Estonia	80.4	69.5	71.0	-9.3
Ireland	62.9	61.2	56.9	-6.0
Greece	66.9	57.9	46.6	-20.3
Spain	74.5	69.9	63.0	-11.5
France	66.1	62.6	59.3	-6.8
Italy	62.6	58.4	53.7	-8.9
Cyprus	67.5	67.0	58.0	-9.5
Latvia	77.4	67.7	66.4	-11.0
Lithuania	67.3	64.4	57.4	-9.9
Luxembourg	90.3	87.3	81.0	-9.2
Hungary	84.4	80.2	77.9	-6.5
Malta	49.4	40.1	42.6	-6.8
Netherlands	80.0	77.5	75.7	-4.3
Austria	74.9	72.8	70.0	-4.9
Poland	80.6	79.9	74.8	-5.8
Portugal	80.1	75.4	70.3	-9.8
Romania	n/a	74.5	69.6	-4.9
Slovenia	76.7	77.0	74.9	-1.8
Slovakia	87.2	86.3	83.0	-4.2
Finland	58.1	55.7	55.3	-2.8
Sweden	59.2	58.5	57.7	-1.5
UK	58.9	55.1	43.6	-15.3
Average	72.2	68.7	64.5	-7.6

Trends in intra-EU trade (shown in Table 2 above in intra-EU exports, focusing on EP election years), by contrast, suggest declining economic interdependence. Between 2004 and 2013, intra-EU exports as a percentage of the total fell 7.6 percent—and, notably, declined in every single EU member state. While it may be unsurprising that intra-EU exports fell the most in crisis-hit countries such as Greece (-20.3 percent), Spain (-11.5 percent), and Portugal (-9.8 percent)—reflecting more general declines in economic

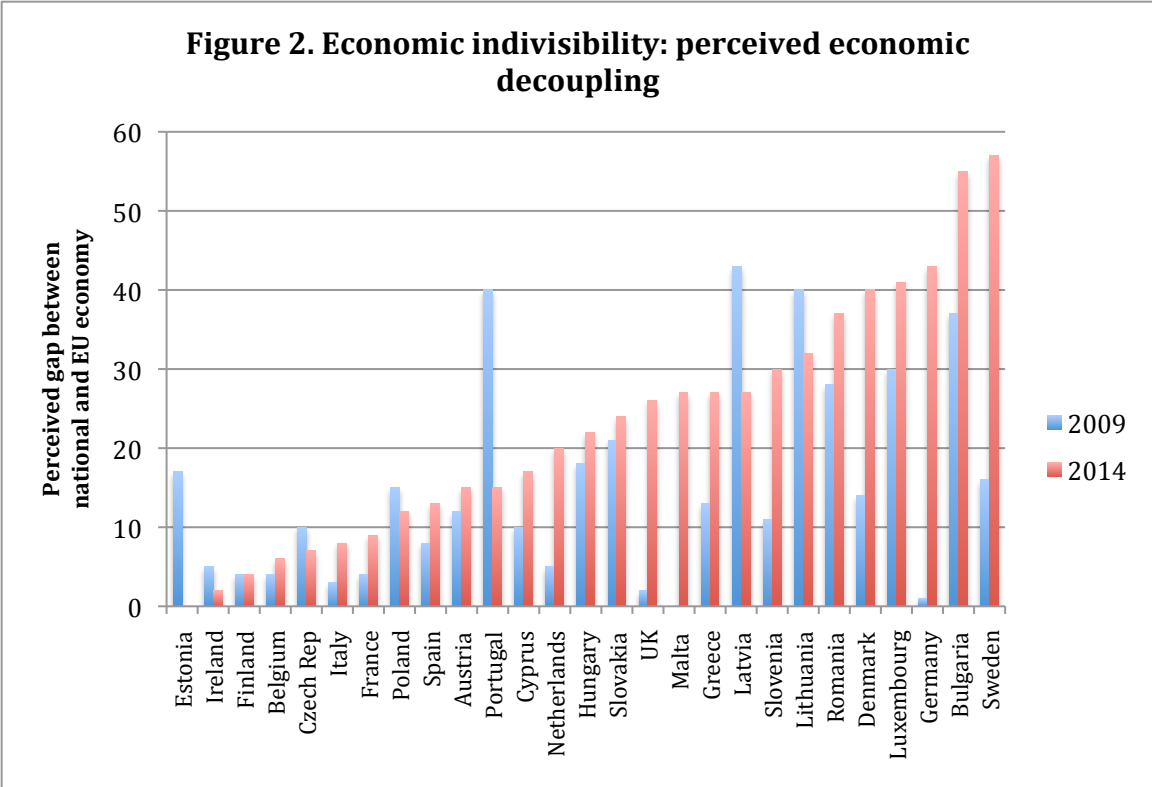
¹¹ Source: Eurostat.

activity—more significant is Germany’s falling trade with EU member states, which at 57 percent of overall German exports is almost 8 percent lower than ten years ago and remains below the EU average.

European economic indivisibility, 2009-2014

To what extent is the mixed picture of *empirical* trends in European interdependence matched by perceptions of indivisibility among citizens? Here only very initial observations are presented.

The primary questions are the measurement of perceptions of interconnectedness and the availability of data to capture this measure. An initial measurement assumption draws on the economic voting literature: citizens’ relative support for incumbent leaders reflects a perception the health of the national economy more than their personal financial status. As such, I have developed a measure of indivisibility that compares people’s perceptions of the health of the national economy to that of the European economy. The data come from the Eurobarometer public opinion surveys, which ask respondents, “How would you judge the situation of” (i.e., good or bad) the national and European economies. Figure 2 below depicts the absolute value of the difference between the two perceived “situations” in the EP election years of 2009 and 2014. A smaller gap (as in Estonia) indicates a higher level of indivisibility, which a larger gap (as in Sweden) indicates lower indivisibility.



A few caveats are in order before attempting to interpret these data. First, Eurobarometer surveys have a limited number of appropriate questions to evaluate the robustness of this measure. A comparison of perceptions of whether the national and EU economies were “moving in the right direction” produced lower average gaps and standard deviations, but their year-to-year variation tracked that of the main indivisibility measure. Second, the Eurobarometer did not include questions about the current economic situation in their country or the EU until 2006, making it impossible to include indivisibility data for the 2004 election year. So, to give a fuller picture of over-time change in indivisibility than that presented in Figure 2, Table 3 below shows annual scores for each member state during 2006-2014.

Table 3. Economic indivisibility, 2006-2014

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>avg, 2006-14</u>
Belgium	2	4	3	4	1	7	7	13	6	2.9
Bulgaria	n/a	43	40	37	39	31	36	42	55	40.4
Czech Rep	27	26	12	10	11	4	10	14	7	13.4
Denmark	15	17	16	14	14	34	35	37	40	24.7
Germany	10	2	2	1	32	47	48	45	43	27.6
Estonia	1	10	17	17	11	9	3	7	0	8.3
Ireland	14	10	4	5	14	0	3	6	2	6.4
Greece	47	40	14	13	11	16	15	21	27	22.7
Spain	4	7	3	8	7	2	11	14	13	7.7
France	12	17	8	4	4	1	0	7	9	7.6
Italy	16	18	0	3	5	2	1	4	8	6.3
Cyprus	12	1	20	10	5	0	9	15	17	9.9
Latvia	51	46	33	43	41	24	25	30	27	35.6
Lithuania	32	44	37	40	46	24	28	33	32	35.1
Luxembourg	20	24	25	30	43	58	48	42	41	36.8
Hungary	56	48	27	18	17	9	13	15	22	25.0
Malta	23	3	10	0	5	20	27	35	27	16.7
Netherlands	15	11	10	5	22	39	21	6	20	16.6
Austria	8	9	17	12	23	36	32	27	15	19.9
Poland	52	30	17	15	12	1	10	16	12	18.3
Portugal	40	13	3	40	1	0	1	6	15	13.2
Romania	n/a	38	30	28	37	25	23	33	37	31.4
Slovenia	18	18	3	11	19	9	19	28	30	17.2
Slovakia	43	24	8	21	17	3	8	14	24	18.0
Finland	11	12	22	4	23	43	34	16	4	18.8
Sweden	22	18	19	16	60	77	65	65	57	44.3
UK	16	6	17	2	2	8	13	16	26	11.8
EU average	22.7	20.0	14.9	15.2	19.3	19.5	20.2	22.5	22.8	19.9
St deviation	16.4	14.7	11.5	13.0	15.9	20.4	16.5	15.1	15.5	11.4

A few observations can be made about over-time and cross-national variation in indivisibility. As the EU averages show, financial and economic struggles after 2009 seem to have reversed an initial convergence on higher levels of indivisibility. In all but a few member states, the gap in 2014 was higher—in some cases, much higher—than in 2009. The highest gaps (and thus lowest indivisibility) were primarily among countries in central

and eastern Europe—countries that either do not use the euro or adopted it only within the last couple of years.¹² There is some differentiation after 2011 in creditor and debtor countries: crisis-beset countries Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, and Cyprus saw declining indivisibility, while creditors Finland, Austria, and the Netherlands bucked the overall trend with higher or rising indivisibility.

Two member states that do not fit this creditor-debtor differentiation, Ireland and Germany, present an interesting contrast. A test of the Irish public's perception of indivisibility came with a 2012 referendum on the Fiscal Compact, a treaty among 25 member states that further empowers the EU vis-à-vis national governments in budgeting. Given not only the hardships of austerity the Irish were experiencing under the terms of the rescue program but also their history of rejecting EU treaties, it is notable that they supported the treaty with a 60 percent majority. This suggests a convergence of opinion with the Irish political elites, who campaigned for the treaty based on economic necessity. By contrast, Germans experienced the biggest single increase in the perceived gap between the national and European economies after 2009. This large gap is unsurprising due to the relative health of the German economy compared to countries receiving European rescues—a situation that also applies to Sweden and Denmark. But it also reflects a persistent gap between political elites and the public in Germany with respect to the “interdependence rationale” for supranational macroeconomic management by the European Union (Fogarty & Wallsten 2013).

European Parliament election results, 2004-2014

How do these observations of economic indivisibility map onto election results in the European Parliament (see Table 4)? Again, interpretation at this stage must be done with a great deal of caution, but a few observations are possible.

¹² This observation suggests a variant on the “contact hypothesis”: the longer Europeans are exposed to EU (and perhaps euro area) authority, the more aware of their common economic fate they become.

Table 4. Vote percentages for mainstream parties in European elections, 2004-2014

	<u>2004</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2014</u>
EU ¹³	81.7	79.9	69.4
Belgium	85	86.2	86.4
Bulgaria	n/a	73.6	88.3
Czech Rep.	32.7	32.2	60.0
Denmark	77.7	77.6	65.3
Germany	86.5	83.6	79.5
Estonia	84.5	91.4	87.4
Ireland	72.1	69.0	54.8
Greece	77.1	74.5	42.0
Spain	90.6	93.2	62.1
France	71.5	69.1	53.6
Italy	75.1	84.9	68.4
Cyprus	52.2	52.1	46.8
Latvia	56.4	56.1	76.6
Lithuania	72.8	57.7	58.7
Luxembourg	89.1	86.3	78.9
Hungary	94.8	81.2	78.9
Malta	97.5	96.9	96.4
Netherlands	80.2	64.3	58.9
Austria	78.9	63.7	73.7
Poland	40.8	66.2	52.3
Portugal	77.8	66.6	81.2
Romania	n/a	88.4	77.3
Slovenia	88.0	86.5	69.1
Slovakia	66.7	83.8	66.2
Finland	84.4	78.3	75.9
Sweden	70.6	78.0	75.6
UK	71.9	39.6	41

mainstream parties/groups

EPP, PES, ELDR/ALDE, EGP, EFA, EDP

left Euroskeptic parties/groups

PEL, GUE/NGL

right Euroskeptic parties/groups

ECR/AECR, EFD/EFDD, AEN

not included

NI

A first observation is that, overall, there seems to be some correlation between trends in indivisibility and voting for mainstream parties. The vote percentage for mainstream parties was relatively unchanged (and increased slightly in many countries) from 2004 to 2009, during a period in which indivisibility was increasing (see Table 3). One major exception to this trend was the UK, whose pro-EU party vote declined less as a result of voter choices than of the Conservative Party's defection from the mainstream EPP to the Euroskeptic ECR. Alternatively, the 2014 European elections brought higher vote tallies to Euroskeptic parties during a period in which indivisibility broadly declined (see Figure 2).

Second, with the exception of Bulgaria and the UK, the countries in which the vote percentage of mainstream parties increased in 2014—Belgium, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, and Portugal—had increasing or comparatively high indivisibility. While this is too tenuous a relationship to draw real conclusions from, it does seem to support the

¹³ Vote percentages are for the EU25 in 2004, EU27 in 2009, and EU28 in 2014.

first observation of a possible positive correlation between indivisibility and pro-EU party voting—and thus the “solidarity” version of the indivisibility proposition.

That said, other observations suggest a good deal of caution in drawing conclusions. Several countries with high or increasing levels of indivisibility—including Estonia, Ireland, Finland, Italy, France, Poland, and Spain—saw declines in support for pro-EU parties in 2014. Meanwhile, stable support for mainstream parties in Germany—consistent with the re-election of Angela Merkel’s center-right-led coalition in September 2013—contrasts with the big decrease in Germans’ perceived indivisibility from 2009 to 2014. More generally, initial scatterplots with data points for all twenty-seven EU members suggest something close to the expected positive relationship between indivisibility and pro-EU party vote in the 2009 election, but no obvious correlation in the 2014 elections.

Though more data collection and analysis is required before more confident conclusions can be drawn, it seems that indivisibility in itself has some effect but not one that is manifestly powerful or consistent across countries.

Conclusion

Like Robert Schuman more than sixty years earlier, former European Commission President Jacques Delors expressed a certain vision of collective action:

I give real importance to the idea of “wanting to live together” ...Accepting interdependence is a cornerstone of this “wanting to act together,” which itself is a condition of “wanting to live together.” (Delors 2012: 177)

As a quintessential European political elite, Delors’ vision is consistent with the expected elite rationale for European management of interdependence. Yet this vision goes beyond a mere technocratic rationale for EU collective action: it aims to connect economic interdependence to shared beliefs about common fate.

This paper represents an initial attempt to examine the nature and extent of public beliefs in economic common fate—i.e., of indivisibility—and its relationship to support for pro-EU parties in the European Parliament. Subsequent iterations of the paper will begin more in-depth testing of hypotheses, and will pay particular attention to the interactive effect of indivisibility with other “community” variables—notably a sense of trust in others and identification with Europe, as per Ecker-Ehrhardt (2014) and Hooghe & Marks (2004).

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