

Are You There Party? It's Me, Your Supporter: Do Parties Respond to Supporters' Preferences on  
the Issue of European Union Membership

By

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Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Political Science

May, 2014

Nashville, Tennessee

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank everyone who read and gave feedback on this paper, especially Mollie Cohen, Laura Sellers, Jan Stuckatz, Oscar Castorena, and the rest of the Democratic Representation and Accountability class.

I would also like to thank Liz Zechmeister for being the second reader and for all of her feedback.

Third, I would like to thank Alex Sargent and the Vanderbilt University Theatre's Costume Shop for helping to keep my sanity throughout the years. I do not know what I would have done without all of them.

I would especially like to thank my mother. I would not be at Vanderbilt, or in graduate school, without her. I would also like to thank her for reading every single draft and proof reading it. I would also like to thank my grandparents, my aunt, and Marilyn Helms for all of the support that they have provided me with over the years and through this process. I know that they could not be prouder of me.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank Zeynep Somer-Topcu, my advisor. She has done so much for me, from letting me be her research assistant to supervising my thesis. Her classes provided me with the foundation for this paper and I cannot thank her enough for being such a great professor, advisor, and boss. Furthermore, this would not have been possible without her tireless help to make it happen.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The European Union (EU) is made up of 28 member states that are joined together for economic and political benefit. Since 1979, this organization, formerly called the European Community, has held elections to the European Parliament (Watts 2008, 30-40). The European Union has increased both in power and responsibility since its formation. The EU, has expanded its sovereignty on issues that reach many people's day-to-day lives (Watts 2008, 277-293). This has been done through the assurances of the free movement of goods, services, currency, and citizens throughout the member states and the world. The increase in importance of the European Union means that individuals should be more concerned about issues at hand. This makes one wonder what the response of national parties has been to the increase in saliency of the European Union among party supporters.

Representation in the European Union is a topic that has been explored in many different contexts, however, to my knowledge, no one has examined the response to party supporters, over time, in relation to the overarching issue of the EU itself. Using Eurobarometer and Euromanifesto data, this paper will examine the model that Adams and Ezrow (2009) employ to show that, on average, only a subset of national political parties competing in the European Parliamentary elections have been responding to the opinions of their supporters regarding the European Union.

This paper makes contributions to the research on political parties, representation, and the European Union. First, it shows that meaningful differences exist between parties, which go beyond the mainstream-niche divide. More specifically, the literature has focused on the behavior of "non-centrist parties", such as communist, green, and national parties (Adams et al. 2006). Second, assuming that the party behavior resembles their manifestos, I show that some

national parties do not represent their parties' supporters on issues involving the European Union. More specifically, there is something different about the way parties respond to their supporters when they are in the national government versus when they are in the opposition. Finally, the paper shows that the model used by Adams and Ezrow (2009) can be extended to the issue of the European Union.

First, I will discuss the relevant literature on representation and response to public opinion, in general. Along with this, I will discuss some of the literature on the importance of the European Union, as a political and economic force. Next, the research methodology, along with the data and main variables, will be presented. Then, I will summarize the findings, along with discussing the implications and limitations of the research. In conclusion, I will discuss some of the potential avenues for future research that could further extend the work on party supporters' opinions and how parties represent the policy preferences of voters.

### **Previous Explanations**

The relationship between party supporters and parties in the European Union is one that many researchers have attempted to explore. The majority of the works have found results that suggest parties are aligned with the opinions of their supporters, however, the results have been qualified (Dalton 1985; Carubba 2001; De Vries and Arnold 2009). Dalton (1985) examines the relationship between party elites and party supporters in the 1979 European Parliamentary elections and finds that the parties respond to the public when controlling for the opinions of party elites. Carubba (2001) extends the literature on elite-supporter correspondence and finds that politicians are responding to the electorate, when the voters change their opinions on integration. However, he does not examine the change over time in the parties' manifestos and does not account for variation between manifesto positions and the positions of the party

supporters (Carubba 2001). De Vries and Arnold (2009) examine representation of the public's preferences in the European Union, but instead of looking at manifesto data, they use role of legislation. The results are that parties are highly responsive to public opinion on separate issues within the overarching category of the European Union, but they do not find support for the parties responding to the preferences of citizens (De Vries and Arnold 2009).

## **THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS**

In this section, I will explain two sources of literature that are used to develop my hypotheses. The relevant literature is on the European Union and two of the theories of representation.

### **The European Union**

The European Union has been growing in importance in the world and the field of political science. Many scholars (Dalton 1985; Carubba 2001; De Vries 2007; De Vries and Arnold 2009; Gabel and Hix 2002; Somer-Topcu and Zar 2013) have researched the European Union. Since the first elections in 1979, the consensus has been that the institution is important for predicting the fortune of parties in national elections and that the elections have been salient in the minds of the European public.

Voters' behavior in European Parliamentary elections points to a need for responsiveness among parties to their supporters' preferences. Previous research has shown that when people vote in the European elections, they are voting in a more sincere way than previously thought (Hobolt and Spoon 2012). The voters are placing greater importance on the elections (Hobolt and Spoon 2012). Sincere voting is one of the main characteristics of "first-order elections", which are elections that are considered the most important in the country, because "there is more at stake" (Hobolt and Spoon 2012). These "first-order elections" are considered to be more

important in the minds of the voters, party members, and the party elites (Hobolt and Spoon 2012). This is in contrast to elections labeled as “second-order” (Hobolt and Spoon 2012). Because the European Parliamentary elections are first-order elections, then the national parties should respond to the party supporters and the opinions regarding the European Union. This is because behavior seen in first-order elections implies that the voters care about the issues. If voters care about the European Union, then the parties should be representing them.

Another reason to expect that the parties in the European Union are behaving like those of national parties is that the saliency of the EU has increased. With the increased attention, the policy area has become more contentious. In previous works, evidence has been found, which suggests that there has been an increase in attention to European integration (Ray 1999; De Vreese et al. 2006; De Vries 2010). Ray (1999) finds that the saliency of European integration increased during the period between 1984 and 1996. Similarly, De Vreese et al. (2006) show that, while the coverage of the European Union has not been extremely high in all of the member countries, the coverage of the elections has been increasing. In another paper, De Vries (2010) shows that when the coverage of European Union issues is high, and voters care about what is happening at the European Union level, the parties respond to them.

The parties’ behavior in the European elections has implications at the national level, because the European Parliamentary elections can serve as a way to gauge support for an issue among the electorate (Somer-Topcu and Zar 2013). This furthers the argument that the European elections are relevant to the national parties, are relevant in calculations by the parties, and in the behavior of their supporters.

Furthermore, parties should respond to the shift in opinions of their party supporters, because European Union related issues are becoming increasingly important in the daily lives of

the citizens. With this increased importance, the European Union is expected to be of concern to the voters. This means that the issue will make itself one that the parties need to address (De Vries 2007).

The European Parliamentary elections are more important to national parties when European Union related issues are salient to the voting public. This means the issues are not confined to the European Parliamentary elections. De Vries (2007) shows that voters do not always care about European Union issues, but when they do, the national elections can be affected. When European Union issues are contentious, the parties should be representing the preferences of voters. Being unresponsive could cost them votes in the national elections, whereas, being responsive could help them win votes. Parties should be even more responsive to party supporters, because they would not want to lose votes to a similar party or have risk abstention by their supporters.

If the issue is important and parties do not respond to their supporters' shifting preferences on the European Union, it is possible that the parties will lose votes to other parties that do align with their beliefs, which would increase the party competition in the party system and decrease their base of support (Taggart 1998). Therefore, the parties should respond to the preferences to keep the supporters' backing. For example, in the United Kingdom, the Conservative Party has been divided regarding EU policies (Taggart 1998). However, as opinions have shifted away from the EU, the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP), an anti-EU Party has become a contender in elections (Taggart 1998). This has led the Conservative Party to adopt more anti-EU policy stances and increase appeals to the anti-European Union voters (Ladrech 2002). A recent example of this is David Cameron's attempt to hold a controversial referendum about membership in the European Union (Dearden 2014). The media

has portrayed this an attempt to cater to the Eurosceptic party supporters that have started to support the UKIP (Dearden 2014).

### **Representation and Party Supporters**

Two major theories of representation are particularly relevant when discussing the relationship between party supporters and national parties. They are sub-constituency representation and dynamic representation.

Parties are institutions that respond in different ways to actors seeking something from them. Sub-constituency representation is the theory that states that instead of representing the public as a whole, institutions represent a sector of their constituents (Dalton 1985). There are many different sub-constituents that an institution can respond to disproportionately. For example, Bartels (2008) finds that parties in the United States respond disproportionately to people who make campaign contributions. In relation to issue of the European Union, the main type of sub-constituency representation that is discussed is party elites and how the parties are responding to their policy preferences (Dalton 1985; Hooghe 2003).

However, the theory also applies to party preferences and their supporters, because party supporters are a sub-constituency. Ezrow et al (2010) examine the possible explanations for policy shifts of parties and response to party supporters. When looking at the differences between the mean voter representation and the mean party supporter, they find that the change in the mean party supporter position has a significant relationship to the change in the policy of parties. This means that all of the parties should respond to changes in the opinion of party supporters.

Another theory of representation is the theory of dynamic representation. Dynamic representation is when public opinion changes and the policy outputs changes in response



(Stimson et al. 1995). This means that as public opinion changes, the expectation is that the policy outputs change. Thus, the parties should respond to opinion changes by their supporters through a change in their policies, in effect, changing their manifesto positions regarding the particular issue.

Dynamic representation and sub-constituency representation are expected to work in conjunction with one another when dealing with EU issues. This is because the two theories are not independent of each other. Although the theories were developed in the study of American Politics, the two theories have applications in the setting of comparative politics. Some scholars (Adams and Ezrow 2009; Ezrow et al. 2011) show that dynamic and sub-constituency representation has an effect on the behavior of parties and the uneven response of parties to elites in Europe. Therefore, my expectation is that, assuming the parties are working in the same manner as national parties in the research of Adams and Ezrow (2009), the theories will work in conjunction with one another.

Based on the previous research and the theory outlined above, this paper posits the following:

*H<sub>1</sub>: The national parties of European Union member countries respond to the preferences of their supporters on issues involving the European Union.*

The expectation is that the national parties will reflect a change in the party supporters' opinion on the European Union by shifting their manifesto position.

However, I expect that the effect size will differ depending on the type of parties. More specifically, the effect will be differ for governing and opposition parties. This is because party manifestos are more important for the opposition parties' election strategies.

The effect is expected to be larger for opposition parties, because manifestos are more important for getting correct information to the voters. The opposition parties do not have as much scrutiny by the media and, by virtue of being in the opposition, do not have performances to be evaluated (Somer-Topcu and Zar 2013). Therefore, the opposition parties are expected to make more sincere appeals in their manifestos, which should correspond to their supporters' preferences. For governing parties, manifestos are not what people examine when trying to decide how to vote. Previous works have shown that the policy promises in election manifestos are "discounted" by the voters (Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012). Bawn and Somer-Topcu (2012) find that this "discounting" means that governing parties gain more votes by taking more extreme positions in their manifestos. This is due to people recognizing the fact that being in the government will force the parties to take more moderate positions, because of coalitions, increased scrutiny by the media, and backlash if the policies are too extreme (Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012). Therefore, instead of taking positions that are close to their supporters, governing parties are expected to take more extreme positions in their manifestos. Then, these extreme positions will be discounted by the public.

*H<sub>2</sub>: The responsiveness of parties to the issue of the European Union will be stronger for parties in opposition.*

## RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to evaluate the hypotheses, the paper makes use of two sources of data. The first is Eurobarometer data from 1978-1999 (Schmitt et al. 2008). The Eurobarometer surveys are sponsored by the European Union and they deal with a wide range of issues pertinent to the European Union (Schmitt et al. 2008). These surveys are conducted multiple times a year with the questions differing depending on the focus of the survey (Schmitt et al. 2008).

The second source is the European Election Studies' Euromanifesto data, which examines the European Parliamentary election manifestos, or party platforms, of the parties' competing in the elections (Schmitt and Wüst 2012). The countries included in the analysis of this paper include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. For the countries that are not part of the original European Parliamentary elections in 1979, the first election to the European Parliament is used as the starting point.<sup>1</sup> For example, Spain became a member of the European Union in 1986 and had the first election to the European Parliament on June 10, 1987. This means that the first time the Spanish parties appear in the data is for the 1987 election.

### Dependent Variable

For all of the models, the dependent variable is *change in party position at t*, which is the change in the party manifesto position between the time of the election and the time of the previous election. This is found by looking the party manifestos. The Euromanifesto data provides a measure for the parties on a number of European Union issues (Schmitt and Wüst

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<sup>1</sup> This applies to Greece, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Austria, and Finland. Greece entered in 1981 and experienced the first election in 1981 (Watts 2008). For Spain and Portugal, see above. Sweden, Austria, and Finland joined in 1995 (Watts 2008). Sweden held the first European Parliamentary elections in September 1995, while Austria and Finland held theirs in October 1996 (Watts 2008).

2012). This is a good proxy for because it is a document the parties publish before an election that explains the policies they wish to carry out while in office (Budge and Hofferbert 1990). Budge and Hofferbert (1990) show that parties, on average, follow the information that they put in manifestos, which means that the parties do not write irrelevant information just to please supporters. The manifestos contain relevant information.

While the Comparative Manifesto Project data is also available, it has only one variable that pertains to the European Union and its issues.<sup>2</sup> In comparison, the Euromanifesto data uses twenty-nine different codes that pertain specifically to the European Union and its governing system (Schmitt and Wüst 2012).<sup>3</sup> The Euromanifesto project examines quasi-sentences (Schmitt and Wüst 2012). First, the quasi-sentences are given a number that corresponds to the area of application, which is the nation, the European Union, or the world (Schmitt and Wüst 2012). Three coders, then, put the sentences into sixty-nine categories, fourteen are in the pro-EU variable and fifteen go into the anti-EU variable (Schmitt and Wüst 2012). Each issue reports the percentage of the manifesto that is dedicated to the specific issues (Schmitt and Wüst 2012). These two variables are then subtracted from each other and scaled to determine the percent difference between the pro and anti European Union variables (Schmitt and Wüst 2012). This measure goes from -100 to 100, with the negative values being anti-European Union and the positive values being pro-European Union (Schmitt and Wüst 2012). Although the scale is -100 to 100, the range for the dependent variable is -34.67 to 49.41.

For the purpose of the dependent variable, the EU position from the election is subtracted from the position in the European Parliamentary election immediately preceding it. To get the

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<sup>2</sup> The Comparative Manifesto Project has variable 110, which is coded if there is a negative reference to the European Union in the manifestos, such as “opposition to the of the manifesto country to the EU budget” (Volkens et al. 2013).

change in the positions of the national parties, the values at  $t-1$  were subtracted from the pro/anti EU variable at  $t$ .

### **Independent Variables**

The main independent variable is *change in mean supporter preference at  $t$* , or the change in the average supporter of the parties on the issue of European Union membership. To evaluate this I use the Eurobarometer surveys from Fall of 1978 through Fall 1997. The surveys used in the analysis occur at least three months, and at most twenty months, before the election.<sup>4</sup> The surveys ask questions regarding vote intention and support for membership in the European Union. The surveys are at least three months before, because it allows for a response to preferences gives time for the manifestos to be written before elections (Adams et al. 2011). The expectation is that the party would see the survey and change the election manifesto in response to the supporters' preferences. Closer to the elections and the parties could not be expected to respond, because the manifestos would most likely have already been written (Adams et al. 2011).

The question that is used to identify the preference toward membership in the European Union asks “Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership of the European Community (Common Market) is ...?” (Schmitt et al. 2008).<sup>5</sup> The answer was coded as 1 if the person thought it was “A Good Thing”, 2 if the individual said “Neither Good nor Bad”, and 3 if the person responded with “A Bad Thing.” For ease of interpretation, the scale was changed from 1, 2, 3 to 3, 2, 1. This was so that a positive value in the mean preference would correspond to a positive value in the manifesto positions.

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<sup>4</sup> Previous work has shown that the effect of previous election performance decreases after three years. This is because contextual changes have occurred (Somer-Topcu and Zar 2013). This is taken to mean that surveys taken up to twenty months previously should still be applicable regarding supporters preferences and parties should still be expected to consider them.

<sup>5</sup> This variable is labeled “membrshp” in the Eurobarometer Trend File (Schmitt et al. 2008).

In order to identify who the party supporters are in the data set, I look at the question regarding vote intent in the next national election. The question asks “If there were a 'general election tomorrow (say if contact is under 18 years: and you had a vote), which party would you support?” (Schmitt et al. 2008).<sup>6</sup> This question is used for a few reasons. First, because the argument is about the actions of parties on a national level, the parties in consideration should be national level parties. Second, the question is asked consistently across the Eurobarometer surveys. The alternative questions do not ask about the national level elections and do not get asked at regular intervals.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, the question being used did not require the respondents to remember their previous vote. Studies have shown that people tend to over report actions, like voting for the winning party (Holbrook and Krosnick 2010). Therefore, the question gets rid of any concern of social desirability bias.

To find the aggregate position of the party supporters, I divided the countries and parties into their respective groups. I dropped the observations that were missing, labeled as “other”, and the refusals (Schmitt et al. 2008). Then, I found the mean placement of party supporters on the issue of European Union membership. Similar to the dependent variable, I find the change in the supporters’ positions by subtracting the values at  $t$  from the values at  $t-1$ .

In order to test the second hypothesis, a second independent variable, *party in government*, is required. This is a dummy variable that codes the party, or parties, that were in

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<sup>6</sup> The variable is labeled ‘Voteint’ in the Eurobarometer Trend File for 1970-2002 (Schmitt et al. 2008).

<sup>7</sup> The other questions considered for this variable are “Were you able to go and vote in the last general election on <date> or were you prevented? If voted: for which party did you vote?” and “Which party are you most likely to vote for in the elections to the European Parliament, assuming for the moment that this party will have candidates in the constituency where you vote?” (Schmitt et al. 2008). They are label “eunext” and “lastvote”, respectively (Schmitt et al. 2008).

government at any point during the period between the last and current national election.<sup>8</sup> Parties that were in government during the period are given a 1 and those that were not are given a 0.

### **Control Variables**

In order to correctly capture the effect of the shift in party supporters' preferences, some control variables will be included. The first control variable is labeled *change in mean supporter preference at t-1*. This variable is the mean support preference at  $t-2$  subtracted by the mean supporter preference at  $t-1$ . The variable is meant to capture the lagged change over time, which ensures that the parties are not responding to the preferences of the supporters from the previous election cycle. The second control variable is the change in the average preference of people in the country, known as *change in average national preference at t*. This is the average preference of everyone surveyed in the country at  $t$  subtracted by the average preference of everyone surveyed in the country at  $t-1$ . This is to control for the possibility that the parties are responding to the preferences of all voters, not just the party supporters. The third control variable is the *change in party's vote share*, which is the percent of the votes cast for the party in the second to last national election subtracted by the percent cast in the last national election. This is to control for the parties increasing or decreasing their vote share, which has been found to affect the way that a party campaigns (Sommer-Topcu and Williams 2013).

### **Model**

In order to evaluate the hypotheses, I use the multivariate regression equation that Adams and Ezrow (2009, 212) employ in their paper on representation in national elections. I also include a number of control variables and an interaction term. The basic regression equation for Model 1 and Model 2 is the following:

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<sup>8</sup> The results were run when looking at the difference between the change in vote share for the national election and the last European Parliamentary elections, but the effect was not substantially different.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Change in party position at } t = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 [\text{change in the average supporter position}] \\ & + \beta_2 [\text{change in party position at } t-1] + \beta_3 [\text{party in government}] \end{aligned}$$

where

**Change in Party Position (t)** =  $\text{party}_i \text{ position } (t) - \text{party}_i \text{ position } (t-1)$  and  $\text{party}_i \text{ position } (t-1) - \text{party}_i \text{ position } (t-2)$  (Adams and Ezrow 2009). This can also be written as the position of a given party on the EU at the most recent election subtracted by the position of the given party on the EU in the election at  $t-1$  and the average party position at  $t-1$  subtracted by the average party position of a given party at  $t-2$ .

**Change in Average Supporter Position** =  $\text{mean supporter position for party}_i (t) - \text{mean supporter position for party}_i (t-1)$  (Adams and Ezrow 2009). This can also be written as the average placement of party supporters at the most recent election subtracted by the mean party supporter placement at  $t-1$ .

**Change in Party Position at t-1** =  $\text{party}_i \text{ position } (t-1) - \text{party}_i \text{ position } (t-2)$  (Adams and Ezrow 2009). This can also be written as the party position of a given party at  $t-1$  subtracted by the party position at  $t-2$ .

**Party in Government** = *if the party was in government between the last national election and the next to last national election.*

If the parties are responding to the supporter position, the expectation is that as the coefficient for the mean supporter position at  $t$  and  $t-1$  increases, or supporters are increasingly in favor of membership in the European Union, the party position should, on average, increase. Finding a positive relationship would mean that the parties are being responsive to their party



supporters. This will be consistent with the previous literature and the findings of Adams and Ezrow (2009).

For evaluating the second hypothesis that the opposition parties will respond to the party supporters more than the governing party supporters, I use the basic model presented above and an interaction between the *change in average supporter preference at t × party in government*. The equation is the following:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Change in party position at } t = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 [\text{change in the average supporter position}] \\ & + \beta_2 [\text{change in party position at } t-1] + \beta_3 [\text{party in government}] + \beta_4 [\text{change in} \\ & \text{average supporter preference at } t \times \text{party in government}] \end{aligned}$$

where

*Change in Average Supporter Preference at t × Party in Government* = (mean supporter position for party<sub>i</sub> (t) - mean supporter position for party<sub>i</sub>) × (if the party was in government between the last national election and the next to last national election).

This is to determine the relationship between the average supporter preference and the party being in government on the manifesto position of the parties. The hypothesis is that the change in a party's position will differ depending on the governing status of the party. Therefore, the expectation is that the parties in opposition will have a stronger response than the parties in government.

## RESULTS

Before I discuss the findings of the regression, I will discuss the descriptive statistics. These are shown in Table 1, which gives the mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and the number of observations in the models.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Change in Party Position at t	180	0.83	12.7	-34.67	49.41
Change in Party Position at t-1	100	-0.83	13.79	-34.67	49.41
Change in Average Supporter Preference at t	353	-0.02	0.39	-1.43	2
Change in Average Supporter Preference at t-1	194	0.01	0.39	-1.33	2
Party in Government	579	0.26	0.44	0	1
Change in Average National Preference at t	353	-0.03	0.2	-1.22	1.19
Change in the Vote Share	518	-0.22	4.82	-31.9	17.9
Change in Average Supporter Preference at t × Party in Government	353	-0.01	0.15	-1.33	0.93

Note: The number of observations differ between the variable for a few reasons. For each election, every party did not have a manifesto that was coded by the Euromanifesto project. Therefore, that particular election was not included in the analysis for the election that year. Also, in every Eurobarometer, all of the parties in competition did not have identified supporters for many reasons, such as the party not competing in elections at the time. Thus, these parties were automatically dropped from the regression.

The range for *change in party position at t* and *change in party position at t-1* is between -34.67 and 49.91 on a -100 to 100 scale. The same values mean that the most extreme changes occur between the elections at *t-1* and *t-2*. The other independent variable, *party in government*, has a range, which is due to it being a dummy variable.

The control variable, *change in vote share*, has a mean of -0.22, a standard deviation of 4.82, and a range of 31.9 to 17.9. This means that the average change in vote share for a party is a decrease of 0.22, with the maximum decrease in vote shares being 31.9% and the maximum gain in vote shares being 17.9%.

To test the first hypothesis that, on average, parties respond to changes in the position of party supporters on the issue of European Union membership, I use a multivariate OLS regression. I control for serial correlation by using an index that are special values that correspond, across time, to a particular party in each country. The parties without 20 supporters in the dataset are dropped.

Table 2: Results from OLS Regressions

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Change in Party Position at t-1	-0.446*** (0.0998)	-0.424*** (0.0986)	-0.463*** (0.0897)	-0.441*** (0.0887)
Change in Average Supporter Preference at t	6.583 (6.501)	4.430 (6.213)	11.82 (7.050)	10.16* (5.815)
Party in Government	-3.673 (2.517)	-3.945 (2.451)	-5.178* (2.713)	-5.659** (2.682)
Change in Average Supporter Preference at t-1		-3.974 (7.595)		-2.235 (7.053)
Change in Average National Preference at t		3.335 (7.582)		3.500 (8.123)
Change in the Vote Share		-0.416** (0.187)		-0.444** (0.182)
Change in Average Supporter Preference at t × Party in Government			-23.38* (13.23)	-24.24* (13.19)
Intercept	1.858 (1.719)	2.011 (1.691)	2.020 (1.738)	2.278 (1.723)
Observations	84	83	84	83
R <sup>2</sup>	0.240	0.264	0.266	0.291

Notes: Dependent variable is the change in a party's position between time  $t$  and  $t-1$ . Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Model 1 is the basic model without the control or interaction variables. *Change in party position at t-1* is significant at the 0.001 level, but it is the only significant coefficient. The coefficient can be interpreted as, for every one unit change between the party position at time  $t-1$  and  $t-2$ , the change in party position at time  $t$  decreases by 0.446. There is not enough evidence to say that the parties respond to a change in preferences of the party supporters. Furthermore, there is not enough evidence to say that the party being in the government matters. This is not what is expected based on previous representation literature and the literature on the European Union, because if the party elites are corresponding with party supporters, parties' platforms should also be doing so (De Vries and Arnold 2009; Carubba 2001; Dalton 2005).

Model 2 is the basic model with the inclusion of the control variables. Once again, the coefficient for the *change in party position at t-1* is significant at the 0.001 level. This can be interpreted as for every one unit change between the party position at time *t-1* and time *t-2*, the change in party position at time *t* decreases by 0.424. The coefficient for the *change in the average supporter preference at t* is not statistically significant. This means that there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This can also be stated as that there is not enough evidence to state that the parties are responding to the opinions of party supporters. Once again, these results are inconsistent with what was expected based on previous literature (De Vries and Arnold 2009; Carubba 2001; Dalton 2005).

The previous models do not account for the second hypothesis, which is that opposition parties will respond more to their party supporters, because of a lack of other platforms for showing the responsiveness of the parties and the ease of changing position, compared to governing parties. Therefore, in Model 3 and 4, I use an interaction model to test the difference between the behavior of governing and opposition parties.

Model 3 is the basic model, previously used in Model 1, but with the inclusion of the interaction between *change average supporter preference at t × party in government*. The results are reported in Table 2. Once again, the variable, *change in party position at t-1* is significant at the 0.01 level. This means that, on average, a one unit change in party position at *t-1* represents a decrease of 0.463. The interaction term, *change average supporter preference at t × party in government*, gives the difference in the effect of the change in the average preference of party supporters at time *t* for governing and opposition parties. The coefficient on the interaction term suggests that the estimated association between the change in the average preference of party supporters on the issue of the European Union and the party position is 23.38 lower in governing

parties than in opposition parties. This coefficient is significant at the 0.1 level, so it can be concluded that the response to preferences by governing and opposition parties is different in the expected direction. This means that there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis that parties in government and parties in opposition respond to their supporters' preferences in the same way.

In order to confirm and strengthen the assertion, another model is used with control variables and the equation from Model 3. This is labeled Model 4 in Table 2. As reported in the table, the coefficient for the *change in party position at t-1* is significant at 0.01. The coefficient can be interpreted as, on average, a one unit change in party position at t-1 represents a decrease of 0.441 in the party position at t. Unlike Models 1-3, the coefficient for *change in mean supporter preference at t* is statistically significant at 0.1. This means that there is evidence on a one unit change in the mean supporter preference is associated with a 10.16 increase in the manifesto position on the issue of the European Union for opposition parties, on average. This demonstrates that there is evidence that opposition parties are responding to their supporters' preferences at t, and thus, Hypothesis 1 is partially supported. The interaction term, *change average supporter preference at t × party in government*, gives the difference in the effect of the change in the average preference of party supporters at time t for governing and opposition parties. The coefficient on the interaction term suggests that the estimated association between the change in the average preference of party supporters on the issue of the European Union and the party position is 24.24 points lower in the governing parties than in opposition parties. This coefficient is significant at the 0.1 level, so it can be concluded that the response to preferences by governing and opposition parties is different in the expected direction. This means that there is enough evidence to support the second hypothesis, which states that parties in government and

parties in opposition respond differently to their supporters' preferences and the opposition parties have a stronger response to the change.

Due to the inability to make strong assertions about coefficients and the statistical significance in an interaction model, I present the information in Table 3. Table 3 shows the marginal effect of public opinion change on party position taking for governing and opposition parties separately using the information from Column 4 in Table 2. The results show that while governing parties are not responsive to the changing preferences of their supporters (the marginal effect is not statistically significant for governing parties), opposition parties change their EU positions in the same direction as their party supporters change their preferences. The coefficient 10.16 means that when party supporters change their preferences one point on the 1-3 EU preference scale, opposition parties change their positions by 10.16 points, on average, on the -100 to +100 EU scale. This is a quite substantive effect and shows that opposition parties respond significantly and substantively to the preferences of their supporters, supporting the second hypothesis.

As shown in Table 2, some of the control variables have negative effects. In both models, the *change in vote share* has a negative, statistically significant effect on the change in party position. The results can be seen in Column 2 and Column 4 of Table 2. The other control variables, *change in average national preference at t* and *change in average supporter preference at t-1*, do not appear to have an effect on the change in party position.

Table 3: Results from Linear Combination of Change in Mean Supporter Preference at  $t$   $\times$  Party in Government

	Average Supporter Preference at $t \times$ Party in Government $\times 0$	Average Supporter Preference at $t \times$ Party in Government $\times 1$
Coefficient	10.16*	-14.08
Standard Error	5.815	12.74
p-value	0.09	0.277

Notes: Dependent Variable is the change in a party's position between time  $t$  and  $t-1$ .

Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

## DISCUSSION

The results of the models are partially consistent with the theory presented. Parties appear to be responding to the supporter opinion regarding the European Union. There is, however, a qualification. This responsiveness is only supported for the opposition parties. The findings are consistent with the idea that opposition parties make more sincere promises in their manifestos, because the voters do not have performances for voters to make comparisons (Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012; Somer-Topcu and Zar 2013). Without policy output to compare to the promises, supporters' do not have the ability to adjust their evaluations. This leads the parties' policies to be more aligned with the preferences of their supporters.

In contrast, parties in government do not appear to be responding to the preferences of their supporters. There are a few possible explanations, but I believe that the most relevant is that the governing parties are taking more extreme positions in their manifestos. This is due to the fact that the voters are “discounting” the promises, by looking at the governing parties' previous performance (Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012).

However, there are limitations to the results. The main limitation is the usage of the European Manifesto Project data, which models itself on the Comparative Manifesto Project. This means that there are a variety of problems that exist pertaining to measurement. Over the years, there has been considerable discussion over the usage of manifesto data to represent the position of parties, but no consensus has been met (Franzmann and Kaiser 2006; Gemenis 2013). A few of the key issues are coder reliability, saliency of the issues, and a lack of scale validation by experts (Gemenis 2013). The problem is that there is not a good alternative to the manifesto data. One alternative is policy output of parties, but it would be difficult for this paper. This is because the European Parliament does not use national parties (Costello et al. 2012).

Instead, the parties are organized by party families, which are coalitions of like-minded parties (Costello et al. 2012). One paper even discusses the fact that the organization of parties in the European Parliament decreases the “quality of representation” (Costello et al. 2012).

A second limitation is that this time series ends with the 1999 election manifestos, which means that the past two elections are unaccounted for in the sample. This was, however, unavoidable, because the question used to identify party preference was omitted from the Eurobarometer surveys that would apply for the 2004 and 2009 elections. The alternative questions that could have been used to identify the party supporters were not consistently asked in the Eurobarometer, so in an effort to increase the internal validity, the sample ends with the 1999 election.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper provides mixed results about the responsiveness of parties to the opinions of their supporters. Although all of the parties do not appear to be responding to the preferences of their supporters, there is evidence that the parties in opposition are responding to the preferences of their supporters on the European Union.

There are many future endeavors that can build on these findings. One possible area of research is trying to determine what is causing the unresponsiveness of governing parties. There are many possibilities that are not considered in the models. For example the governing parties might be responding to their supporters, but in different policy areas. Although Carrubba (2001) and other scholars (De Vries and Arnold 2007) examine different policy areas using a different model, change over time has not been considered. Another potential area is how the world economy and the breakdown of the overall world fiscal crisis is changing the political landscape of the European Union, but the results of the 2004, 2009, and 2014 elections would need to be



taken into account. Moreover, as the European Union grows and gains more power and prestige, these issues are ripe for further study.

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