

Contesting Europe: Eurosceptic Dissent and Integration Polarization in the European Parliament

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of Eurosceptic contestation within the legislative arena of the European Parliament (EP) from 2009 to 2019. Under what conditions do Eurosceptics vote differently from their Europhile peers? The literatures on European integration, party competition and policy types lead us to expect variation in Eurosceptic contestation across policy areas. Drawing on roll-call votes in the EP, we introduce two new measures of such contestation: Eurosceptic dissent, that is, the extent to which Eurosceptics diverge from the Europhile plurality, and integration polarization, that is, the extent to which Eurosceptics and Europhiles oppose each other as cohesive camps. Our two indicators show that Eurosceptic contestation is particularly pronounced when the EP votes on cultural, distributive and constituent issues. When voting on redistributive policies, in contrast, dissent and polarization are curbed by national and ideological diversity.

Keywords: European Parliament; Euroscepticism; legislative behaviour; roll-call votes

Introduction

The European Union (EU) is increasingly contested. During its first 35 years, European integration progressed by stealth leaving European citizens largely detached from the EU. Their ‘permissive consensus’ (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970) was sufficient for European and national elites to move forward with integration. This started to change with the completion of the internal market in the early 1990s. The deepening of integration brought structural differences in member state interests to the fore. European citizens also became more aware of how much ‘Europe hits home’ (Börzel and Risse 2018) and challenger parties seized on the topic. As a result, the EU has become increasingly politicized.

Whilst a small number of Eurosceptics entered the European Parliament (EP) already with the first direct elections in 1979, the legislature has been dominated by a Europhile majority reflecting the pro-integrationist consensus amongst European parties. Yet, Eurosceptic challengers continued to make inroads over time, and their numbers surged with the 2014 EP elections (Hobolt 2015; Treib 2014). These developments are also reflected in the structure of conflict in the legislature. Until 2004, the left-right dimension still explained some 90 per cent of roll-call votes, with the integration dimension relegated to a secondary role, explaining limited variation (Hix et al. 2007, p. 167). Recent research, however, shows that since 2009, core factors influencing voting patterns started to change. The integration dimension has increasingly structured political conflict in the

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EP, pitting integrationist legislators against anti-integrationists (Blumenau and Lauderdale 2018; Buzogány and Četković 2021; Cavallaro et al. 2018; Hix et al. 2020; Otjes and Van Der Veer 2016). The increasing polarization has raised concerns that Eurosceptic parties would water down the substance of EU policies and undermine the functioning of the EU system more generally (Ripoll Servent 2019; Kantola and Miller 2021). Such a negative impact, however, hinges on the cohesion of the Eurosceptic vote.

Existing scholarship has investigated changes in the political space in the EP by analysing programmatic positions of parties represented in the EP (Bressanelli 2012; Hooghe et al. 2002; McElroy and Benoit 2012), expert judgements (Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2019) or public opinion (Hobolt and De Vries 2016). Studies on the behaviour of Eurosceptics have focused either on specific policy areas (Kantola and Lombardo 2020; Kantola and Miller 2021; Ripoll Servent and Panning 2019) or selected issues, such as the process of group formation (Whitaker and Lynch 2014), the roles of Eurosceptics as representatives and their contestation strategies (Brack 2012, 2018).

This article focuses on how Eurosceptic and Europhile Members of European Parliament (MEPs) contest European integration through their voting behaviour to reveal the potential impact Eurosceptic contestation on legislative output. We argue that the legislative impact of Euroscepticism is policy dependent. The extent of conflict between Eurosceptics and Europhiles in the EP cannot simply be deduced from the new cultural cleavage. Rather, national interests and the left–right axis decisively inform the relationship between Eurosceptics and Europhiles. We expect Eurosceptic contestation to be weaker in policy fields that are less structured along the new cultural cleavage and are dominated by left–right ideologies or national interests.

To demonstrate our argument about the policy-dependent impact of Euroscepticism, the article starts by introducing two new indicators of contestation in the EP: Eurosceptic dissent, which captures the extent to which Eurosceptics diverge from the Europhile plurality, and integration polarization, which measures the extent to which the Europhiles and Eurosceptics oppose each other as cohesive camps. Whilst Eurosceptics are generally expected to oppose the Europhile majority in the EP, we suggest that their contestation will be curbed if issues related to left–right ideology or national interest cut across the integration divide. We derive these expectations from the literatures on European integration, policy types and party competition.

To investigate these expectations, we draw on a comprehensive dataset of roll-call votes in the 7th and 8th terms of the EP (2009–2019). Our analyses find that Eurosceptic contestation is surprisingly low in absolute terms, even in areas where dissent and polarization are high in relative terms. Eurosceptic dissent from Europhile peers is highest in policy areas dominated by cultural, redistributive and constituent issues. Considering Eurosceptics' and Europhiles' voting behaviour in combination reveals different levels of integration polarization. It is lowest in policy areas where national interests dominate and ideological diversity along the traditional left–right cleavage still prevails. The article offers important contributions to research on Euroscepticism in the EP. Our analyses of MEP voting behaviour provide a comprehensive overview of contestation dynamics across two legislative terms and across all policy areas. This goes significantly beyond the scope of previous studies and provides new comparative insights into the extent of conflict and polarization in the EP. For both the European and national level, the findings

help to better understand broader dynamics of party competition by showing in which policy areas Eurosceptics are more likely to act as challengers (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). Finally, the findings shed light on the Eurosceptics' (limited) potential for legislative influence and the degree to which they may undermine the working of the EU. This can inform future research studying voting behaviour both at plenary level in the EP and throughout the legislative process.

I. Contesting Europe in the EP

Conceptualizing Eurosceptic Contestation

The article introduces two new indicators of Eurosceptic contestation in the EP. Drawing on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey's (CHES) item on national parties' positions on European integration, we identify Eurosceptic and Europhile MEPs. The survey asks respondents to indicate whether a party is strongly opposed, opposed, somewhat opposed, neutral, somewhat in favour, in favour or strongly in favour of integration, and we consider MEPs affiliated with national parties that are at least somewhat opposed to integration as Eurosceptic, whilst those from parties at least somewhat in favour of integration are classified as Europhile.

Eurosceptic dissent captures the extent to which Eurosceptic MEPs diverge from the vote of the Europhile plurality¹ and has two important qualities. Eurosceptic dissent is a *negative* concept; it does not measure positive cohesion amongst Eurosceptics. If Europhiles overwhelmingly vote in favour of a piece of legislation, dissent includes both abstentions and votes against. Therefore, Eurosceptic dissent does not speak to cohesion in the sense of Eurosceptics casting the same vote. Relatedly, Eurosceptic dissent is a *relational* concept, as it compares the vote of the Eurosceptics to that of the Europhiles. By contrast, a positive notion of Eurosceptic cohesion would define cohesion independent of the Europhile vote. Yet, it is this relational quality of Eurosceptic dissent that allows for our second measure of contestation. *Integration polarization* measures the extent to which Eurosceptics vote *against* the Europhile plurality and to what extent Europhiles vote *in line with* the Europhile plurality. Just as Eurosceptic dissent, it is relational, comparing the voting behaviour of Eurosceptics and Europhiles, with the latter as reference category given their long-standing dominance in the chamber. Unlike measures of cohesion amongst Eurosceptics and Europhiles, it therefore allows us to speak to the concept of polarization.² Our notion of polarization resonates with party polarization rather than mass polarization. Its operationalisation draws on concrete action rather than policy or ideological distance (McCarty 2019). The higher the share of Eurosceptics who oppose the Europhile plurality and the higher the share of Europhiles that vote with the Europhile plurality, the higher is integration polarization in the EP. The advantage of these measures is their high face validity to understand effects of contestation on the legislative output beyond mere size or cohesion of the Eurosceptic camp.

¹The Europhile plurality reflects the most frequent vote choice amongst Europhile MEPs. Since they can vote in favour, against or abstain, the most frequent vote choice does not necessarily reach an absolute majority. Therefore, we refer to the 'Europhile plurality' rather than 'majority'. We use Europhiles' voting behaviour as the reference point because they have historically dominated the EP, with Eurosceptics taking on the role of challengers (see Supporting Information S1: Appendix 7 on the size of the camps).

²Supporting Information S1: Appendix 8 further elaborates the measure.

In short, the common denominator of Eurosceptic dissent and integration polarization is the measurement of whether MEPs vote in line with the Europhile plurality. Whereas Eurosceptic dissent refers to Eurosceptics opposing the Europhile plurality, integration polarization combines Eurosceptic dissent with Europhiles' own support of the Europhile plurality, revealing how clear a cleavage there is between the camps.

Policy-Area Variation in Eurosceptic Contestation

Post-functionalist theory argues that the positions of political parties on European integration increasingly reflect a new dimension of European politics (e.g. Hooghe et al. 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2009). Differences in contestation are less linked to economic interests but to cultural identity. This new cultural cleavage has been referred to as Green, Alternative, Liberal (GAL) versus Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist (TAN), as integrationist versus demarcationist or as cosmopolitan versus communitarian (cf. De Wilde et al. 2014; Kriesi et al. 2008; Marks et al. 2002). The new cleavage is a powerful predictor of Euroscepticism (Hooghe et al. 2002). It has a strong potential for politicization and can mobilize voters in elections and referendums, consequently shaping European policy-making and integration outcomes. Eurosceptic parties therefore seek to restructure party competition around issues such as life style, cultural diversity, immigration, ecology and nationalism that unite the pro-EU mainstream parties across the left–right cleavage and divide them internally (Braun et al. 2016; Hooghe et al. 2002). Mobilizing against the pro-European consensus provides an opportunity to reap votes from mainstream parties (Braun et al. 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Hooghe et al. 2002) and 'shake up the system' (Hooghe et al. 2002, p. 970).

Unlike the member states, the EU is no fused-powers system in which the executive is supported by a stable majority in the legislature and falls if it loses this support. As a consequence, there is no Westminster-style government–opposition dynamic, in which an opposition as government-in-waiting has an incentive to reject any and all government initiatives (see, e.g. Dewan and Spirling 2011), in the EP. Rather, coalitions are formed on an ad hoc, issue-by-issue basis. At the same time, these coalitions are often composed of Europhile supermajorities (Hix and Noury 2015). As Eurosceptics seek to win over voters from pro-EU mainstream parties, a baseline expectation is that Eurosceptics will vote against the Europhile majority.

However, a series of factors shape Eurosceptics' opposition. In the EU political system, these conditions are closely connected to policy areas. Of course, we expect Eurosceptics to oppose Europhiles on policies that transfer power and authority. Such constituent policies directly speak to European integration and the day-to-day workings of the EU. Likewise, Eurosceptics should vote against Europhiles in policy areas dominated by the new cultural cleavage (climate change, migration, gender). At the same time, there are theoretical reasons to expect that, in some areas, the traditional right–left dimension continues to shape the political space in the EP. This is also the case for national interests. The following theoretical considerations help us identify factors that may divide Eurosceptics in their opposition to the Europhile majority along policy lines.

First, policy areas differ in the way they affect actors and their interests. Linking institutional features to the process of politics, the seminal work of Theodore Lowi discerns four different policy types: distributive, redistributive, regulatory and constituent

(Lowi 1972). Following the well-known argument that policy determines politics, each policy type is aligned with specific systemic patterns about politics and choice. According to Lowi, redistributive policies that transfer resources from one group of individuals, regions or countries to another group are particularly conflict prone. There are multiple interests involved. Beyond the political arena, organized interests are bound in through ideological ties and stable conflict lines drive rifts deeper between decision-takers. In contrast, distributive policies, such as public works or research and development, allocate public resources amongst alternative users. This policy type is more likely to see compromises through log rolling. Contestation on regulatory policies, in turn, is frequently characterized by technical debates and bargaining of actors. Lowi's classification is neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. For the sake of our argument, however, we expect that EU policy areas differ in what are the most prevalent issues. Whilst some policy areas, such as agriculture or regional policy, are dominated by redistribution, regulation is prevalent in other areas, such as environmental or transport policy. In line with Lowi, we expect these policy type differences to play out as differences in contestation across policy areas. Specifically, redistributive interests may cut across the integration divide, incentivizing Eurosceptics as well as Europhiles to prioritize the economic interests of their constituents. As a consequence, this suggests reduced contestation along the integration dimension.

Second, in this vein, public choice theory focuses on the economic self-interest of actors within political systems. Policy areas differ in the likelihood that such self-interest will materialize along national lines. We know that in federal systems, territorial interests override ideological government and opposition dynamics when *fiscal or spending capacities* at the subnational level are concerned (Scharpf 1988). Similarly, EU spending policies divide the member states into (eastern and southern) net receivers and (western and northern) net contributors (Diermeier et al. 2020; Zimmer et al. 2005). Such geographical patterns (Thomson 2011, p. 66), nurtured by 'country-level redistributive interests' (Bailer et al. 2015, p. 438), shape interaction in policy areas such as agriculture and fisheries.

Likewise, member states differ in their *regulatory regimes*. Economies have been described as liberal or coordinated with different levels of control on capital and labour to regulate markets (Hall and Soskice 2001). And particularly with enlargement, structural differences between national economies, further amplified by the Euro crisis, have shaped debate over economic and labour policies (Höpner and Schäfer 2010; Scharpf 2016; Streeck and Elsässer 2016). Consequently, national interests differ with regard to the level and type of harmonization to be enshrined in EU economic policy and market regulation, likewise dampening the level of contestation along the integration dimension. Taken together, we expect Eurosceptic contestation to be lower in policy areas dominated by distributive and regulatory issues due to cross-cutting national interests.

Third, some issues relate strongly to the classic left–right dimension. Euroscepticism is primarily found at the political fringes (Halikiopoulou et al. 2012; Hix et al. 2020). Whilst opposition to the EU clusters on the far right of the political spectrum, there are far-left parties that oppose European integration and the EU in its current or projected form, too. But they do so for different reasons. Economic nationalists on the left contest globalization and call for the imposition of tariffs and other restrictions on the movement of labour, goods and capital to protect jobs, regulatory standards and social security systems

at the national level. The focus of this left-wing welfare populism is on social inclusiveness and solidarity within national communities (Colantone and Stanig 2019). Fundamental criticism of the EU from the left has been fuelled by the EU's response to the Eurozone crisis imposing austerity programmes and strict conditionality on the debtor countries (Börzel and Risse 2018; Hobolt 2015; Streeck and Elsässer 2016). Rather than advocating a return to the nation state, left Eurosceptics demand a break with the neoliberal monetarist policies and undemocratic institutions of the EU and call for a strengthening of the regulatory and redistributive powers of the EU to promote European solidarity and social justice in and amongst the member states (Varoufakis 2015). Yet, ideological issues do not only divide right and left Eurosceptics but also sow dissent amongst right Eurosceptics. Welfare chauvinists choose leftist policies of economic redistribution whilst seeking to exclude non-natives from welfare benefits and the labour market (Kitschelt and McGann 1997). Neoliberal populists, in contrast, favour economic conservatism opposing a strong welfare state with its high government spending funded by high levels of taxation (Betz 1993). Not surprisingly, right Eurosceptic parties hold diverging positions on EU monetary and fiscal policies as well as related measures the EU adopted to manage the Eurozone crisis (e.g. Braun et al. 2019; Cavallaro et al. 2018). In sum, this means that policy areas clearly relating to ideological right–left issues will see lower levels of Eurosceptic contestation.

These theoretical considerations give us strong reasons to expect that Eurosceptic contestation substantially varies across policy areas. The degree of variation is an empirical question. To capture the full picture and to understand better which of the theoretical approaches make (more) sense to understand contestation in and across policy areas, below, we focus on Eurosceptic dissent and integration polarization.

II. Data and Method

To measure Eurosceptic dissent and integration polarization, we draw on a newly compiled dataset comprising all 17,213 roll-call votes in the 7th and 8th legislative terms of the EP (2009–2019). We obtained the data from VoteWatch Europe,³ and it is based on information provided by the EP.

We divide MEPs into two camps: Europhiles and Eurosceptics. National parties inside the European party groups play a key role in structuring MEP behaviour. Therefore, national and parties' positions are a useful proxy for MEPs' positions. The CHES (Bakker et al. 2015, 2020; Polk et al. 2017) provides party positions on European integration, allowing us to distinguish between Europhile and Eurosceptic MEPs based on whether their national party was on balance opposed to integration or in favour of it.⁴

³ www.votewatch.eu, last access 2 February 2020.

⁴ We assign MEPs to the national party they were affiliated with at the time of a specific vote. For some MEPs whose national parties are not covered by the CHES, we use predecessor parties or closely related parties (e.g. if in the same electoral alliance) in order to minimize missing values. We calculate national party positions for EP7 as the average of positions in the 2010 and 2014 waves and for EP8 as the average of the positions in the 2014 and 2019 waves. For parties that only feature in one of the waves, we use that position; for parties that feature in none of the waves, we draw on the previous and subsequent waves. To measure Euroscepticism, we draw on the item 'How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the course of 2014?', with response options ranging from strongly opposed, opposed, somewhat opposed and neutral to somewhat in favour, in favour and strongly in favour.

Figure 1: Distribution of MEPs' Integration Positions.

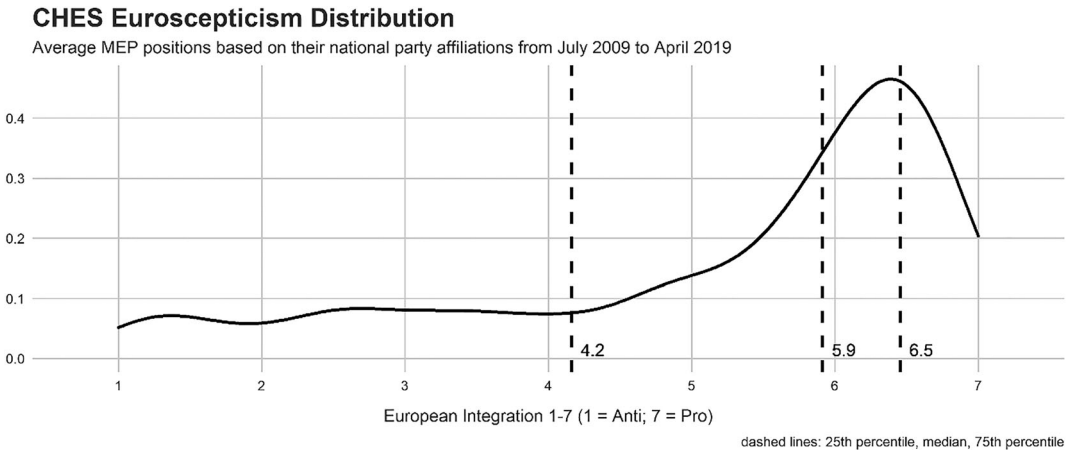


Figure 1 presents an overview of the distribution of MEPs' positions on the integration dimension.

The median MEP's national party scores 5.9 on the 7-point anti–pro scale and, hence, belongs to a clearly Europhile party. The 25 per cent of MEPs from parties that are most supportive of European integration are very homogenous and extreme in their position (6.5–7 on the scale). By contrast, the 25 per cent of MEPs that are affiliated with the most Eurosceptic national parties in fact include parties neutral towards integration and are thus much more diverse and heterogenous (1–4.2 on the scale).

For this reason, we opt for a demarcation of Europhiles and Eurosceptics that is based on the survey's response categories, thus yielding a high validity of the categorization. We label all MEPs from parties with a score of 3 (*somewhat opposed*) or less on the CHES EU anti–pro scale as Eurosceptic and all MEPs from parties with a score of 5 (*somewhat in favour*) or more as Europhile. Examples of parties just inside the Eurosceptic camp include the Greek *SYRIZA* (for EP7) or the Hungarian *Fidesz* (for EP8), parties just inside the Europhile camp include the UK Labour party (for EP7) and the Dutch People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*; for EP8). We drop from the analysis MEPs whose national parties are neither at least somewhat supportive nor at least somewhat opposed to European integration, because our focus is on Eurosceptics and Europhiles.

Seven MEPs in our sample switched their national party affiliation. Therefore, we remove neutral MEP-votes rather than neutral MEPs. In total, we drop 15 per cent of the observations in our sample.⁵ Having assigned MEPs to the two groups, we identify for each vote the plurality vote (the mode) amongst the Europhile camp. The common denominator of measuring Eurosceptic dissent and integration polarization is MEPs' voting behaviour vis-à-vis the Europhile plurality. Our dependent variable captures whether an MEP votes with the Europhile camp, coding the variable 1 if the MEP's vote matches that

⁵Supporting Information S1: Appendix 4 demonstrates that our findings are robust to changing cut-offs for the two camps.

of the Europhile plurality and 0 if they diverged. In addition to the familiar three voting options of voting in favour, against or abstaining, MEPs may opt to not vote in a specific vote on a given day even though they are present (see Supporting Information S1: Appendix 5). Since not voting in a specific roll call may be a strategic decision, particularly employed by Eurosceptics to express opposition (Brack 2013), we code these as 0.⁶ From this, we derive our measures of Eurosceptic dissent and integration polarization.

The independent variables of interest operationalize the effect of Euroscepticism conditional on policy area. We model these effects by interacting our binary *Eurosceptic* variable with a categorical variable for the responsible lead standing committee of the EP. MEPs under leadership of the rapporteur conduct the preparatory work in 20 sectoral standing committees (and two subcommittees), which provide a stable and fine-grained division into policy areas. Nevertheless, the policy substance and type of legislation within these areas remains diverse and not all committee jurisdictions translate neatly into relevant categories of party competition (e.g. Legal Affairs). We assume that over the large number of observations the committee jurisdictions meaningfully demarcate substantively different policy decisions that align with our expectations.⁷

Our analysis is on the MEP-vote level, and we pooled observations from both parliamentary terms. Due to the structure of the analysis, our data become very large (8,389,689 observations). We control for the following variables to limit confounding effects on the relationship between Euroscepticism and policy area.

First, we include an MEPs' ideological position on the left–right dimension. We need to control for left–right ideology because it may influence the decision to vote for or against the Europhile plurality and Eurosceptics tend to be more concentrated along the extremes of the left–right scale. Furthermore, since Eurosceptics cluster towards both ends of the left–right scale, we control for the left–right position and the square of the left–right position of an MEP. We draw on MEPs' national parties' position reported in the CHES to construct this variable.⁸ Second, we control for variation in the extent to which national parties and member states exert influence over their MEPs (Hix et al. 2007) by including two control variables. The variable *state* is categorical and refers to the MEPs' member states, and the variable *party* refers to MEPs' national party affiliations. In addition, we control for idiosyncratic variation between individual MEPs. The variable *MEPid* is a categorical variable that uniquely identifies each MEP. The legislative term variable is binary and refers to either the seventh or the eighth EPs. Lastly, the *Procedure* variable can take on the categories: resolutions on topical subjects, own-initiative procedure, legislative procedures and budgetary procedures.⁹

The impact of legislative procedure requires some elaboration. The EP's empowerment over time has seen it win veto powers and become a co-equal legislator with the

⁶MEPs may also be entirely absent on a given day. We drop these observations, assuming that such an absence – which affects votes across different policy areas – is not a form of opposition to the Europhile plurality which meaningfully impacts the variation in contestation across policy areas that we are interested in. In Supporting Information S1: Appendix 5, we present a robustness check in which we also code absent MEPs as 0, that is, only dropping them if they justified their absence (e.g. parental leave, illness).

⁷Supporting Information S1: Appendix 1 provides an overview of the summary statistics.

⁸We use the general left–right position ('Please tick the box that best describes each party's overall ideology on a scale ranging from 0 (*extreme left*) to 10 (*extreme right*)').

⁹The legislative procedure category contains files that are subject to the ordinary legislative procedure, the consultation procedure and the assent procedure. The budgetary category contains the discharge procedure and the budgetary procedure.

Council of the EU (Hix and Høyland 2013). This has raised the stakes in votes in the EP. Hix et al. (2007) argue that this empowerment explains the increase in party group cohesion in the EP over time. In addition to that change over time, the EP's power also varies with the type of votes. We therefore distinguish the types of vote in our sample. Some votes lead to the adoption of binding legislation, whilst others are merely advisory. We use the institutional code to distinguish the following vote types (see Table 1).

We drop all votes that are not in one of the following categories: (1) resolutions on topical subjects (RSP), (2) own-initiative reports (INI), (3) legislative decisions (APP, CNS, COD) and (4) budgetary decisions (DEC, BUD). The remaining sample contains 17,932 individual votes. We drop other vote types for two reasons. First, in the remaining categories, the number of votes is small. Second, we approximate salience through the procedure type. Resolutions on topical issues are the least salient out of our four categories because they do not entail legally binding acts and do not necessitate further activity. Own-initiative procedures are somewhat more salient because they require a response by the European Commission and may result in a legislative proposal (Kreppel and Webb 2019). Legislative decisions are even more salient because they lead to European law. Budgetary issues are likewise very salient issues, in particular along the Eurosceptic–Europhile cleavage. This is because they shape the spending of the EU, its institution and programs, both in terms of size and priorities, as well as providing an avenue to hold the institutions accountable.

It is important to note that our analysis draws on roll-call votes only, which are but a subset of votes in the EP. Research on roll-call votes has greatly informed our understanding of EU legislative politics (Hix et al. 2007) but has also attracted criticism (Carruba et al. 2006, 2008; Høyland 2010; Yordanova and Mühlböck 2015). Yordanova and Mühlböck (2015) differentiate between two main concerns: a 'behavioural bias' and a 'selection bias'. First, MEPs knowing that their behaviour may be observed by their

Table 1: Legislative Procedures.

Abb.	<i>Procedure Name</i>	<i>Total cases</i>
ACI	Inter-institutional agreement procedure	37
APP	Consent procedure	232
AVC	Assent procedure (historic)	1
BUD	Budgetary procedure	1140
CNS	Consultation procedure	355
COD	Ordinary legislative procedure (ex-co-decision procedure)	4465
DEA	Delegated acts procedure	21
DEC	Discharge procedure	1100
IMM	Members' immunity	2
INI	Own-initiative procedure	6739
INL	Legislative initiative procedure	257
INS	Institutional procedure	2
NLE	Non-legislative enactments	800
REG	Parliament's Rules of Procedure	158
RPS	Implementing acts	20
RSO	Internal organisation decisions	18
RSP	Resolutions on topical subjects	3901
Total		19,248

principals may behave differently under roll-call voting. Second, not all votes in the EP are RCVs, meaning that it is unclear to what extent they are representative of the universe of votes in the legislature. To uncover whether these potential biases are observable and substantively meaningful, research has exploited rule changes in the EP that have made roll calls mandatory on final legislative votes (Hix et al. 2018; Hug 2016; Yordanova and Mühlböck 2015). Hix et al. (2018) conclude that an analysis of RCVs is reflective of general voting behaviour in the legislature. Yet, we do not know how general party group cohesion maps onto the measurement of polarization that we propose in this study. In any case, roll calls represent an important subset of the total number of votes and thus merit investigation.

Our unit of observation is the individual MEP-vote. Our independent variables vary at different levels, some variables are nested within others, and some variables are crossed (not nested). To account for this complex structure of variation and to correctly attribute components of variation to its sources, we estimate a random intercepts model. Supporting Information S1: Appendix 2 describes the model in detail. In this multilevel model, we estimate five random effects. MEPs are nested within national parties, which in turn are nested within states. The procedures and legislative terms are crossed. In the case of MEPs, for example, this means that we estimate an individual intercept for each of the 1085 different MEPs. Each intercept shift accounts for systematic differences between individual MEPs, and, because of the nesting structure, it also includes modelled differences across national parties and member states. The variables *Euro sceptic*, *policy*, the interaction *euro sceptic* × *policy*, *left–right* and *left–right squared* are estimated as fixed effects. This means that these variables are estimated to have constant effects at the levels at which they vary. For example, *policy* and the interaction term *euro sceptic* × *policy* vary at the MEP-vote level and are estimated to have constant effects across MEPs, parties, member states, legislative terms and procedures.

III. Results

We first present descriptive statistics and then move on to our main dependent variables.¹⁰

Descriptive Statistics: Cohesion across Policy Areas

A descriptive overview of voting behaviour can already provide a glimpse of variation between Eurosceptics and Europhiles as well as within Eurosceptics. To this end, we determine the degree of cohesion of the two camps for each vote according to Hix et al. (2007, p. 91):

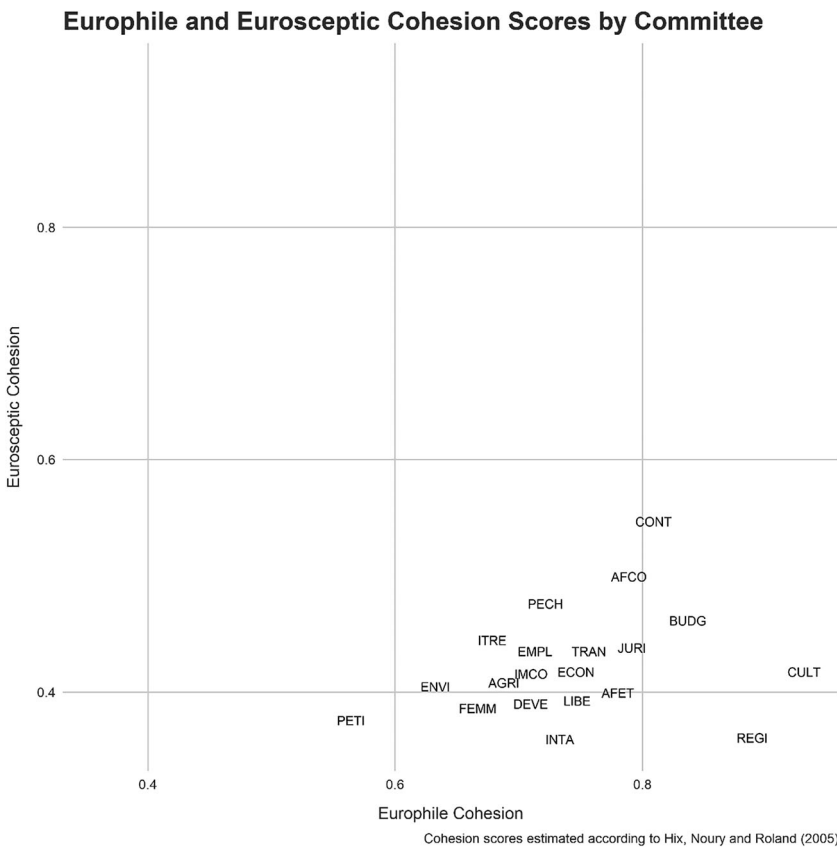
$$\frac{\max \{Y_i, N_i, A_i\} - \frac{1}{2}[(Y_i + N_i + A_i)] - \max \{Y_i, N_i, A_i\}}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

where Y_i denotes the number of Yes votes, N_i the number of No votes and A_i the number of abstentions. This measures each camp's cohesion independently of each other. In

¹⁰Replication materials are available in the Supporting Information S2.

Figure 2, we plot the average policy area cohesion scores for Europhiles on the x-axis and the Eurosceptics' scores on the y-axis. Cohesion is higher within the Europhile camp than within the Eurosceptics. This suggests that Eurosceptic MEPs are less powerful as a group than their numbers suggest. The variation of cohesion is also larger within the Europhile group, which is perhaps a consequence of being the larger camp. We also observe variation across policy areas. Both Eurosceptics and Europhiles exhibit low cohesion on policy areas including the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety as well as Women's Rights and Gender Equality. This suggests that the integration dimension does not structure voting behaviour on the issues as internal divisions riddle both camps. In contrast, Eurosceptics and Europhiles are both relatively cohesive on issues regarding the Budget, Budgetary Control and Foreign Policy. Whilst the camps each vote cohesively, this however does not yet tell us whether they oppose each other or vote along the same lines. For instance, if both Eurosceptics and Europhiles were perfectly cohesive, they may be polarized, with one camp, for example, supporting a decision and the other opposing it or abstaining en bloc, or there may be consensus amongst them. In the next section, we therefore link the votes of the two camps through our measures of Eurosceptic dissent and integration polarization.

Figure 2: Europhile and Eurosceptic Cohesion by Committee.

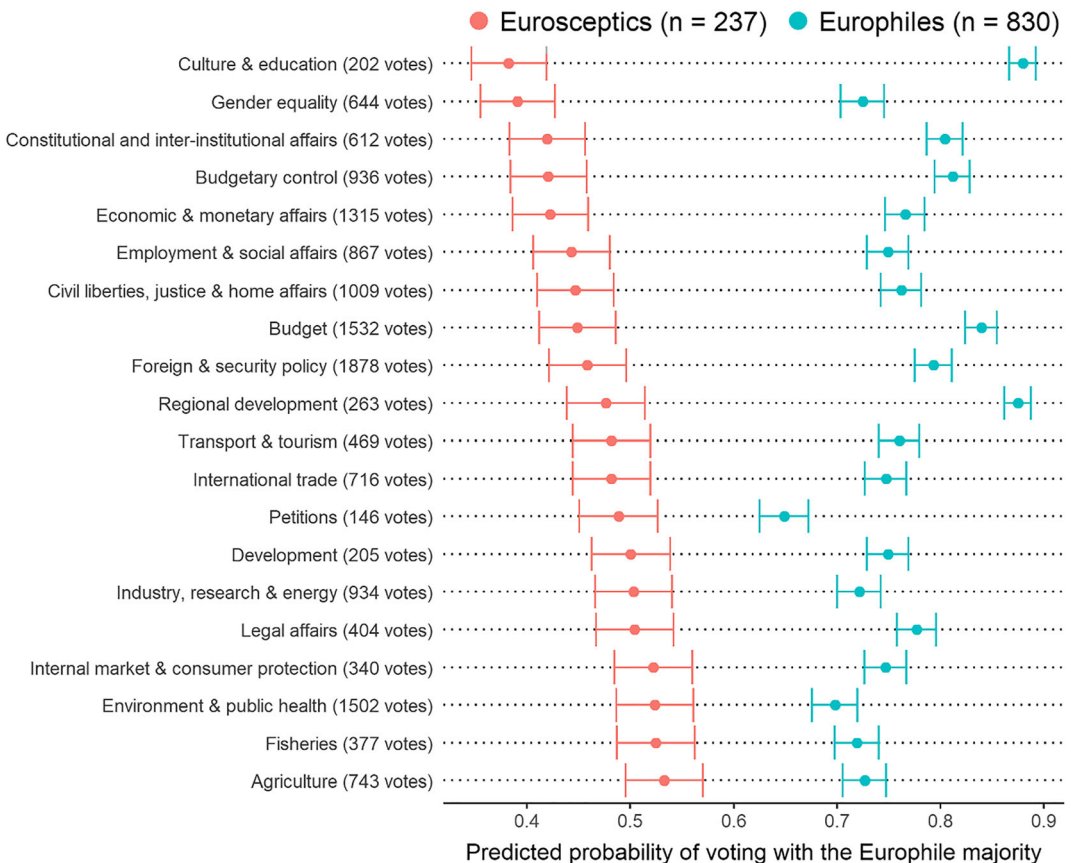


Analysis at the MEP-Vote Level

Having gained descriptive insights into cohesion in the EP, we now take a closer look at Eurosceptic dissent. Our dependent variable captures whether an MEP voted with the Europhile plurality or not (Eurosceptic dissent). Figure 3 (on the basis of the regression in Supporting Information S1: Appendix 3) shows the variation in the predicted probability of dissent from the Europhile plurality for Eurosceptics as well as Europhiles. We sort committees by highest Eurosceptic dissent. This illustrates strong variation across the policy areas demarcated by committee jurisdictions in the EP whilst controlling for MEPs' position on the left–right dimension, their member state, the legislative term and the salience of the legislation (through the type of procedure).

First, the results demonstrate that Eurosceptics behave differently depending on the policy area of a vote. Recall that we argued that constituent policies as well as policies that activate the cultural cleavage should show higher Eurosceptic dissent. Redistributive policies closely linked to national economic interests should show lower dissent. We find

Figure 3: Eurosceptic Dissent by Policy Area. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

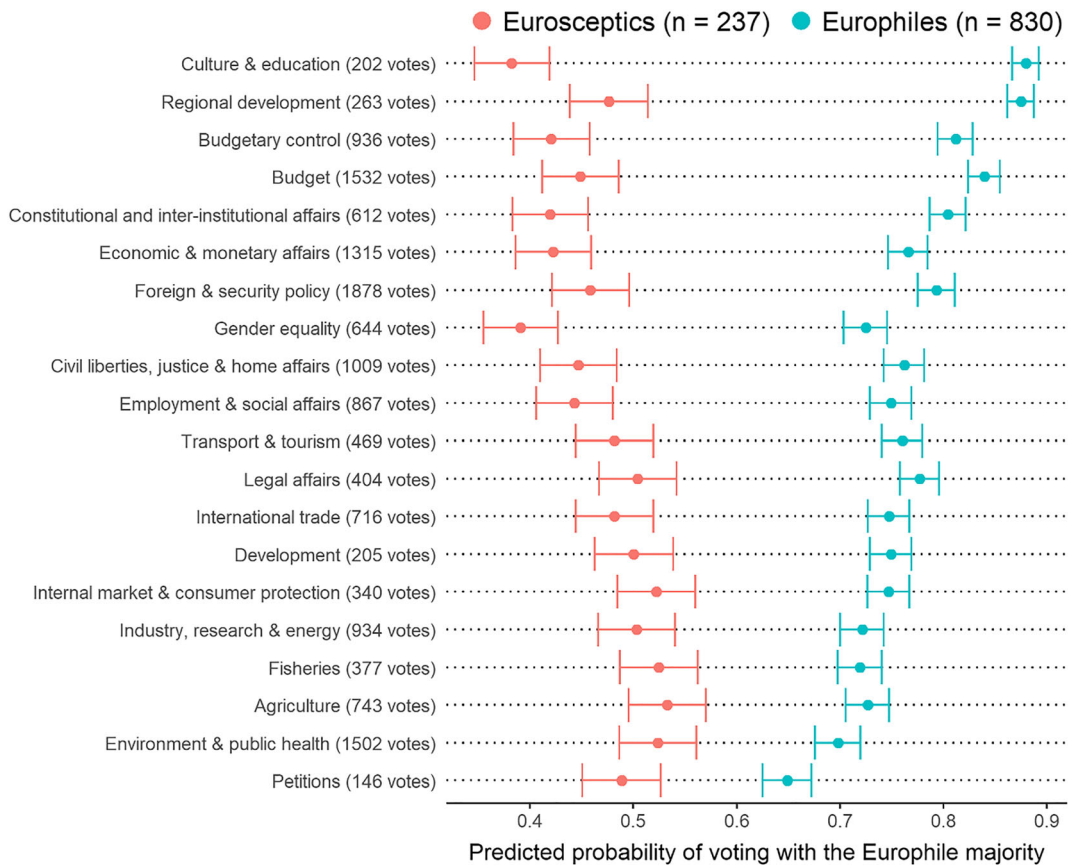


support for these expectations. Votes falling under the remit of the Culture and Education Committee as well as the Gender Equality Committee exhibit the lowest probability of seeing a Eurosceptic MEP support the Europhile plurality. Likewise, Eurosceptics are likely to contest the Europhile plurality on Constitutional Affairs and inter-institutional policy questions that shape the day-to-day practice and progress of European integration. Budgetary Control votes, which frequently deal with instruments that decide about the actors and levels that shape and constrain budget use, also fit this pattern of seeing relatively higher contestation by Eurosceptics, whilst Budget votes score somewhat lower than expected. This resonates with findings on the unexpected low conflict within the EU Commission regarding policy programs of consecutive order (Hartlapp et al. 2014, p. 133), where debates evolve around the same conflict lines each time a new cycle starts. Theoretically, budget competences seem fixed in the EU, whilst controls have to be renegotiated again and again (Abbott et al. 2020). In contrast, and in keeping with our expectations, the two standout redistributive policies of the EU, the Agricultural policy and the Fisheries policy, see some of the lowest Eurosceptic dissent. Regional Development policy, however, sees higher dissent than we expected. One possible explanation is that Regional Development policy has seen substantially more politicization. Conditionality regarding macro-economic imbalances and rule of law in Poland and Hungary are of increasing importance. This might push the Regional policy more on the GAL-TAN dimension than other redistributive policies that are perceived as technical and remain more detached from public opinion.

Second, the probability of supporting the Europhile plurality varies amongst Europhiles as well – and more starkly so than amongst Eurosceptics. This may be explained by the size of the Europhile camp that can easily carry legislation despite some rebels. At the same time, it is interesting to note that there is no obvious correlation between the two camps' predicted probabilities of voting with the Europhile plurality. Neither does Eurosceptic contestation breed rebellion amongst Europhiles, nor does it consistently coincide with higher Europhile cohesion. In other words, if Eurosceptics' higher probability to contest the Europhile plurality denotes them 'smelling blood' and expecting to be able to drive a wedge between Europhiles, their sense of smell does not appear particularly reliable. This resonates with analyses that question the relevance of electoral competition as we know it in the national political arena for the EP (Meijers and Van Der Veer 2019).

Figure 4 (based on the regression in Supporting Information S1: Appendix 3) replicates the results from Figure 3 but orders the policy areas by the difference between Eurosceptics' and Europhiles' probability of voting with the Europhile plurality. These differences are indicators of integration polarization in the EP. In general, the expected pattern holds up. Polarization is higher in cultural, constituent and distributive policies, whilst it is lowest in redistributive policies, such as Agriculture and Rural Development and Fisheries. Regional Development policy turns out to be the one clear outlier based on our expectations. Votes in the policy area determine how regional development funds are distributed. Whilst being a *prima facie* redistributive policy, its dynamics appear to be more akin to budgetary policy, yielding the high level of polarization we expect there. This difference might also play into the linkage that has frequently been made between Regional Development policy and rule of law issues. Not least it underlines a salience of the policy field that differs strongly from Agricultural Policy and Fisheries Policy. In

Figure 4: Eurosceptic Dissent by Integration Polarization. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



contrast, in Gender Equality issues, a low probability of Eurosceptics to vote with the Europhiles is matched by a relatively low cohesion amongst Europhiles. This might reflect divisions not only amongst progressive and conservative Europhile party groups but also within national parties.

The relatively low polarization in Environment, Internal Market and Consumer Protection and Industry, Research and Energy speaks to the redistributive consequences of the standards and regulations set within these committee jurisdictions. Differently structured economies, welfare state models and regulatory systems mean that such policies produce winners and losers amongst member states and MEPs’ constituencies. As expected, this may sway MEPs’ votes in ways that cut across the Eurosceptic–Europhile divide.

Finally, the results also shed some light on the potential impact of Eurosceptics on legislative output. For the time being, neither dissent nor integration polarization per se is a good indicator of a legislative influence over policy. Despite the inroads that Eurosceptics have made in the EP, their numbers are still small compared with those of the Europhile camp. In our sample, using our operationalization of Europhiles and Eurosceptics based

on MEPs' national parties' positions on integration, less than 30 per cent of the MEPs qualify as Eurosceptics. In order to influence policy output by, for example, voting down specific amendments, Eurosceptics need to successfully sow division amongst Europhiles and induce some to form issue-specific coalitions with them.

Potential impact is thus highest in policy areas that combine a low predicted probability of voting with the Europhile plurality for both camps, indicating that Eurosceptics may garner sufficient votes to block or carry legislation in line with their preferences. These are also areas where new coalitions are more likely to emerge in the medium term as the lower probability to vote with the plurality in both camps offers room for new alignments. In sum, perhaps counterintuitively, given the imbalance in the strength in numbers, dogs that bark do not always bite: where contestation is most visible, and polarization strongest, Eurosceptics may have the least real-life impact. Yet, when the two camps are harder to make out based on their voting behaviour, this may in some circumstances indicate actual legislative influence of Eurosceptics.

IV. Discussion and Conclusion

European integration has become a salient issue in European politics. Large bodies of research have investigated the rise of Euroscepticism and its impact on party competition. Meanwhile, Eurosceptics have made inroads in legislatures in EU member states as well as in the EP. This article contributes to the emerging research on the behaviour of Eurosceptics in EU institutions and their impact on decision-making. Based on literatures on European integration, party competition and policy types, we develop expectations regarding variation in contestation across policy areas. Moving beyond previous studies, our analyses of roll-call data from the 7th and 8th EP term (2009–2019) comprehensively map the extent of contestation along the integration dimension and reveal patterns of variation across policy areas.

Drawing on newly developed concepts of Eurosceptic dissent and integration polarization, we show that contestation is overall lower than expected. It is highest in policy areas touching on distributive, constituent and cultural issues. Eurosceptic dissent and integration polarization are lowest on redistributive policies including Agriculture and Rural Development as well as Fisheries policy, where contestation is curbed by national interests and ideological diversity along the traditional left–right cleavage. These comparative findings should also inform party competition at the national level, allowing to identify policy areas in which Eurosceptics are more likely to act as challengers of mainstream parties (De Vries and Hobolt 2020).

The results also speak to the legislative impact of Eurosceptics. Where polarization between Eurosceptics and Europhiles is strongest, the uneven size of the two camps hardly allows Eurosceptics to block or alter legislation in the EP. Only when Eurosceptics meet a divided Europhile camp is there a potential for them to alter the course of European integration through influencing legislative output.

Finally, our findings can inform future research on Eurosceptic contestation and EU decision-making. Whilst our study focuses on broad trends in voting, these may be indicative of dynamics throughout the legislative process, such as in preparatory work in the committees of the EP or legislative debates in the plenary (Bélanger and Schimmelfennig 2021).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Supporting Information S1
Supporting Information S2