

**Rational Parties, Radical Voters?  
Fringe Party Recruitment Strategies at the National & European Levels**

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**Rational Parties, Radical Voters?  
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Scholars and practitioners alike have long noted the relative lack of interest in European Parliament (EP) elections, both on the part of the voting public and from mainstream national politicians (Hix and Marsh 2007; Hobolt, Spoon, and Tilley 2009; Reif and Schmitt 1980; Reif 1984; Schmitt 2005). Within the academic literature, this has led to a characterization of EP elections as being ‘second order’ in interest to both European voters and political parties, as compared with national political contests. It also contributes to portrayals of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) as a klatch of political amateurs, retirees, or fringe extremists—even as the real legislative powers of the EP have greatly expanded since the initiation of direct European elections in 1979 (Kreppel 2002).

Indeed, the analytical narrative remains that the EP is disproportionately comprised of fringe elements and extremist parties – happily installed by a select rump of the full voting public, that itself is rife with absenteeism during EP elections. The recent European elections of May 2014 provide ample support for this thesis, as groups like French National Front (FN) and United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) dominated both campaign coverage and the electoral returns themselves. While these one-sided characterizations of MEPs as amateurs and extremists are certainly overblown (Daniel 2013; Meserve, Pemstein, and Bernhard 2009; Navarro 2009a), it remains the case that smaller fringe parties do continue to outperform their mainstream national rivals during European elections in many ways (i.e., Schmitt 2005).

One popular explanation for why fringe parties do so well in EP elections is that EP voters are less politically aware or interested in the particular issue areas addressed by EU politics and are thus more comfortable in voting with their 'hearts,' rather than with their 'minds.' While scholars have spent some time exploring the impact of second-order elections on the behavior of voters, comparatively less attention has been given to what impact the second-order election hypothesis may have on the behavior of political parties responsible for fielding candidates at multiple levels of elected office, as well as on the professional ambitions of individual politicians seeking election, themselves.

Accordingly, this paper explores the rational incentive for politicians from European political parties that operate outside of the mainstream of national political systems to focus their attention disproportionately on EP elections, as compared with their more mainstream national analogues. This proposition should thus result in an alternative logic of candidate selection and nomination practices for fringe parties, which in focusing disproportionately on EP elections will also stack them with experienced incumbents that can serve quality candidates, more so than the traditional governing parties. This logic would also indicate that fringe parties will also consider EP elections to be potentially more important to their long term successes than national ones. In other words, whereas the second-order election hypothesis suggests that parties and voters alike will treat EP elections as less important than national competitions, this paper challenges the assumption for parties outside of the mainstream, which may actually treat EP elections as their *first-order* contests.

In the following section, I define what is meant by fringe parties and develop two alternative ways of operationalizing this concept. I then use a discussion of the extant literature on fringe groups and their relationship to second-order elections to craft a theory of candidate selection that assumes that fringe parties will be more likely than mainstream ones to promote incumbent in EP elections and will thus focus disproportionately on EP elections, as compared with national contests. I then develop and test a range of hypotheses related to this theory, using original data collected on all individual members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from the two most recently completed waves of parliament, 2004-2014. In doing so, I am able to provide empirical support to my claim that MEPs from fringe parties will be more likely to select quality candidates in EP races, rather than MEPs from mainstream parties—particularly when these EP elections are held in ‘off years’ from national contests.

### **I. First-Order Elections for Second-Order Parties?**

Before testing the assumption that fringe parties may actually treat EP contests as first order, as compared with their mainstream counterparts, I must first define what exactly is meant by fringe parties, as well as explore how these parties and their constituent politicians may have a different set of opportunity structures, as compared with mainstream parties, when it comes to selecting candidates for electoral contests. I couch this discussion in the extant literature on candidate selection in EP elections, in order to present my theory that fringe political parties will treat EP elections with greater attention than their mainstream national rivals, in selecting experienced candidates for European contests.

*What is a Fringe Party?*

Throughout the paper, I refer to ‘fringe’ parties as a general category for those political parties that operate outside of the mainstream of national political life. Fringe parties have traditionally been smaller than mainstream parties—in terms of their representation at the national level—and enter into governing coalitions less frequently or not at all. They may or may not have radical or extreme ideological agendas. While the bulk of research on fringe parties in Europe has typically centered on radical right-wing and right-wing populist parties (i.e., Carter 2005; Ignazi 2006; Norris 2005), plenty of research also exists on pro-regionalist and separatist parties, single-issue Eurosceptic parties, and parties from the far left. For the purposes of this paper, I acknowledge that fringe parties of all stripes may espouse very different beliefs and goals, but also face similar structural challenges when it comes to accessing elected power.

As noted above, fringe parties are typically defined as such, either in relation to their size or because of their non-mainstream ideological agendas. For the purposes of this paper, I consider both of these factors in turn. First, if parties are to be considered as fringe groups because they are ideologically extreme, then we might expect that they espouse beliefs that are so incompatible with mainstream governance that it is impossible for them to enter into governing coalitions. As represented in the EP, these national political parties will likely be found among the far left (GUE/NGL), Eurosceptic (EFD), and non-aligned (NI) party groups. Table 1 lists all of the national political parties

represented in the EP, 2009-2014, that were members of these three blocs and might therefore be considered as fringe parties, due to their ideologically extreme nature.<sup>2</sup>

[ Table 1 about here. ]

Second, parties might be considered to be fringe groups simply because they are too small to have a dominating effect on national politics. Norris' (2005) work on the major challenges faced by far-right parties in Europe considers a number of these structural hurdles that may also apply to other smaller parties, outside of the far right. In addition to the presence or lack of certain social cleavages that may be receptive to radical ideologies, fringe parties are often hampered by institutional barriers to entry, restrictive electoral systems, as well as intraparty organizational problems. Institutional barriers might include difficulties accessing ballots and registering for elections, as well as constitutional and other legal barriers meant to prevent the entrance of extreme ideologies into the government. Electoral barriers include the absence of proportional seat allocations—which favor the entry of smaller parties into the legislature—and restrictive electoral thresholds. Organizational challenges for parties include procuring campaign funding, party institutionalization and discipline, and sustainable access to grassroots movements.<sup>3</sup>

While each of these factors may penalize smaller parties in national competitions, many of these issues are somewhat less of a concern in European elections. As pertains

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<sup>2</sup> Four notable exceptions from these political groups are not included in the list of proposed fringe parties, as they have historically entered into governing coalitions in their home countries. These are the Austrian Freedom Party, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, the Movement for France, and the Cypriot Progressive Party of Working People.

<sup>3</sup> For additional work on right-wing parties in Europe and their comparative successes and failures, see also Carter (2005), Ignazi (2006), and Williams (2006).

to electoral systems, EU regulations require that EP elections be held using some form of proportional representation—even in countries that use majoritarian systems to elect their national parliaments. As relates to other institutional barriers to entry, a recent German court ruling even went as far as to effectively end the use of electoral thresholds in European elections; campaign funding, at least for existing parties and party groups, is also heavily supported by the EU; ballot access requirements are also typically easier than in national elections. As a result, the EP is oftentimes more institutionally conducive to supporting smaller parties than are national parliaments.

This second, more mechanical, definition of a fringe party is clearly related to the first in a number of ways. Returning to Table 1, we can see that many of the political parties that espouse fringe ideologies also earned relatively low shares of the vote in both recent EU and national elections. While many fringe parties outperformed their most recent national scores in the 2014 EP elections, it is also worth noting that the more proportional nature of EP elections means that parties that are blocked from national parliaments may still find seats in the EP, even with lower scores. This reality brings us to a discussion about how the nature of European elections may condition a different set of opportunity structures for fringe parties to recruit quality candidates in EP, rather than in national elections, and thereby treat the EP as their first order contest.

#### *Fringe party behavior in EP Elections*

While institutional barriers to entry may prevent ideologically extreme, as well as other smaller fringe parties, from big gains in national elections, they have traditionally been less effective at keeping such parties out of EP elections. Kousser (2004) explores a

number of the explanations for the success of fringe parties in the EP. Among them, small parties tend to do better in EP, rather than in national elections, because they absorb both protest votes against major governing parties, as well as unfavorable retrospective economic evaluations of their home economic situations. Voters also feel less strategic when it comes to EP elections; accordingly, Kousser posits that votes for smaller parties in European elections can be seen as more 'sincere' than those votes cast in national competitions.

The idea that EP voters will vote more so with their 'hearts' than their 'minds' also extends back to Reif and Schmitt's (1980) initial exploration of the second-order election hypothesis. However, it is also related to the decision that politicians face when deciding whether or not to run for election at the European level, as well as the decision that national parties face in deciding whether or not to select a candidate for a European or for a national contest (see, for example, work by Bhatti and Hansen, 2011, Hix and Marsh, 2007, and Hobolt and Wittrock, 2011).

A continued lack of interest in European elections on the part of both national voters and mainstream politicians also means that the connection between national political party organizations and the representatives selected by these political parties to serve at the EP level can be particularly tenuous. Jensen and Spoon (2010) explore the persistent lack of a connection between national parties and their MEPs. However, one unexpected finding from their work is that niche parties in the EP (such as the fringe parties described above) operate relatively independently from national party organizations, unless their party is in government domestically (see also work by



Thorlakson, 2005, on the organizational mismatch between national and European political parties).

Such work suggests that political parties that cannot control decision-making at the national level or that are unable to win representation in national governments may instead use the EP as a sort of surrogate home base—in other words, their first-order political institution. On the other hand, the disconnect between central party decision-makers and their representatives at the EU level is perhaps even more problematic in mainstream parties, as studies of major West European party families have suggested that EU membership has only led to an increasing centralization of decision-making taken by a handful of political party elites at the national level (i.e., Hertner 2013; Raunio 2002). This leads us to a discussion of why fringe parties may actually treat candidate selection for EP elections more attentively than their mainstream analogues.

## **II. Why Fringe Parties Ought to Behave Differently in EP Elections**

Thus far I have identified a particular subset of European political parties that operate outside of the mainstream and have thus traditionally faced substantial barriers to entry in the national political scene. However, these parties do perform comparatively better in continent-wide elections for the EP—which are traditionally less contested elections and are also of lesser interest to many voters. I have further suggested that many mainstream political parties have yet to adapt to the multi-level nature of elections in the EU effectively and continue to focus primarily on the national level, when it comes to selecting candidates for election and making policy decisions. If party organizations have become increasingly centralized in directing EU affairs, but

fringe parties perform better in EP—rather than in national—elections, might it be that fringe parties will actually treat EP elections as their ‘first order’ contests, when it comes time to select candidates and contest elections at both levels?

### *Candidate Selection and Political Ambition*

The variables of candidate selection practices and the professional ambitions of politicians are both highly connected and related to the question of fringe party behavior. At a theoretical level, Hazan and Rahat (2006), as well as Rahat (2009), offer the most concrete discussion of potential comparative candidate selection methods in Europe—which can either be driven by a limited clique of party leaders, the broader party membership, or even a public primary. Numerous other scholars have explored the dynamics of specific countries and party systems within this framework, exposing the many different candidate selection practices coexisting in EP elections (Chiva 2012; Gallagher et al. 1988; Gherghina and Chiru 2010; Lundell 2004; Poguntke 2007).

Less explored, however, is the extent to which candidate selection practices condition the individual ambitions of politicians. Particularly within the EP, the literature on the comparative professional ambitions of MEPs has remained somewhat chaotic, contradictory, and even inconclusive (see, for example, work by Meserve, Pemstein, and Bernhard 2009; Navarro 2009b; Scarrow 1997). While Daniel (2015) offers a theory for the career behavior of MEPs that examines the effect of legislative professionalization and party organization in varying European regime types, the mediating effect of political parties to control the professional fortunes of candidates at the European and national levels remains mostly unexplored.

*A Theory of Fringe Party Behavior in EP Elections*

In this paper, I propose that parties from outside of the political mainstream have a rational incentive to focus their energies on EP, as compared with national elections—where they have traditionally performed worse and where barriers to entry are higher. If fringe parties are indeed treating EP elections as their ‘first-order’ contests, then we might expect to see evidence of this in the displayed professional ambitions of fringe party politicians. Put in the language of Schlesinger (1966), I expect that fringe party politicians will demonstrate a greater degree of ‘static ambition’ than their mainstream colleagues—and thus seek reelection to the EP at higher rates. In other words, I expect to observe the following:

**H1. Politicians from fringe parties will be more likely to seek reelection the EP.**

Another way of thinking about this is that fringe parties have an incentive to select quality candidates for elections. In the broader literature on campaigns, candidate quality is often synonymous with candidate experience, which can be defined here as those candidates with prior experience in EP. In other words, if a fringe party is more interested in retaining and expanding upon its share of the EP than a mainstream party, then we ought to observe higher rates of incumbent MEPs from these parties attempting seeking reelection. This relationship can also be tested with a more general indicator of party size – and thus strength:

**H2. The greater the political party’s share of the vote in the most recent national election, the less likely a politician from that party will seek reelection the EP.**

In other words, we should expect that larger parties in national elections may be less interested in EP contests, as they are predominantly preoccupied with the task of

national governing. If this is the case, the reverse should also hold true. Smaller parties, who have a heightened opportunity for success at the EP level, will focus on winning these elections by nominating established MEPs to seek reelection at greater rates. One potential confounding factor, however, is that European elections are not always held in concert with national contests—which vary in accordance with domestic electoral systems and laws. Therefore, the decision to seek reelection to the EP should also be conditioned by the degree to which European elections correspond with the national electoral calendar. For this consideration, I expect the following:

**H3. Fringe parties will be more likely to nominate incumbent MEPs for reelection than mainstream ones, particularly when national contests have not been held for some time.**

If MEPs from fringe parties are more interested in securing an electoral victory in the EP—either because of a personal interest in the institution or because they believe that they can more easily secure a seat there—then we should expect them to run for reelection to the EP in higher rates, particularly when EP elections are held at the ‘midterm’ period or in an off year between national elections. While there are relatively few instances in which national elections are held during the exact same period as EP votes (although this was the case for the 2014 Belgian regional and federal elections), MEPs from smaller parties will be forced to prioritize their electoral ambitions in such a way that maximizes their possibility of winning in a world in which there are not only scarcer resources available to them than found in mainstream parties, but also fewer quality (experienced) candidates available to run for multiple levels of office.

Work done by proponents of the second-order hypothesis also states that minor parties should perform better in EP elections than in national ones, because voters use EP elections to punish the major political parties. When EP election calendars are clearly distinct from national elections, MEPs from smaller parties have a rational incentive to seek reelection, because they are the most likely to benefit from voters frustrated with the current national government. Thus, the more time since a national election has been held, the greater the likelihood that fringe parties will benefit from retrospective evaluations made by voters of their national governments. Furthermore, if the national election has not been held in some time, it will also be more likely to be held soon. In this case, the EP election may actually serve as a sort of electoral barometer for the national contest. In either case, fringe parties should stand to benefit from EP elections that are held separately from national one and will thus seek reelection to the EP at higher rates.

### **III. Data and Method: New Evidence from the MEP Careers Dataset**

To explore the relationship between fringe parties and the career behavior of MEPs, I use original individual-level data for all MEPs from the two most recently completed waves of the EP, 2004-2014<sup>4</sup>. Sources for biographical data include Høyland, Sircar, and Hix's (2009) tool for extracting publicly available biographical data from the EP website, further data taken EU websites, as well as a variety of public records kept by the EP CARDOC archives in Luxembourg, national political archives in France and

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<sup>4</sup> A number of the control variables used in this study were initially collected for all MEPs, starting with the first European elections of 1979, and the findings of this paper are largely corroborated by this longer timespan. For more information on the full MEP careers dataset project, see Daniel (2013) and (2015).

Germany, and various other research library holdings. Official electoral lists for the 2014 campaign were consulted using Burson-Marsteller's "Europe Decides" project<sup>5</sup>. The unit of analysis is individual MEP-legislature, with a total of 1733 observations in the full sample used for this paper—representing observations for nearly all politicians serving in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> sessions of the EP. Missing data, although relatively minimal, is distributed randomly across MEP backgrounds—suggesting a lack of major concern that gaps in the data will bias the empirical results.

#### *Dependent Variable*

The main dependent variable used throughout the empirical analysis is taken from an unordered indicator for an individual MEP's career **outcome** following the conclusion of the EP term in question. For the purposes of this paper, the unordered variable is then recoded to dichotomously test for an MEP's decision to **seek reelection** to the EP. Figure 1 provides some context to the future career paths of MEPs that do not seek reelection to the EP, following their mandate, 1979-2009. As it is not yet clear where MEPs from the 2009-2014 EP that did not seek reelection last month with inevitably move to next, the dependent variable used in the regression analysis considers only those MEPs that *were* selected by their parties to seek reelection. The selection of an incumbent can thus demonstrate the presence of a personal ambition to remain in the EP for the following term. As displayed in Figure 1, the plurality of outgoing MEPs typically seek reelection—although they do so to a lesser degree than is found in many national legislatures.

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<sup>5</sup> Publically available here: <http://europedecides.eu>

[ Figure 1 about here. ]

### *Independent Variables*

Independent variables of interest and their related hypotheses are **Fringe Party** (H1), **National Vote** (H2), and **Election Clock** (H3). Summary statistics for all variables used in the displayed regression analyses are listed in the Appendix. **Fringe Party** is a dichotomous indicator for MEPs hailing from a national political party that appears on Table 1 and captures those parties with an ideologically extreme position. These parties are further separated into dichotomous indicators of **Far Left**, **Eurosceptic**, and **Non-Aligned** MEPs in certain models. As posited by H1, I expect that parties from the ideological fringe will be more likely to seek reelection to the EP.

**National Vote** is a continuous variable that represents the vote share of the MEP's national political party in the most recent national legislative elections, prior to the 2009 and 2014 elections. According to H2, a larger vote share should indicate the presence of a more mainstream party and thus a decreased likelihood of reelection seeking in the European elections. All observations are coded at the national party level, except for elections in which multiple national parties or party factions ran under the same list—in which case the total party list vote is counted.<sup>6</sup> As indicated in some models, this variable is also recoded as a dichotomous indicator for parties receiving more than 10% of the vote in the most recent national election. Party vote share—as

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<sup>6</sup> One major exception to this rule is the Belgian political parties, in which the vote shares for parties from different language groups were added (i.e., the Dutch and French Liberals were coded as one party). This is done to avoid artificially biasing party vote-share downward and is acceptable, considering that Belgian national coalitions must contain equal members of Dutch and French ministers—thus both language parties are typically included in a governing coalition.

opposed to the share of the legislature—is used as a means of acknowledging the widely divergent electoral systems present across all EU member states.

**Election Clock** is a count variable for the number of years elapsed since the most recent national legislative election and is counted from the EP election dates in 2009 and 2014. According to H3, fringe party MEPs whose national legislatures have more recently held elections will stand to benefit less from EP elections than those whose elections are a few years out. Another way of thinking about this variable is to consider those countries where four years have already passed since legislative elections. In such cases, fringe MEPs will likely benefit from midterm evaluations of the governing party and assumptions about the outcome of the pending national elections. In either case, I expect that higher values of this variable will positively impact fringe parties MEPs to seek reelection. This is interacted with both measures for fringe parties, as described above.

#### *Control Variables*

**EP Delegation Size** measures the number of MEPs present in the country's full national delegation. I expect that larger delegations (such as France or Germany) will have more diversity and fluidity in the career behavior of their members, as there are more seats available to them. **New Member State** is a dichotomous variable for the 12 member states that acceded to the EU between 2004 and 2007, the 6<sup>th</sup> EP, and for Croatia, who acceded to the EU during the 7<sup>th</sup> EP. I expect that new members will be more enthusiastic about seeking reelection to the EP than their Western counterparts during their first term.



**Local Elections** is a trichotomous indicator of the presence of direct subnational elections in a given MEP's home country and is taken from the *dpi\_state* indicator initially developed by Beck et al. (2001; as mentioned by Teorell et al. 2011), which is a leading indicator for the functional presence of federalism in a country (Blume and Voigt 2011; Voigt and Blume 2012). Countries with no direct subnational elections were coded with 0, countries with either a directly elected subnational executive or a legislature were coded with 1, and those with both a directly elected subnational legislature and an executive were coded with 2. Higher values of **Local Elections** indicate an important source of variation for functional federal organization. I expect that MEPs from more federal countries will be more likely to seek reelection (for more on this hypothesis, see Chapter 4 of Daniel 2015).

**Rapporteurships** is a count variable for the number of times that an individual MEP served as committee rapporteur during a given legislative period. Rapporteurs are a prestigious office within the EP, bestowed upon active MEPs who shepherd legislative proposals through the legislative process—assembling a majority opinion within the committee and serving as the point person for debates on a policy proposal prior to the taking of a plenary vote (Benedetto 2005; Daniel 2013; Kaeding 2004; Yoshinaka, Mcelroy, and Bowler 2010). I assume that MEPs who are assigned relatively high numbers of reports have succeeded in self-selecting their participation into this elite group of legislators. In other words, these politicians signal the ambition to remain in their current job. Similarly, MEPs who seek out **Leadership** positions—whether serving

as group coordinator, committee chair or committee vice chair—are also signaling a personal investment or desire to remain in the EP.

A number of demographic differences are also considered, such as an MEP's **Age** at the end of the given legislative period, **Female** MEPs, and MEPs who were **Dropouts**—having left office prior to the conclusion of their term—which were also accounted for. Finally, MEPs that have already served at least one term are coded with the dichotomous indicator for **Seniority**.

#### **IV. Results and Discussion: Smaller Parties, Higher Stakes**

[ Table 2 about here.]

Table 2 displays principal regression coefficients from the logistic regression analysis, with standard errors reported below in parentheses. Robust standard errors were estimated in the models and are clustered by individual MEPs (that presumably could have appeared in both observed waves). As the comparative magnitude of logistic coefficient values are not directly interpretable, marginal effects plots are described below, in order to discuss the substantive significance of statistically significant coefficients.

Models 1 and 4 estimate the effects of national party size and ideological extremeness on the selection of outgoing MEPs to seek reelection, without interacting these variables with the national electoral clock. As a baseline, these models provide only modest support for H1 and H2, although Model 1 does indicate that non-aligned MEPs (that typically come from far-right parties, such as the French National Front or Austria Freedom Party) do seem to seek reelection more readily than other MEPs, all

else held equal. Control variables, displayed on the right-hand portion of the table, consistently provide evidence for a number of the mitigating factors that might be expected to influence an MEP's reselection, as discussed above.

Once the interaction posited by H3 is included in the models, however, additional support for each of the hypotheses begins to emerge. In Model 2, the electoral clock is shown to have a positive and significant effect on the decision of MEPs to seek reelection, specifically when they come from parties that received 0% of the national election results (in other words, their parties did not even contest the national elections). The substantive significance of this interaction is plotted using predicted probabilities for real existing values in the data and is displayed in Figure 2.

[ Figure 2 about here. ]

Figure 2 displays the conditional probability that an MEP will stand for reelection, given his or her party's national vote share in the most recent national election and the time elapsed since that election was held. While the graph clearly displays that mainstream parties (that received a larger share of the national vote) do not treat EP elections significantly differently based upon the electoral clock (displayed here as a total convergence of the lines representing the electoral clock), there do appear to be significant differences for the smaller parties, based upon the national electoral calendar. More specifically, an MEP from a small party that did not stand in the national election (and thus received 0% of the vote) is nearly 25% more likely to be selected to stand for reelection, when that national election was held four years ago – rather than

in the same year – with varying degrees of differentiation in between. This general pattern is mitigated as the national vote share of the party increases.

[ Figure 3 about here. ]

Presented in starker terms, Figure 3 provides a similar graph based upon Model 3, which dichotomizes political parties into ‘large’ and ‘small,’ depending upon whether they received more or less than 10% of the national vote. Although the selection of the 10% threshold is somewhat arbitrary (it was selected because it is twice the German threshold for entry into the *Bundestag*, which is often considered to be the watermark for what can be considered ‘too small’ to enter into a parliament), party size very much seems to matter when it comes to selecting MEPs—particularly as EP elections become increasingly removed from national ones. As demonstrated by the figure, MEPs hailing from smaller parties have nearly a 70% likelihood of seeking reelection to the EP, when their home country has not held an election in four years – a figure that is nearly 15% higher than the relative likelihood than an MEP from a large party will stand for reelection.

An analysis of the control variables used in Model 3 tells a similarly interesting story about what types of MEPs stand for reelection. Marginal effects reveal that MEPs from countries with both a subnational elected executive and legislature are about 9.4% more likely to seek reelection to the EP, than those from countries with only nationally elected legislatures and executive positions. The result that MEPs from federal countries are more likely to seek reelection to the EP than those from unitary ones is also germane to my theory of party organization, as it suggests that political parties in

federal countries are less centralized in their candidate selection and nomination practices—which may favor the independent agency of those politicians wishing to specialize at a particular level of government across multiple terms.

MEPs that are more active as rapporteurs in the legislature are shown to be more likely to seek reelection (an effect of about 1.1% for each additional rapporteurship completed, up to a maximum of 55 completed rapporteurships in a given term)—an indicator that MEPs who choose to participate and specialize in the legislative process are perhaps more committed to building a long-term career in the EP, regardless of their party background. Also interesting is that MEPs from countries that were new to the EP in that term, due to a recent enlargement, were more than 20% more likely to seek reelection for a further term, as compared with veteran EU member states—suggesting that new members behave somewhat differently than longstanding ones in their treatment of the EP.

Looking more at the effect of individual demographics on the decision to seek reelection, MEP age is shown to have a negative effect on reelection seeking, though the effect is not particularly large (0.8% per year). Senior MEPs were about 6% less likely to seek reelection for yet another term. MEPs from larger delegations were significantly more likely to seek reelection, although the substantive importance of this finding is quite small (less than 0.1% more likely for each additional member of the delegation). In short, most of the control variables perform in ways that are both substantively and

statistically significant across all models, even when fringe parties and national elections are taken into consideration.<sup>7</sup>

Although the analysis from the current section provides useful quantitative evidence that fringe parties may treat EP elections as more important than their mainstream competitors, particularly when they stand to gain from a midterm or a retrospective voting effect in an electoral off year, it is also useful to corroborate the found statistical effects with specific examples from the outgoing 7<sup>th</sup> session of the EP. Table 3 provides evidence that the fringe parties discussed are often led by politicians whose main elected office is the EP, itself, and provides further evidence that fringe parties consider the EP as their first order electoral home.

[ Table 3 about here. ]

Table 3 details national party leaders that also sit in the European Parliament. It should be immediately evident from the table that most of the party leaders who have chosen to serve as MEPs (and thus can not be national MPs) also come from the fringe parties listed in Table 1. In fact, out of the 40 national parties from the 7<sup>th</sup> session of the EP that were identified as ‘fringe’ political movements in this analysis, a full 13 of them are led by sitting MEPs at the time of the 2014 elections. Of the remaining hundreds of mainstream political parties represented in the EP, on the other hand, only seven parties were being led by sitting MEPs, as of May 2014 – and many of these are smaller parties that are disadvantaged in national elections, themselves. In other words, not only are smaller and fringe elements more likely to seek reelection to the EP when they

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<sup>7</sup> Additional control variables that are not displayed in Table 2 or discusses in the analysis are listed in the back matter, following Table 2.

believe that they can stand to gain more from EP than from national elections, but their party organizations are also led in many cases by sitting MEPs, themselves.

## **V. Conclusions and Further Research**

This paper has explored differences in the treatment of EP elections by fringe political parties. Using individual-level evidence for the careers of MEPs in the two most recently completed waves of parliament, 2004-2014, I am able to offer some support for the hypothesis that fringe parties—whether defined simply as small parties or as ideologically extremist movements—are more likely to treat EP elections as important, ‘first-order’ elections and that they do so especially when the national electoral calendar is likely to favor them in EP elections. In a parliament that is notorious for high degrees of membership turnover and low levels of popular voter interest, this is an interesting finding and suggests that while many smaller parties espouse fringe and even radical ideologies, they also behave in highly rational ways when it comes to recruiting quality and experienced candidates for elections.

Naturally, the data presented in this paper offer only a small snapshot of the full dynamics of fringe party behavior in both national and EU elections. Beyond expanding the coding for the national vote share and national calendar variables back to 1979, in order to test for a more dynamic and robust effect for these hypotheses, future work can also consider how the makeup of fringe party organizations differs from mainstream parties—beyond simply the party leadership discussion demonstrated in Table 3. More specifically, with the recent EP elections now complete and a number of the parties explored by this paper having made substantial gains in Brussels and Strasbourg, it will

be interesting to see just how much of these fringe party leadership organizations have found themselves with a full-time job in the EP until at least 2019.

Although the specific MEPs elected to the 8<sup>th</sup> EP will not be officially seated in the parliament until July 2014, plenty of anecdotal and journalistic evidence already suggests that fringe elements, such as the National Front or UKIP, will play a major role in the upcoming session of the EP—with other notable fringe leaders, such as Geert Wilders, perhaps even choosing to leave national politics for a seat in the European legislature. While mainstream parties in France and United Kingdom have seen these gains as increased evidence that they have a dire need to reorganize their domestic political organizations, fringe parties have clearly benefitted from the spoils of the second-order election hypothesis once again – even if for these parties, a seat in the EP may be the most attainable, and perhaps desirable, prize of all.



## Tables

Table 1. EP Fringe Parties and their Electoral Successes, 2009-2014

Country	Party Name	EP Group	2014 EP Vote (%)	National Vote (%)
Austria	Liste Hans-Peter Martin	NI	<i>Did not Run</i>	<i>Did not Run</i>
Austria	Die Reformkoservativen	NI	1.2	<i>Did not Run</i>
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	NI	4.1	3.67
Bulgaria	National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria	EFD	3.05	3.7
Bulgaria	National-Democratic Party	NI	< 1.0	0.1
Croatia	Hrvatski laburisti	GUE/NGL	3.46	5.1
Czech	Komunistická strana	GUE/NGL	10.98	14.91
Denmark	Folkebevaegelsen mod EU	GUE/NGL	8	6.7
Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti	EFD	26.6	12.3
Finland	Perussuomalaiset	EFD	12.9	19.1
France	Front de Gauche	GUE/NGL	6.34	6.91
France	Alliance des Outre-Mers	GUE/NGL	<i>Did not Run</i>	<i>(Front de Gauche)</i>
France	Front National	NI	24.95	13.6
Germany	Die Linke	GUE/NGL	7.4	11.9
Greece	Popular Orthodox Rally	EFD	2.7	1.58
Greece	Radical Left / SYRIZA	GUE/NGL	26.6	26.89
Greece	Communist Party	GUE/NGL	6.07	4.5
Hungary	Jobbik	NI	14.67	20.54
Ireland	Socialist Party	GUE/NGL	1.8	1.2
Italy	Io Cambio	EFD	0.18	0
Italy	Lega Nord	EFD	6.15	4.08
Italy	Io amo l'Italia	EFD	<i>Did not Run</i>	0.12
Lithuania	Partija Tvarka	EFD	14.25	7.31
Netherlands	Artikel 50	NI	0.5	<i>Did not Run</i>
Netherlands	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	EFD	3.83	2.1
Netherlands	Socialistische Partij	GUE/NGL	9.6	9.7
Netherlands	Partij voor de Vrijheid	NI	13.32	10.1
Poland	Solidarna Polska	EFD	3.98	<i>Did not Run</i>
Portugal	Partido Comunista	GUE/NGL	12.67	1.12
Portugal	Bloco de Esquerda	GUE/NGL	4.56	5.17
Romania	Partidul România Mare	NI	2.7	1.47
Slovakia	Slovenská národná strana	EFD	3.61	4.55
Spain	Izquierda Unida	GUE/NGL	8.66	6.92
Spain	Unión, Progreso y Democracia	NI	6.5	4.7
Sweden	Vänsterpartei	GUE/NGL	6.3	5.6
UK	An Independence from Europe	NI	1.93	<i>Did not Run</i>
UK	UKIP	EFD	26.77	3.1
UK	Sinn Féin	GUE/NGL	0.97	0.6
UK	British National Party	NI	1.09	1.9
UK	Democratic Unionist Party	NI	0.8	0.6

Table 2. The Effect of Party Size and the Decision to Seek Reelection to the EP, 2009-14

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>National Vote</i>	0.001 (0.004)	0.012 <sup>^</sup> (0.008)	0.610 <sup>**</sup> (0.281)	0.075 (0.159)	0.081 (0.158)
<i>Fringe Party</i>				0.178 -0.207	0.277 -0.406
<i>Far Left</i>	0.169 (0.247)	0.133 (0.253)	0.130 (0.257)		
<i>Eurosceptic</i>	-0.144 (0.325)	-0.273 (0.334)	-0.283 (0.338)		
<i>Non-Aligned</i>	0.427 <sup>^</sup> (0.319)	0.469 <sup>^</sup> (0.326)	0.475 <sup>^</sup> (0.331)		
<i>Election Clock</i>		0.230 <sup>**</sup> (0.091)	0.033 (0.052)		0.096 <sup>**</sup> (0.048)
<i>Vote * Election Clock</i>		-0.005 <sup>*</sup> (0.003)	0.262 <sup>**</sup> (0.106)		
<i>Fringe * Election Clock</i>					-0.050 (0.144)
<i>Seniority</i>	-0.230 <sup>*</sup> (0.122)	-0.242 <sup>*</sup> (0.124)	-0.240 <sup>*</sup> (0.124)	-0.223 <sup>*</sup> (0.122)	-0.247 <sup>**</sup> (0.123)
<i>Local Elections</i>	0.188 <sup>**</sup> (0.0882)	0.206 <sup>**</sup> (0.0891)	0.189 <sup>**</sup> (0.0889)	0.184 <sup>**</sup> (0.087)	0.198 <sup>**</sup> (0.088)
<i>Age</i>	-0.032 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)	-0.032 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)	-0.033 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)	-0.032 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)	-0.032 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)
<i>EP Delegation Size</i>	0.003 <sup>*</sup> (0.002)	0.003 <sup>^</sup> (0.002)	0.004 <sup>*</sup> (0.002)	0.003 <sup>^</sup> (0.002)	0.003 <sup>^</sup> (0.002)
<i>New Member State</i>	0.853 <sup>***</sup> (0.200)	0.900 <sup>***</sup> (0.203)	0.886 <sup>***</sup> (0.203)	0.842 <sup>***</sup> (0.201)	0.872 <sup>***</sup> (0.203)
<i>Rapporteurships</i>	0.043 <sup>***</sup> (0.016)	0.0431 <sup>***</sup> (0.016)	0.043 <sup>***</sup> (0.016)	0.042 <sup>***</sup> (0.016)	0.042 <sup>***</sup> (0.016)
<i>Constant</i>	1.634 <sup>***</sup> (0.375)	1.162 <sup>***</sup> (0.422)	1.635 <sup>***</sup> (0.387)	1.720 <sup>***</sup> (0.365)	1.506 <sup>***</sup> (0.382)
N	1727	1727	1727	1727	1727
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.139	0.142	0.143	0.138	0.139
Party Size Variable	<b>Continuous</b>	<b>Continuous</b>	<b>Dichotomous</b>	<b>Dichotomous</b>	<b>Dichotomous</b>

## Notes for Table 2.

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Standard errors in parentheses

Models estimated using robust standard errors, clustered by individual

 $\wedge$   $p < 0.2$  (one-tailed), \* $p < 0.1$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ 


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Note: Controls for MEP leadership roles, gender, dropouts\*\*\*, national party in government and a time effect for MEPs from the 7th session are also included in all models

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Table 3. The Presence of Party Leaders in the EP

Country	National Party Name	Party Leader in EP
<i>Fringe</i> (13 of 40 national parties considered)		
Bulgaria	National-Democratic Party	Dimitar Stoyanov
Finland	Perussuomalaiset	Timo Soini
France	Mouvement pour la France	Philippe de Villiers
France	Front de Gauche	Jean-Luc Mélenchon
France	Front National	Marine Le Pen
Ireland	Socialist Party	<i>Committee Led</i>
Italy	Lega Nord	Matteo Salvini
Lithuania	Partija Tvarka	Rolandas Paksas
Netherlands	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Geert Wilders (2014-)
Poland	Solidarna Polska	Zbigniew Ziobro
Romania	Partidul România Mare	Corneliu Vadim Tudor
UK	An Independence from Europe	Mike Nattrass
UK	UK Independence Party	Nigel Farage
UK	British National Party	Nick Griffin
<i>Mainstream</i>		
Bulgaria	Coalition for Bulgaria	Sergei Stanishev
France	Europe Ecologie - Les Verts	Eva Joly
France	Mouvement Démocrate	Fraçois Bayrou
France	Mouvement pour la France	Philippe de Villiers
Greece	Ecologists Greens	<i>Committee Led</i>
Greece	Drassi (Liberals)	Theodoros Skylakakis
Ireland	Sinn Fein	<i>Committee Led</i>
Lithuania	Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija	Valdemar Tomasevski

Figures

Figure 1. The Realized Ambition of Outgoing MEPs, 1979-2009

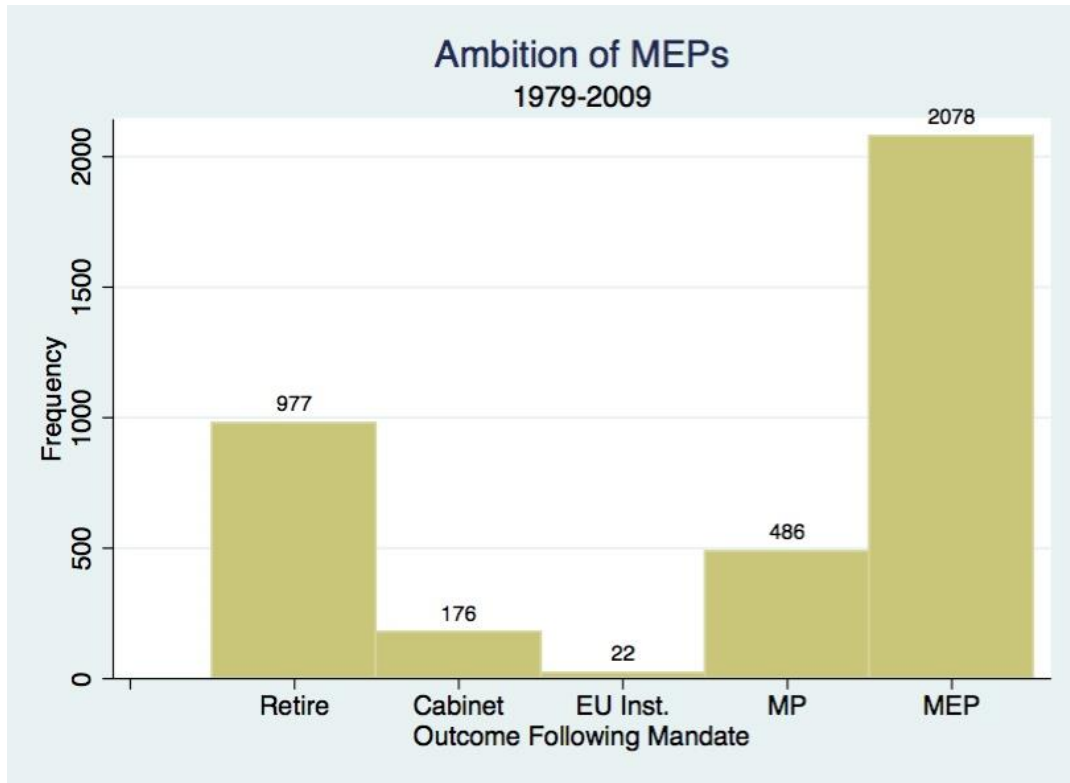


Figure 2.

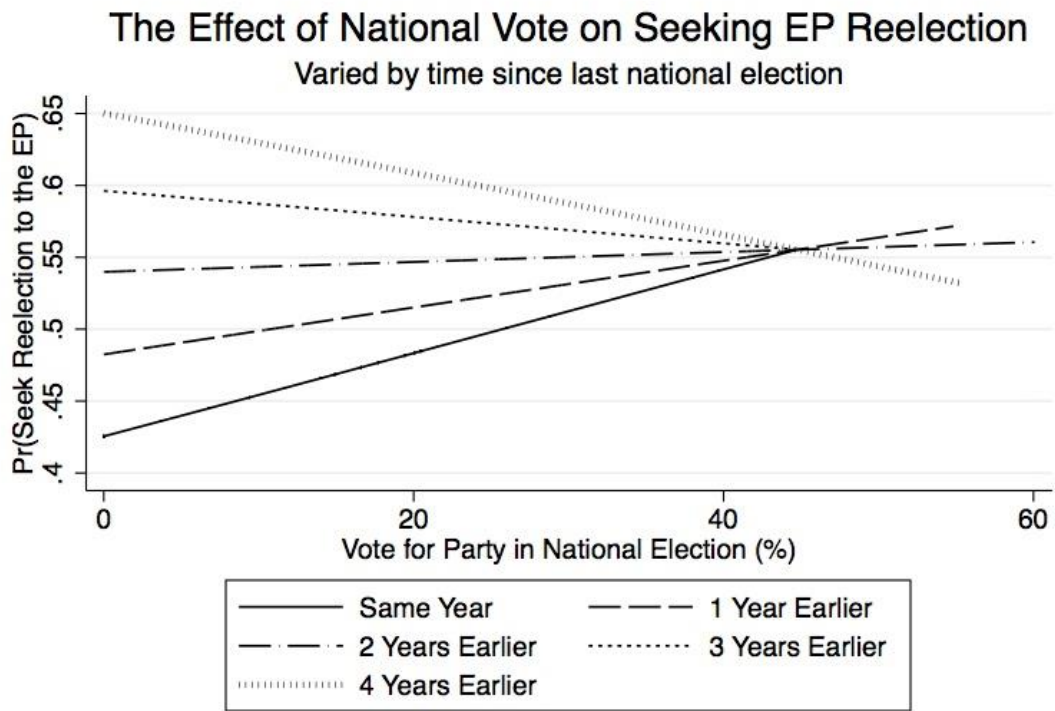
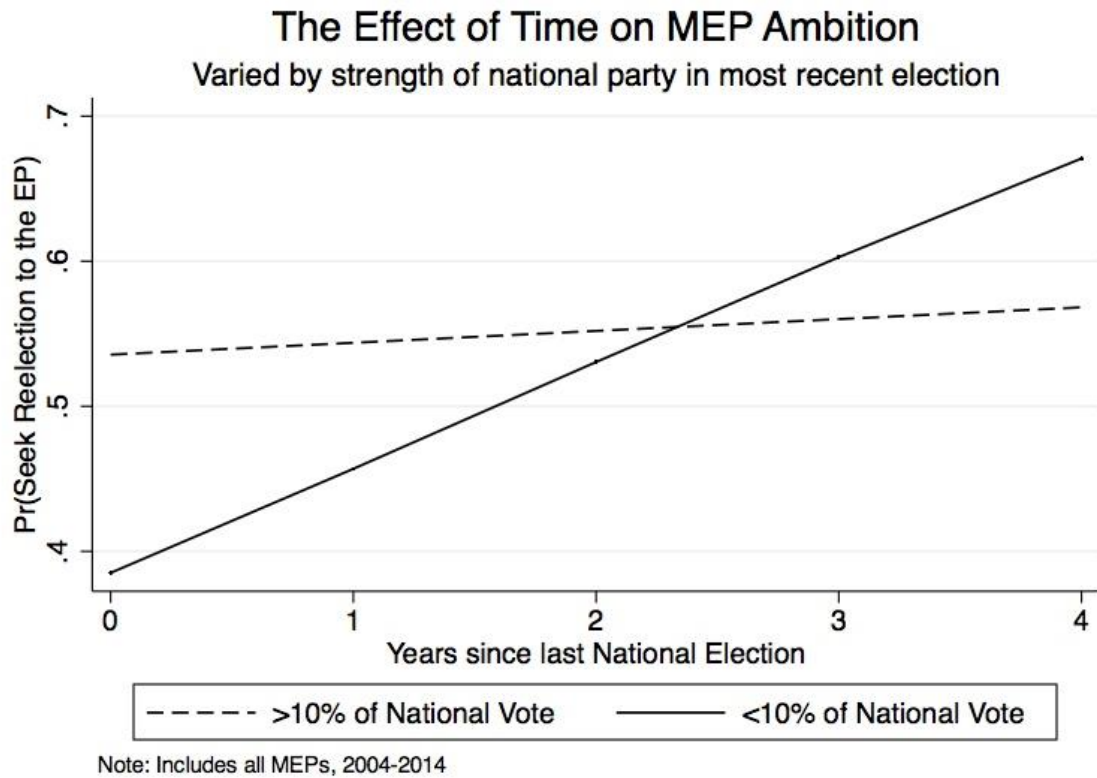


Figure 3.



## Appendix

## Appendix A. Summary Statistics for Table 2

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
<i>Seek Reelection</i>	1733	0.577	0.494	0	1
<i>National Vote</i>	1733	25.269	15.752	0	60.07
<i>National Vote (Dichotomous)</i>	1733	0.252	0.434	0	1
<i>Fringe Party</i>	1733	0.113	0.316	0	1
<i>Far Left</i>	1733	0.052	0.222	0	1
<i>Eurosceptic</i>	1731	0.036	0.187	0	1
<i>Non-Aligned</i>	1731	0.039	0.193	0	1
<i>Election Clock</i>	1733	2.147	1.192	0	4
<i>Seniority</i>	1733	0.385	0.487	0	1
<i>Local Elections</i>	1733	1.384	0.721	0	2
<i>Age at End of Mandate</i>	1733	55.299	10.447	26	86
<i>EP Delegation Size</i>	1733	48.969	29.898	5	99
<i>New Member State</i>	1733	0.143	0.350	0	1
<i>Rapporteurships</i>	1729	2.528	4.547	0	55

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