

JAMES LO
University of Mannheim

An Electoral Connection in European Parliament Voting

Concerns about endogeneity often complicate attempts to estimate a causal link between public opinion and the voting records of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). In this article, I overcome this problem by exploiting a rare natural experiment—the surprising and exogenous revelation of Irish public opinion that resulted from Ireland’s ratification of the Nice treaty. I find that the Irish electorate’s rejection of Nice caused Ireland’s European Parliament delegation to vote in a more conservative manner, while its subsequent ratification caused a partial reversal of this shift. My finding of an electoral connection on the Nice treaty casts doubt on the claim that MEPs are largely unconstrained by voter preferences on European issues, despite claims of a democratic deficit in European institutions.

What is the relationship between the public and political elites on European issues? Since the creation of the European Parliament (EP), numerous scholars (for example, Weiler, Haltern, and Mayer 1995) have been concerned with a democratic deficit in European Union (EU) institutions. While there is no single meaning of the “democratic deficit,” Follesdal and Hix (2006) identify five central claims of the literature: excessive concentration of power in the executive branch, weak powers for the EP, governing institutions that are difficult to understand, a lack of elections that are truly “European,” and policy drift from voter preferences. Central to the last two claims is an underlying belief that EP members are largely unconstrained by voter preferences on European issues.

The belief that Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are largely unconstrained by voter preferences on European issues is a consequence of the weak electoral connection asserted by Follesdal and Hix (2006), who argue that EP elections are not really “European” in the sense that they do not debate personalities, parties, or policies at the EU level. Rather, EP elections are best described as “second-order national contests,” a characterization that appears consistent with all six EP elections to date (Hix and Marsh 2011; Marsh 1998; Reif and Schmitt 1980; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). More specifically, even EP elections are

fought on domestic rather than European issues, and parties collude to keep the issue of Europe off the domestic agenda (Hix 1999; Marks, Wilson, and Ray 2002).

Despite the absence of a European element in EP elections, studies investigating the relationship between public opinion and the preferences of European institution elites (for example, Aspinwall 2007; Finke 2009; Hix and Marsh 2007; Thomassen and Schmitt 1999) demonstrate some linkages between the preferences of national delegations and their voters using standard-regression techniques. However, drawing causal inference from such studies is problematic for two reasons. First, isolating the impact of public opinion is difficult because detectable public opinion shifts (i.e., across elections) are typically accompanied by a host of other changes to the legislative environment, including shifts in chamber membership, committee rosters, partisan control of the legislature, and the chamber's policy agenda. Secondly, endogeneity is a concern that is frequently ignored in such studies. As Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (2002) note, a relationship between voter preferences and legislative behavior alone does not necessarily imply that legislators are responsive to voter preferences—an alternative interpretation of that finding, for example, might include the possibility that voter preferences are responsive to legislators through campaign and persuasion effects.¹

In this article, I argue that the 2001 Irish referendums on the Nice treaty provides a rare empirical opportunity to isolate the effect of changes in constituency preferences on MEP voting behavior and more specifically to conduct an empirical test for legislative responsiveness to revelation of public opinion shifts. In what follows, I show that after the surprising rejection of the Nice treaty by Irish voters, Irish MEPs voted in a more conservative manner. My central argument is that voting in the Nice referendums reveals voter preferences, causing MEPs to respond to this new information. Following Converse (1964), I argue that voting on the Nice referendum not only provides information on preferences about Nice but is also suggestive of a broader ideological shift. On average, the magnitude of this voting shift spanned approximately one-fifth the distance of the ideological gap between the mean of the liberal (ALDE) and socialist (PES) party group delegations in the EP. I also show that following the ratification of the Nice treaty in a second referendum, Irish MEPs shifted their voting record to the left in response, erasing part of the ideological shift resulting from the first Nice treaty referendum.

These findings are substantively important for two reasons. First, by addressing endogeneity issues that have frequently been ignored in

earlier research, my research design establishes a causal linkage between public opinion on a European issue and the voting record of European MEPs. This finding casts doubt on the assumption that EP members are largely unconstrained by voter preferences on European issues, despite claims of a democratic deficit in European institutions. Secondly, my finding speaks to a growing body of research that suggests legislators adapt to changing constituent preferences and party pressures when casting votes.² Contrary to research by Levitt (1996) and Poole (2007) in the U.S. context, I find that MEPs adapt their voting behavior in response to exogenous public opinion shocks even when the legislative context of their votes is held constant.

The Nice Referendums as Natural Experiments

Following the convening of an intergovernmental conference at Nice, EU leaders signed the Treaty of Nice on 26 February 2001. Among other tasks, the Nice treaty sought to reform the institutional structure of the EU to prepare for expansion into Eastern Europe.³ In most countries, ratification of the Nice treaty was conducted by each EU member's national legislature. However, Irish law stipulates that amendments to European treaties extending beyond the obligations of membership require ratification by referendum.

A three-week campaign culminating in a referendum on 7 June 2001 (hereafter Nice 1) was planned, but the result of the vote was unexpected and shocking (Doyle 2002; Jones 2002), as the anti-Nice side won with a 53.9% to 46.1% vote nationwide on low turnout.⁴ While voters opposed to Nice expressed displeasure over a panoply of issues, the result was generally interpreted as an expression of latent Euroskepticism by the Irish electorate.⁵ In comments to the European Council, Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern attributed the defeat of Nice 1 to a "widespread sense of disconnection between the institutions of the (European) union and its citizens."⁶ Subsequent academic accounts of Nice 1 include Hayward, who argues that:

Reasons for the rejection of the first referendum on the Treaty of Nice on 7 June 2001 are, without doubt, manifold; yet what this defeat signified was that the electorate of one of the most consistently pro-European member-states (confirmed time and again in Eurobarometer surveys even post-Nice I) was not 'at one' with the enthusiasm of its political elite for further European integration . . . Although the Nice I result did not instigate a crisis for Ireland's relations with Europe, it nonetheless provided a jolt to a pro-European elite that had broadly assumed majority support for the EU in Ireland to be a given. (2003, 1–2)

The unexpected result led the Irish political elite to hold a second referendum on Nice on 19 October 2002 (hereafter Nice 2), which successfully ratified the treaty by a vote of 62.9% to 37.1%.⁷

For the purposes of examining the effect of a public opinion shock on MEP voting, the Nice referendums are excellent natural experiments for six reasons.⁸ First, the Nice referendums deal with issues that are explicitly European in nature. Secondly, because the referendums both occur in the middle of the 5th European Parliament, the treatment is uncorrelated with any other institutional change in the EP. Third, the effect of the treatment is highly localized, allowing treatment and control units (i.e., Irish and non-Irish MEPs, respectively) to be clearly demarcated. Fourth, my analysis involves two referendum treatments, providing an additional safeguard against false inference. Potential confounders must therefore explain both voting shifts I estimate following Nice 1 and Nice 2. Fifth, my data set contains enough data to properly power the study, as 5,745 roll-call votes were divided in roughly equal numbers between the pre-Nice 1, post-Nice 1, and post-Nice 2 periods. Furthermore, Ireland's delegation to the EP includes 15 MEPs—a reasonable number of treatment subjects preventing idiosyncratic legislators from skewing the results. Finally, there are strong reasons to believe that the treatment was truly exogenous, as substantive accounts of Nice 1 suggest that the result was highly unexpected.⁹

The surprising and exogenous nature of the public opinion shock is of paramount importance to the research design, so I present three reasons justifying the claim that the shock was truly exogenous. First, Ireland has a long history of approving EU treaties by large margins, and while the margin of support in European referendums declined steadily over time, the vote margins were still quite sizable. It approved entry into the EEC in 1972 on a 83–17% vote, passed the Single European Act in 1987 on a 70–30% vote, approved the Maastricht treaty in 1992 on a 69–31% vote, and voted 62–38% in favor of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1998. Notably, this was not true in other referendums where EU treaties were voted upon in other countries.¹⁰

Second, prereferendum polls overwhelmingly suggested that the pro-Nice forces would win a lopsided victory. At the start of the campaign, 52% of respondents indicated they would vote “Yes” on Nice, while only 21% indicated they would vote “No.”¹¹ When asked the same question just over a week before the referendum, 45% of respondents indicated they would vote “Yes” while 28% were opposed.¹² While polling results suggested the “Yes” campaign was losing ground, the results clearly suggested that it held a comfortable lead with 62% of all decided voters heading into the last week of the election.¹³

Third, the Nice 1 result was surprising given the political consensus among the Irish political elite in favor of the treaty. It was supported by the coalition Fianna Fail–Progressive Democrat government and supported by Fine Gael and Labour, who were the two major opposition parties. Opposing the treaty were Sinn Fein, the Green Party, and the Socialist Party, which together held only four of 165 seats in the Irish lower house of parliament. Moreover, numerous observers behaved as if a “Yes” outcome was a foregone conclusion.¹⁴ Doyle notes that “with the exception of the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister on the Government side, and one or two prominent Opposition members like former Prime Minister John Bruton, most major political figures on the ‘yes’ side were noticeably absent from the debate” (2002, 4).¹⁵

The Nice Referendums and Legislative Voting Behavior

Research Design

In this article, I demonstrate a responsiveness to public opinion shifts by Irish MEPs. My central argument is that voting in the Nice referendum reveals voter preferences, causing MEPs to respond to this new information. Voting on the Nice referendum not only provides information on preferences about Nice, but it is also suggestive of preferences on a host of other issues that may be bundled with it. As Converse (1964) has noted, this bundling of issues need not only have a logical basis—psychological and social sources of constraint are also prominent. Just as the result from a U.S. ballot initiative on gay rights also signals a shift of preferences on other seemingly unrelated issues (i.e., taxation), I argue that the results of the Nice referenda may signal similar ideological shifts in the Irish electorate.

How does the Nice treaty empirically fit into the ideological structure of European politics? The canonical work on roll-call voting in the European Parliament is Hix, Noury, and Roland (2006), who apply the Poole and Rosenthal (2000; Poole et al. 2011) NOMINATE procedure to roll-call votes in the European Parliament. Hix, Noury, and Roland find that voting in the European Parliament is largely characterized by two dimensions, a primary left-right dimension and a secondary dimension with a more ambiguous interpretation.¹⁶ I examine the relationship between the Nice treaty and these two dimensions by extracting every roll-call vote dealing with the Nice treaty from the 5th European Parliament and predict the vote of each legislator on each roll-call vote separately using each legislator’s first- and second-dimension NOMINATE score in a logistic regression model.¹⁷ This includes three roll calls on the

TABLE 1
 Logistic Regression Models for all Votes on Nice Treaty,
 5th European Parliament

	RC 479	RC 480	RC 481	RC 493	RC 494	RC 495	RC 496
Intercept	1.153 (0.201)	0.969 (0.194)	-0.387 (0.170)	-2.553 (0.289)	0.959 (0.186)	0.387 (0.151)	1.675 (0.138)
Nominate 1D	-6.455 (0.574)	-5.139 (0.425)	-5.595 (0.584)	7.266 (0.607)	-5.789 (0.497)	-4.775 (0.403)	-1.592 (0.237)
Nominate 2D	0.353 (0.493)	2.343 (0.545)	-0.610 (0.446)	-0.032 (0.508)	0.658 (0.484)	0.505 (0.396)	1.685 (0.333)
Log-Likelihood	-143.06	-160.26	-174.26	-144.21	-159.43	-195.20	-259.61
N	560	564	561	574	579	576	578

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is “Yes” vote on the specified roll call, which are identified using Hix’s identifying code. Roll calls 479–81 are votes on paragraphs 1, 5, and 9 of amendment 18 on the European Summit report on Nice, while roll calls 494–96 are votes on amendments 9–12 on the European Council report on Nice.

European Summit report on Nice and four roll calls on the European Council report on Nice. My results, shown in Table 1, suggest that on all seven votes identified here, first-dimension NOMINATE is a statistically significant predictor of voting behavior on the Nice treaty. In contrast, second-dimension NOMINATE is a significant predictor in only two cases (RC 480 and 496). Of these two cases, one roll call (RC 496) produces an unusually poor model fit, demonstrated by its significantly lower log-likelihood relative to the other six votes. Thus, conflicts about Nice seem to mostly manifest themselves on the first, rather than second NOMINATE dimension. This is notably consistent with recent work by Benoit, Mikhaylov, and Laver (2009), who find that EU policies of national parties map onto the first dimension of EP NOMINATE once measurement error is accounted for.

Building on this earlier work, I thus focus my attention on voting shifts by Irish MEPs along a single dimension, which Hix, Noury, and Roland (2006) identify as the traditional left-right ideological dimension.¹⁸ My research design examines the voting behavior of Irish MEPs across three periods in time—before Nice 1, between Nice 1 and Nice 2, and after Nice 2—using a standard roll-call discontinuity design.¹⁹ To estimate the ideological positions of all MEPs in the 5th European Parliament, I apply Poole and Rosenthal’s NOMINATE procedure to recover each legislator’s ideological position (Poole and Rosenthal 2000; Poole et al. 2011). Roll-call data for the EP were obtained from Hix’s website (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007). This data set includes 2,124 roll

calls before Nice 1, 1,514 roll calls between Nice 1 and Nice 2,²⁰ and 2,107 roll calls after Nice 2.²¹

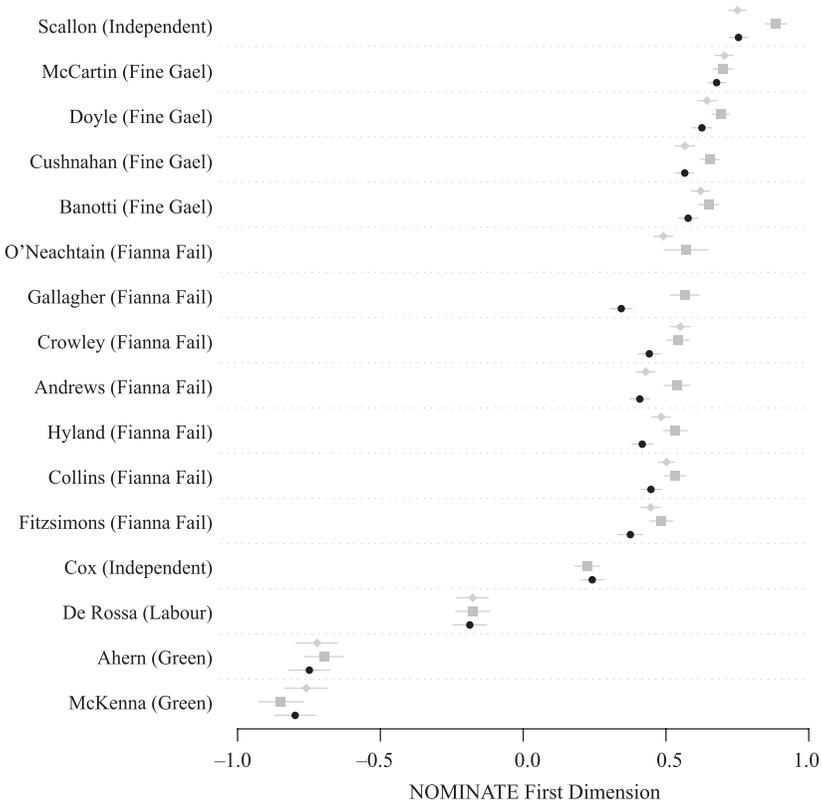
To facilitate the estimation of each Irish MEP's ideal point during the three periods into the same ideological space, I assume that MEPs from other countries are unaffected by the result of the referendum and do not change their voting behavior after the two referenda.²² I then treat each Irish MEP's voting record in each of the three periods as a separate legislator and estimate a NOMINATE model with unconstrained Irish MEPs along with MEPs from elsewhere in Europe that are constrained to have the same ideal point across the entire 5th European Parliament.²³ These constrained MEPs facilitate meaningful comparisons of the ideal points of the Irish MEPs across the three periods by holding the scale and rotation of the ideological space constant over time.²⁴

My theoretical expectations are principally motivated by the work of Aspinwall (2007), who finds that left-wing governments are more supportive of integration than right-wing governments.²⁵ However, I also note that for reasons discussed later, neither my hypotheses or results are inconsistent with the "inverted U-curve" of support/opposition to European integration posited by Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson (2002). I test two hypotheses with my estimates. If MEP voting records are affected or constrained by public opinion on the Nice treaty, the failure of Nice 1 signals a rightward shift on the part of the electorate. Hence, Irish MEPs should respond by voting in a more conservative manner in the immediate aftermath of Nice 1. Similarly, the same reasoning suggests that after Nice 2, Irish MEPs should respond in the opposite way by voting in a more left-leaning manner.

Results

Figure 1 presents my NOMINATE estimates of the Irish EP delegation, and three ideal point estimates are plotted separately for each MEP. Round points represent the legislator's ideal point before Nice 1, squares represent the legislator's ideal point after Nice 1, and diamonds represent the legislator's ideal point after Nice 2. Bars accompanying each point are 95% confidence intervals estimated via the parametric bootstrap (Poole and Lewis 2004). While the Irish MEP delegation consists of only 15 members, I include 16 members because one MEP (Gallagher) was replaced by another MEP (O'Neachtain) during the period between Nice 1 and 2. For these MEPs, only two ideal points are estimated.²⁶

FIGURE 1
Ideal Points Estimates of Irish MEPs,
5th European Parliament



Note: Round points, squares, and diamonds represent each MEP's ideal point before Nice 1, after Nice 1, and after Nice 2 respectively. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

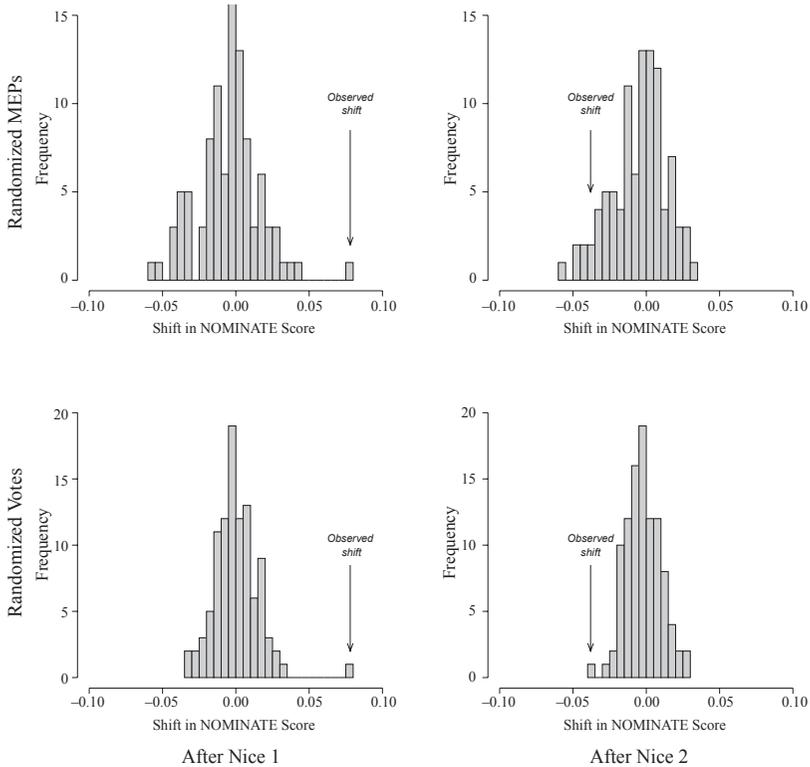
Consistent with my hypotheses, 13 of the 15 legislators voted in a more conservative manner after Nice 1. For many of these members, the confidence intervals of the estimates for each period do not overlap, suggesting that the shifts are individually significant.²⁷ Also consistent with my expectations, 10 of the 14 legislators shift to the left after Nice 2. The average post-Nice 1 shift to the right was +0.076, or approximately 3.8% of the distance between the most left- and right-leaning MEP (defined by NOMINATE as -1 and 1, respectively). In contrast, the average leftward voting shift after Nice 2 was -0.038—half the magnitude of the post-Nice 1 shift.

Although the observed shifts are consistent with theoretical expectations by Aspinwall (2007), they are also largely consistent with the “inverted U-curve” of support/opposition to European integration posited by Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson (2002). While Aspinwall’s findings predict a rightward shift after Nice 1 for all legislators, Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson’s work suggests that MEPs should move towards the extremes. Therefore, both Aspinwall and Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson’s theories predict a shift to the right for Irish MEPs who are already to the right of the ideological spectrum. In fact, this is exactly what occurs, as all but one conservative MEP (i.e., MEPs with a NOMINATE score greater than 0) shift to the right after Nice 1.²⁸ My ability to test these competing theories therefore rests upon the three left-leaning Irish MEPs in the data, who provide evidence that is largely inconclusive. While two of these MEPs (De Rossa and Ahern) shift to the right in line with Aspinwall’s expectations, neither shift is statistically significant. This is countered by a shift to the left by McKenna that is consistent with Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson’s expectations, though this shift is also statistically insignificant. Without more data (i.e., left-leaning Irish MEPs), I am unable to draw any strong conclusions to differentiate between these competing theories.

Three different techniques allow us to determine the statistical significance of these aggregate shifts. Under the null hypothesis of no shift, the probability that one estimates a voting shift to the right (left) by chance for each legislator is 0.5. The binomial distribution therefore suggests that the probability of observing at least 13 of 15 independent legislators shifting to the right after Nice 1 by chance is $p = 0.0005$. Similarly, the probability of observing at least 10 of 14 legislators shifting to the left after Nice 2 by chance is $p = 0.029$. The probability of observing both the expected rightward and leftward shifts together by chance is the product of these two probabilities, or $p = 1.4e^{-5}$. Hence it is extremely improbable that both sets of vote shifts estimated in Figure 1 occur solely by chance.

While the procedure above accounts for the joint significance of both referendums, it also discards a significant amount of data from the analysis, so I validate my results further using resampling techniques for each referendum separately. Two resampling procedures are available and can be conducted separately for the post-Nice 1 and post-Nice 2 shifts. The first procedure simulates the shifts that one would estimate among the control units under no treatment condition. First, I discard all Irish MEPs and proceed to generate 100 roll-call data sets where 15 random non-Irish MEPs are selected to be placebo units. For these placebo MEPs, I treat them in an identical manner to the original treatment units

FIGURE 2
Validity Tests, 5th European Parliament



and allow their ideal points to vary before Nice 1, after Nice 1, and after Nice 2. Since each group of placebo MEPs is unaffected by the Irish referendums, the distribution of mean ideal point shifts that I calculate across the 100 samples will approximate the sampling distribution of the shifts estimated under the null hypothesis.

I plot the distribution of average shifts from the 100 pseudo-data samples for Nice 1 and 2 on the left panels of Figure 2 and highlight the actual shifts that I estimate for the 15 Irish MEPs. Under the null hypothesis that there was no change in the mean ideal points of Irish MEPs after each referendum, the estimated mean ideal point shifts should be similar in magnitude to the changes found across the 100 samples. Similarly, if the estimated shift is not typical of estimates from the null distribution, I can reject the null hypothesis of no ideal point

shifting following each referendum. For Nice 1, I find that the observed shift was considerably larger than any of the 100 shifts simulated with random selections of 15 placebo MEPs. This allows me to reject at the $\alpha=0.01$ level the null hypothesis that the observed shift is due to chance. For Nice 2, only five of the simulated shifts were greater in magnitude than the estimated shift, allowing rejection of the null hypothesis at $\alpha=0.05$.

My second procedure simulates the shifts that should be observed among Irish MEPs under no treatment condition. Rather than randomizing across legislators, I instead randomize the order of the votes in time across 100 pseudo-data samples. In each pseudo-data sample, I then estimate ideal points for Irish MEPs separately for three treatment periods as before. Each treatment period contains the same number of roll-call votes as in the original data set; however, each period will now contain roughly equal proportions of votes from before Nice 1, after Nice 1, and after Nice 2. Since I have effectively randomized the control and treatment roll-call votes across the pseudo-control and pseudo-treatment groups in each data set, the mean shifts observed from this alternative placebo treatment will also simulate a null sampling distribution. My results from this test, plotted on the right panels of Figure 2 for Nice 1 and Nice 2, are consistent with earlier results in reaffirming the statistical significance of the observed shifts. In both cases, the observed shifts are larger in magnitude than any of the simulated samples, allowing rejection of the null hypothesis at $\alpha=0.01$.²⁹

Since my resampling tests simulate the sampling distribution under the null hypothesis, the standard deviations of these sampling distributions can be interpreted as standard errors. For the post-Nice 1 and post-Nice 2 shift estimates of 0.076 and -0.038 , respectively, my MEP randomization procedure yields standard errors of 0.019 and 0.018, respectively. In contrast, the vote randomization procedure yields standard errors of 0.013 and 0.011. The two resampling techniques yield similar estimates of uncertainty, though uncertainty estimates derived from legislator resampling are more conservative. This is because the two procedures estimate different yet related parameters—by randomizing legislators, I simulate the distribution of average treatment of the control group under the null hypothesis, whereas by randomizing votes I simulate the average treatment effect on the treatment group under the null. The two will be different because the control and treatment units will have different propensities to vote (i.e., legislators that served for only part of the 5th European Parliament will have greater uncertainty over their individual ideal points).

Threats to Validity

I also consider three theoretical and empirical concerns to the results presented here. First, earlier research suggests that European elections are best characterized as “second-order” contests, where parties compete on national rather than European issues. If this is true, is there voter awareness of MEP legislative behavior on the part of the Irish voter? If not, why would legislators bother adapting to a changing electorate? I find evidence that voter ignorance of MEP behavior may be somewhat overstated. Using the 2009 European Election Study (2011), which asks voters to place parties on a European Integration scale, I generate voter estimates of party positions by averaging voter placements for each party. I then compare these estimates to position estimates generated using the 2006 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Hooghe et al. 2010), which estimate party placements in a similar manner using political experts and scholars. These estimates correlate at $r = 0.64$ ($N = 97$) across all European countries and $r = 0.95$ ($N = 4$) within Ireland.³⁰ In the aggregate, this suggests that voters are not wholly unaware of party positions on European Integration.³¹

A second theoretical concern relates to the interpretation of the electoral signal from Nice. Turnout for Nice 1 was only 34.8%, reflecting the fact that most politicians expected an easy victory for the pro-Nice side.³² Sinnott (2002) thus argues that the main reason for the failure of Nice 1 was low turnout. Given the low turnout, why would legislators interpret the Nice 1 result as something indicative of preferences in the broader electorate? I argue this is suggestive for two reasons. First, Irish politicians clearly expected a pro-Nice result even with low turnout and campaigned minimally on the assumption that Nice would pass easily like the other European referenda preceding it. A negative referendum result with low turnout, at the very minimum, suggests that voters who turned out to vote were more Euroskeptic than previously expected.³³

More generally, however, current theories of turnout are consistent with the idea that turnout is itself in part a reflection of voter preferences. This implies that low turnout itself is potentially indicative of voter preferences on the Nice treaty. The canonical theoretical work on turnout is Riker and Ordeshook (1968), who propose that the utility a voter receives from voting can be characterized by $R = B * P - C + D$, where R represents the utility from voting, B represents the benefit of the voter's preferred alternative winning, P the probability that a vote is pivotal, C the cost of voting, and D the satisfaction from voting. While Downs (1957) has argued that $B * P$ is effectively zero because the probability of

being the decisive voter is minimal, Riker and Ordeshook demonstrate that voters tend to overestimate P .³⁴ Under the spatial model of voting, for a voter with ideal point x_i , preferred and nonpreferred alternatives θ_p and θ_n , and a quadratic loss function, B can be represented as $B = -(x_i - \theta_p)^2 + (x_i - \theta_n)^2$. Under these conditions, it is trivial to see that $\frac{dR}{dx} = 2(\theta_p - \theta_n) * P$. This implies that turnout does in fact provide information about voter preferences—as the gap between the preferred and nonpreferred referendum alternatives ($\theta_p - \theta_n$) grows, voters receive greater utility from voting and are more likely to turn out.

Third, I also consider the leading alternative hypothesis that could potentially cause the observed shifts. While the data I consider only spans the 5th European Parliament and thus holds constant the legislative context of the natural experiment, an Irish general election for the lower house was held on 17 May 2002. Since the general election occurred in the period between Nice 1 and Nice 2, the public opinion shifts signalled by the general election are a possible confounding variable driving the observed voting shifts. However, this is theoretically unlikely for two reasons. First, the general election did not result in any changes to the Irish EP delegation, as EP elections are held separately from general elections. Secondly, the general election resulted in the reelection of the previously governing center-right Fianna Fail-Progressive Democrat coalition government. This election result suggests no shift in public opinion or at worst suggests a possible shift to the right.

To test for the possibility that the general election signal causes the result, first note that two results must be satisfactorily explained—the rightward shift after Nice 1 and the leftward shift following Nice 2. Since the election signal only suggests a shift to the right, it is not consistent with the observed leftward post-Nice 2 shift. To the extent that such a shift actually occurs, my post-Nice 2 results will actually be understated. While a rightward shift is consistent with the post-Nice 1 results, I can definitively rule out this possibility. Of the 1,514 roll-call votes taken between Nice 1 and Nice 2, only 357 occur after the general election. I reestimate the model after discarding these 357 roll-call votes, which eliminates all potentially contaminated votes in the post-Nice 1 period. This model estimates a 0.071 shift to the right after Nice 1, compared to my original estimate of 0.076. Using the previously estimated standard error of $\hat{\sigma} = 0.019$, I find that the shift is still significantly significant at $t = 3.74$. However, the difference in Nice 1 shifts estimated with and without the 357 roll calls is not statistically significant ($t = 0.26$).

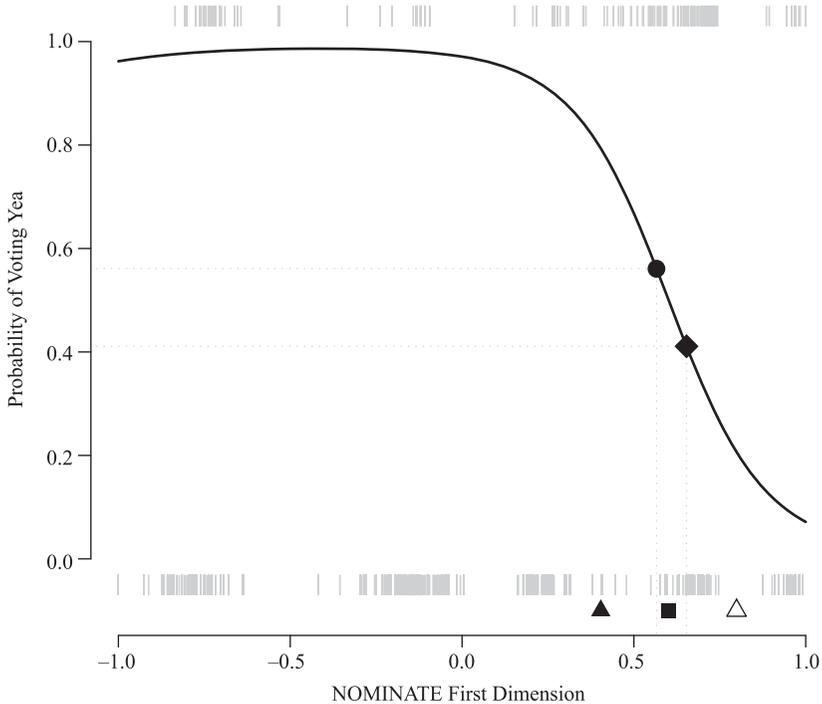
Assessing Substantive Significance

How might I determine the substantive magnitude of these statistically significant shifts? As noted earlier, I estimate the public opinion shock from Nice 1 produced on average a 0.076 shift to the right in the NOMINATE voting record of Irish MEPs. One way to think about the magnitude of this shift is to compare it to the distances between the mean NOMINATE score of each EP group. I find that the Nice 1 shift spans approximately one-fifth the distance between the mean Liberal (ALDE) and Socialist (PES) party group member.³⁵ The shift is also approximately the size of one standard deviation of NOMINATE within the ALDE party group.³⁶ Stated differently, the average vote shift observed after Nice 1 would not be sufficiently large to turn a Socialist MEP into a Liberal MEP, but it would represent a sizable shift relative to the amount of ideological heterogeneity expected within an EP group.

Another way to assess the substantive impact of the shifts is to examine the impact of the vote shift on real votes. Because the size of the Irish delegation is quite small relative to the size of the EP as a whole (i.e., 15 of 626 parliamentarians), Irish legislators are collectively unlikely to be pivotal on any roll-call vote. However, the shifts I estimate suggest that vote probabilities are individually impacted in significant ways for a select number of roll-call votes. Consider the estimated effect of Nice 1 on John Cushnahan, a Fine Gael MEP whose NOMINATE score shifts from 0.566 to 0.653 after Nice 1. This shift is similar in both magnitude and direction to the average shift that is observed across all MEPs after Nice 1. Using the NOMINATE choice function and the estimated bill locations after Nice 1, I calculate Cushnahan's probability of voting Yea using both his pre-Nice 1 and post-Nice 1 ideal point. In 29 of the 1,337 bills between Nice 1 and Nice 2, I find that Cushnahan's vote probability shifts by over 15%. When the same exercise is conducted for all 15 Irish MEPs, I find that 1,542 of the 20,055 roll-call votes cast after Nice 1 experience a vote probability shift exceeding 15%.³⁷

Figure 3 examines this more closely by focusing on the effect of Nice 1 on Cushnahan's vote on amendment 95 of the European Research Act, which took place in the period between Nice 1 and Nice 2. The vote is illustrative because it is one of several examples where Cushnahan's ideal point shift after Nice 1 makes his observed vote (a "No" vote) much more probable. The plotted curve captures the probability of voting Yea on the roll call conditional on an MEP's ideal point. Upper and lower rug plots show NOMINATE positions of legislators voting Yea and Nay,

FIGURE 3
Voting on Amendment 95, European Research Act



respectively. Dark and empty triangles show the estimated bill and status quo locations, while the square shows the estimated bill midpoint. John Cushnahan's estimated ideal points before and after Nice 1 appear as points on the the vote probability curve, on the left and right, respectively. His probability of casting his observed "No" vote, based on his pre-Nice 1 ideal point, is 41.1%. Cushnahan is therefore predicted to vote "Yea" on this bill conditional on his pre-Nice 1 ideal point. However, this probability increases to 56.1% when calculated using his post-Nice 1 ideal point, so Cushnahan is predicted to vote against the bill conditional on his post-Nice 1 ideal point.

Conclusion

Estimating a causal link between public opinion and MEP voting records is frequently complicated by concerns about endogeneity. In

this article, I overcome this problem by exploiting a rare natural experiment—the surprising and exogenous revelation of Irish public opinion that resulted from Ireland’s ratification of the Nice treaty. I find that the Irish electorate’s rejection of Nice caused Ireland’s EP delegation to vote in a more conservative manner, while its subsequent ratification caused a partial reversal of this shift. My finding of an electoral connection on the Nice treaty casts doubt on the claim that MEPs are unconstrained by voter preferences on European issues, despite claims of a democratic deficit in European institutions.

My work also suggests avenues for further research. While I demonstrate a robust responsiveness by Irish MEPs to shifts in public opinion, I am able to say little about the specific causal mechanism underlying the electoral connection. More specifically, do MEPs respond to public opinion signals because they fear the loss of their position in subsequent European elections? Or alternatively, are national parties responding to these signals by disciplining or offering inducements to their MEP delegation to vote in a more responsive manner? Both mechanisms are theoretically and empirically consistent with an electoral connection, though the latter explanation is potentially consequential because it suggests there may be circumstances under which national parties are unable or unwilling to discipline their EP caucus in that manner.

Finally, as with all natural experiments, my results are situated in a specific institutional context. While the specific context of the Nice referendum is valuable in producing an exogenous revelation of public opinion,³⁸ it is also possible that factors specific to the Irish context also lead its MEPs to be unusually responsive to the public. In particular, Irish MEPs are elected by single transferable vote (STV), which tends to produce more candidate-centric elections (Carey and Shugart 1995). For European elections, Malta and Northern Ireland are the only other states employing STV, while most other EU states employ some form of closed-list proportional representation. Country-specific factors such as STV may limit my ability to generalize from the case of Irish MEPs about a possible electoral connection in the EP, and further research on the impact of institutional factors on EU representation is needed before stronger generalizations can be made.

James Lo <lo@uni-mannheim.de> is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Mannheim, SFB 884, L13 17, 5th Floor, 68161, Mannheim, Germany.

NOTES

Support for this project was provided by SFB 884 “Political Economy of Reforms” at the University of Mannheim. I thank David Fortunato, Thomas Gschwend, Sven Oliver Proksch, and Nikoleta Yordanova for comments on an earlier draft of this article.

1. Other possibilities include replacement of ideologically incompatible legislators in elections, MEP anticipation of opinion shifts, and confounders such as the “rally around the flag” effect.

2. See Hibbing (1986), Crook and Hibbing (1985), Snyder and Ting (2003), Jenkins (2000), Wright and Schaffner (2002), Grossback, Peterson and Stimson (2005), Kousser, Lewis and Masket (2007), and Yoshinaka and Grose (2011) for additional examples.

3. A full review of the Nice treaty is beyond the scope of this article but can be found in Tsebelis (2002).

4. Rejection was also geographically dispersed, as the “No” side prevailed in 39 of the 41 voting constituencies. However, because MEPs are elected through proportional representation, the effect on MEPs is likely to be diffuse even if rejection was not geographically dispersed.

5. Issues raised during the Nice treaty campaign included Ireland’s neutrality policy, economic autonomy, and abortion rights. In an article published several years after the Nice referendums, Garry, Marsh, and Sinnott (2005) also find that while issue-voting and second-order election considerations were both important, issue voting outperforms the second-order model in both referendums.

6. These comments were made in a statement to the European Council in Gothenburg, Sweden on 15 June 2001.

7. Nice 2 was preceded by the Seville declaration, which reaffirmed Ireland’s right to maintain military neutrality.

8. More accurately, the treatments are better characterized as surprising revelations of latent public opinion, rather than shocks resulting from shifts in public opinion.

9. However, note that to the extent the public opinion shock was anticipated by Irish MEPs and acted upon in the pre-Nice 1 period, the results will actually be understated.

10. For example, Denmark’s rejection of the Maastricht treaty in 1992 was not preceded by any prior experience with EU referenda.

11. Poll numbers are reported in Gilland (2002). The MRBI/Irish Times poll question was “are you likely to vote yes or no to the Nice Treaty which provides, among other things, for the enlargement of the number of countries in the European Union?”

12. Ireland bans the publication of poll results less than a week before each campaign, so results closer to the referendum date are not available.

13. The imbalanced polling results in Ireland do not appear to be true of other EU referendums. For example, polls throughout virtually the entire Maastricht treaty referendum campaign in Denmark were close, with a majority of “No” votes in the polls a month before the referendum (Laursen and Vanhoonacker 1994).

14. Hayward (2002) notes that there was some intraparty dissent by the main parties in the electoral campaign. Nevertheless, she does not dispute the surprising nature of the outcome, even conditional on lower-than-expected elite interest in the outcome—a claim made clear in the title of her article (“Not a Nice Surprise . . .”).

15. Spending patterns for Nice 1 and the 2002 campaign are also suggestive that political elites treated the result of Nice 1 as a foregone conclusion. Benoit and Marsh (2008) provide descriptive statistics suggesting that total spending in the 2002 campaign totalled €6.61 million. In contrast, Gilland (2002) reports that the Referendum Commission spent only €3.17 million on publishing information booklets and informercials for the two sides, and Doyle (2002) reports that the parties spent little money on the campaign themselves. However, Benoit and Marsh note that the 2002 general election was the first election in which campaign spending disclosure was required by law, so direct verification of Doyle's claim is not possible.

16. The second dimension is often characterized jointly by government/opposition divides and preferences on European integration.

17. I omit roll call 616 from this analysis, which mentions Nice but does not appear to be about the Nice treaty. This vote "calls on the national parliaments, when expressing their views on the Treaty of Nice, to manifest their commitment to the convening of a Convention."

18. For this legislature, a single dimension correctly classifies 87.8% of all votes and reduces classification error over a naive model in which all members vote with the majority by 55.5%.

19. Other examples of such research designs can be seen in Poole (2005), Kousser, Lewis, and Masket (2007), Ho and Quinn (2010), and Lo (2013).

20. Hereafter, the period "after Nice 1" refers to the period between Nice 1 and Nice 2.

21. Following standard practice, roll-call votes where the losing side received less than 2.5% of the vote were dropped, and I keep only legislators who vote a minimum of 50 times.

22. Without this assumption, an alternative interpretation of the estimates is that Irish MEPs did not shift positions at all, but all other MEPs shifted to the left after Nice 1 and to the right after Nice 2. This is because estimation of spatial locations from observed vote choices allows only relative identification. However, I find this interpretation of the results to be substantively implausible. Another consequence of relative identification results if the constrained legislators in fact shift positions to the right after Nice 1 and to the left after Nice 2 along with the Irish legislators. While this is more substantively plausible, my estimates of the Irish MEP shifts will actually be understated because these shifts capture only the differences in moves between the constrained and unconstrained MEPs.

23. Although I fix the ideological space by assuming that non-Irish MEPs are unaffected by the referendum, an alternative possibility is that countries with close ties to Ireland (i.e., those with significant Irish immigration) might similarly interpret the Nice 1 result as suggestive of preferences in their own national electorates and also vote in a more conservative manner. Although this is unlikely, this would lead us to understate the magnitude of the result.

24. Comparisons of ideal points across time all require some assumption that "fixes" the ideological space between periods to facilitate intertemporal comparisons—no ideal point estimators permit all legislators to shift positions simultaneously over time without addressing the relative identification problem discussed in the previous footnote. My decision to hold non-Irish MEPs fixed represents the most

natural way to fix the ideological space across the three periods because this is in fact the implicit assumption that is made when running NOMINATE on all legislators across a full European Parliament.

25. My work focuses on legislative voting behavior as measured by NOMINATE, but there is some evidence of similar expectations among voters. Gabel and Anderson (2002) test this by fitting a two-factor model to a series of survey questions and extracting separate factors for the left-right and EU integration dimensions. They find that the two factors are correlated at $r=0.671$ in the direction consistent with Aspinwall (2007).

26. Cox cast less than 50 votes after Nice 2 and is also excluded.

27. Of course, statistical significance at the 95% confidence level does not require that the confidence intervals not overlap.

28. In particular, these shifts appear much more pronounced among the Fine Gael and Fianna Fail MEPs who supported the Nice treaty, though there is no theoretical reason to expect differences in the magnitude of shift between supporters and opponents of the treaty.

29. I also conduct a second variant of this test in which I draw placebo MEPs from the same party family distribution as Ireland. This allows me to test for the possibility that the shifts shown here are driven by more general polarization within the EP. My results are consistent with the results shown here, rejecting the null hypothesis for both referendums at $\alpha=0.01$.

30. On the left-right scale, the correspondence between voters and experts is even stronger, at $r=0.88$ across Europe and $r=0.97$ in Ireland.

31. Although the Chapel Hill surveys are the most frequently cited source of European party positions, one hypothetical but unlikely possibility is that they are derived solely from perceptions that are completely independent of actual legislative behavior. As a robustness check, I applied NOMINATE to all $N=123$ votes that are identified as being related to “constitutional and inter-institutional affairs” and generate party scores by meaning MEP NOMINATE scores by party. These “constitutional NOMINATE” scores correlate with Chapel Hill-derived estimates at $r=0.75$, which suggests that these scores are at least in part a function of actual legislative behavior.

32. Turnout for Nice 2 subsequently increased to 49.5%.

33. Note that MEPs in Ireland are elected via a single transferable vote system that is designed to achieve proportional representation through preferential voting. Thus, all votes will be impactful on the total number of MEPs that each party receives.

34. For more on this point, also see Quattrone and Tversky (1968).

35. From left to right, the mean first-dimension NOMINATE scores for each party group’s EP delegation are as follows: EUL-NGL (-0.815), Greens (-0.797), PES (-0.227), EDD (0.136), ALDE (0.161), UEN (0.411), and EPP (0.650).

36. I focus on comparisons using ALDE because seven of the Irish MEPs are Fianna Fail party members, which is itself currently affiliated with ALDE.

37. These figures include all recorded roll-call votes during this period, including those in which Irish legislators were absent. Results are substantively unchanged if one only considers votes that were actually cast.

38. In particular, most EU referendums will not produce public opinion shocks that are surprising or exogenous, thus limiting my ability to replicate this study in other

contexts. Taking the Lisbon treaty as an example, Lisbon 1 failed 46.6% to 53.4% on June 12, 2008, but the election was known to be a close vote leading up to the election. A June 7, 2008 poll by Red C showed 42% for, 39% against, and 19% undecided, while a June 5, 2007 poll by TNS/MRBI showed 30% for, 35% against, and 35% undecided. Given the massive margin of uncertainty leading up to the vote, it would be difficult to argue that either outcome was surprising.

REFERENCES

- Aspinwall, Mark. 2007. "Government Preferences on European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories." *British Journal of Political Science* 1 (37): 89–114.
- Benoit, Kenneth, and Michael Marsh. 2008. "The Campaign Value of Incumbency: A New Solution to the Puzzle of Less Effective Incumbent Spending." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (4): 874–90.
- Benoit, Kenneth, Slava Mikhaylov, and Michael Laver. 2009. "Treating Words as Data with Error: Uncertainty in Text Statements of Policy Positions." *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (2): 495–513.
- Carey, John, and Matthew Shugart. 1995. "Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas." *Electoral Studies* 14 (4): 417–39.
- Converse, Philip. 1964. The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. In *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press, 208–61.
- Crook, Sara, and John Hibbing. 1985. "Congressional Reform and Party Discipline: The Effects of Changes in the Seniority System on Party Loyalty in the US House of Representatives." *British Journal of Political Science* 15 (2): 207–26.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper.
- Doyle, Peter. 2002. "Ireland and the Nice Treaty." Center for European Integration Studies, Discussion Paper.
- European Election Study (EES). 2011. *European Parliament Election Study, Voter Data, Advance Release (23 June 2011)*. Available at: <http://www.piredeu.eu>.
- Erikson, Robert, Michael Mackuen, and James Stimson. 2002. *The Macro Polity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Finke, Daniel. 2009. "Domestic Politics and European Treaty Reform: Analysing the Dynamics of Governmental Reform Positions." *European Union Politics* 4 (10): 482–506.
- Follesdal, Andreas, and Simon Hix. 2006. "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 3 (44): 533–62.
- Gabel, Matthew, and Christopher Anderson. 2002. "The Structure of Citizen Attitudes and the European Political Space." *Comparative Political Studies* 35 (8): 893–913.
- Garry, John, Michael Marsh, and Richard Sinnott. 2005. "Second-order versus Issue voting Effects in EU Referendums." *European Union Politics* 6 (2): 201–21.
- Gilland, Karin. 2002. "Ireland's (first) Referendum on the Treaty of Nice." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (3): 527–35.
- Grossback, Lawrence, David Peterson, and James Stimson. 2005. "Comparing Competing Theories on the Causes of Mandate Perceptions." *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (2): 406–19.

- Hayward, Katy. 2002. "Not a Nice Surprise: An Analysis of the Debate Surrounding the 2001 Referendum on the Treaty of Nice in the Republic of Ireland." *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 13 (1): 167–86.
- Hayward, Katy. 2003. "If at First You Don't Succeed: The Second Referendum on the Treaty of Nice, 2002." *Irish Political Studies* 18 (1): 120–32.
- Hibbing, John. 1986. "Ambition in the House: Behavioral Consequences of Higher Office Goals among US Representatives." *American Journal of Political Science* 30 (3): 651–65.
- Hix, Simon. 1999. "Dimensions and Alignments in European Union Politics: Cognitive Constraints and Partisan Responses." *European Journal of Political Research* 1 (35): 69–106.
- Hix, Simon, Abdul Noury, and Gérard Roland. 2006. "Dimensions of Politics in the European Parliament." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (2): 494–520.
- Hix, Simon, Abdul Noury, and Gérard Roland. 2007. *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hix, Simon, and Michael Marsh. 2007. "Punishment or Protest? Understanding European Parliament Elections." *Journal of Politics* 2 (69): 495–510.
- Hix, Simon, and Michael Marsh. 2011. "Second-Order Effects plus Pan-European Political Swings: An Analysis of European Parliament Elections Across Time." *Electoral Studies* 1 (30): 4–15.
- Ho, Daniel, and Kevin Quinn. 2010. "Did a Switch in Time Save Nine?" *Journal of Legal Analysis* 2 (1): 69–113.
- Hooghe, Liesbet, Gary Marks, and Carole Wilson. 2002. "Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?" *Comparative Political Studies* 35 (8): 965–89.
- Hooghe, Liesbet, Ryan Bakker, Anna Brigevich, Catherine De Vries, Erica Edwards, Gary Marks, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Vachudova. 2010. "Reliability and Validity of the 2002 and 2006 Chapel Hill Expert Surveys on Party Positioning." *European Journal of Political Research* 49 (5): 687–703.
- Jenkins, Jeffrey. 2000. "Examining the Robustness of Ideological Voting: Evidence from the Confederate House of Representatives." *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (4): 811–22.
- Jones, Erik. 2002. "The Politics of Europe 2001: Adversity and Persistence." *Industrial Relations Journal* 33 (5): 377–91.
- Kousser, Thad, Jeffrey Lewis, and Seth Masket. 2007. "Ideological Adaptation? The Survival Instinct of Threatened Legislators." *Journal of Politics* 69 (3): 828–43.
- Laursen, Finn, and Sophie Vanhooacker. 1994. *The Ratification of the Maastricht Treaty: Issues, Debates, and Future Implications*. New York: Springer.
- Levitt, Steven. 1996. "How do Senators Vote? Disentangling the Role of Voter Preferences, Party Affiliation, and Senator Ideology." *American Economic Review* 86 (3): 425–41.
- Lo, James. 2013. "Legislative Responsiveness to Gerrymandering: Evidence from the 2003 Texas Redistricting." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8 (1): 75–92.
- Marks, Gary, Carole Wilson, and Leonard Ray. 2002. "National Political Parties and European Integration." *American Journal of Political Science* 3 (46): 585–94.

- Marsh, Michael. 1998. "Testing the Second-Order Election Model after Four European Elections." *British Journal of Political Science* 4 (28): 591–607.
- Poole, Keith. 2005. *Spatial Models of Parliamentary Voting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Poole, Keith. 2007. "Changing Minds? Not in Congress!" *Public Choice* 131 (3): 435–51.
- Poole, Keith, and Howard Rosenthal. 2000. *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll-Call Voting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Poole, Keith, and Jeffrey Lewis. 2004. "Measuring Bias and Uncertainty in Ideal Point Estimates via the Parametric Bootstrap." *Political Analysis* 12 (2): 105–27.
- Poole, Keith, Jeffrey Lewis, James Lo, and Royce Carroll. 2011. "Scaling Roll Call Votes with W-Nominate in R." *Journal of Statistical Software* 42 (14): 1–21.
- Quattrone, George, and Amos Tversky. 1968. "Contrasting Rational and Psychological Analyses of Political Choice." *American Political Science Review* 82 (3): 719–36.
- Reif, Karlheinz, and Hermann Schmitt. 1980. "Nine Second-Order National Elections. A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results." *European Journal of Political Research* 8 (1): 3–44.
- Riker, William, and Peter Ordeshook. 1968. "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting." *American Political Science Review* 62 (1): 25–42.
- Sinnott, Richard. 2002. "Cleavages, Parties and Referendums: Relationships between Representative and Direct Democracy in the Republic of Ireland." *European Journal of Political Research* 41 (3): 811–26.
- Snyder, James, and Michael Ting. 2003. "Roll Calls, Party Labels, and Elections." *Political Analysis* 11 (4): 419–44.
- Thomassen, Jacques, and Hermann Schmitt. 1999. "Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union." In *Issue Congruence*, ed. Hermann Schmitt and Jacques Thomassen. London: Oxford University Press, 188–210.
- Tsebelis, George. 2002. *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*. Illustrated edition. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- van der Eijk, Cees, and Mark Franklin. 1996. *Choosing Europe? The European Electorate and National Politics in the Face of Union*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Weiler, Joseph, Ulrich Haltern, and Franz Mayer. 1995. "European Democracy and its Critique." *West European Politics* 3 (18): 4–39.
- Wright, Gerald, and Brian Schaffner. 2002. "The Influence of Party: Evidence from the State Legislatures." *American Political Science Review* 96 (2): 367–79.
- Yoshinaka, Antoine, and Christian Grose. 2011. "Ideological Hedging in Uncertain Times: Inconsistent Legislative Representation and Voter Enfranchisement." *British Journal of Political Science* 41 (4): 765–94.