



The policy impact of leadership in committees: Rapporteurs' influence on the European Parliament's opinions

Rory Costello

University of Twente, The Netherlands

Robert Thomson

Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Abstract

What impact do leaders in the European Parliament's (EP) committees have on the EP's opinions? This study formulates and tests expectations about the conditions under which rapporteurs influence the EP's opinions and also about what factors motivate that influence. In line with the informational theory of legislative committees, the most important factor affecting the EP's opinion is the policy position of the median MEP, not a characteristic of the rapporteur. Nonetheless, the evidence shows that rapporteurs influence the EP's opinions when legislative proposals are subject to early agreements under the co-decision procedure and when the consultation procedure applies. Rapporteurs' influence is motivated primarily by national interests, rather than by the interests of their EP party groups.

Keywords

co-decision, committees, European Parliament, rapporteurs

Although legislative committees empower the legislature as a whole, committee structures also empower individual committee members above others. Legislative committees allow parliamentarians to specialize in particular policy areas, which increases the legislature's effectiveness (Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1990).

Corresponding author:

Rory Costello, Department of Political Science and Research Methods, University of Twente, Enschede, 7500 AE, The Netherlands.

Email: r.d.costello@utwente.nl

Committees provide specialized information to the plenary, thereby reducing uncertainty for other legislators concerning the consequences of alternative policies (Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1990: 536). This specialization enables the legislature to check more effectively the power of the executive, as well as bureaucratic actors and special interest groups. However, committee members may also have incentives to use their specialized knowledge to manipulate the outcomes of the legislature's decision-making process. Under certain conditions, the power ascribed to individual committee members may bias the legislature's collective policy positions toward the preferences of those privileged committee members. Thus, the considerable benefits of a jurisdictional committee system may be associated with the agency costs of policy outcomes that reflect the preferences of committee members, rather than the preferences of members of the entire chamber.

Previous research has examined how parent chambers can use committee appointments to ameliorate the possible biases created by specialized committees. Parent chambers reduce the agency costs of biased legislative outcomes by monitoring the assignment of parliamentarians to committees to ensure that committees are representative of the assembly as a whole. If committees are made to be 'microcosms of the House' (Krehbiel, 1991: 155), they should produce decision outcomes that reflect the distribution of preferences in the entire chamber. McElroy's (2006) research on the composition of committees in the European Parliament (EP) concludes that these are highly representative of the EP as a whole.

Even if committees are broadly representative of the parent chamber, committees' internal leadership structures may engender biases in the legislative decision-making process. Committees in several European countries and in the EP employ a system by which a particular member is appointed as the rapporteur for each piece of legislation. Rapporteurs perform a leadership role within the committee on each particular piece of legislation. This has the effect of concentrating the committee's information advantage in the hands of a particular member. Consequently, even when committees are representative of their parent chambers, the outcomes of legislative decision-making may be biased toward individual committee members' interests.

The EP offers an excellent testing ground for examining the impact of committee leadership under different conditions. It has strong committees and weak parties, and EP committees play a vital role in the production of EU legislation (Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003; Settembri and Neuhold, 2009). Typically, one committee is given responsibility for producing a report on legislative proposals for the EP, and several other committees may be asked to give an opinion. Although there are various levels of leadership in EP committees, including the committee chair and the coordinators of the transnational party groups, the most important leadership role on any given proposal is arguably held by the rapporteur of the responsible committee (Benedetto, 2005; Farrell and Héritier, 2004; Hausemer, 2006; Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003; Rasmussen, 2008). The importance of rapporteurships is reflected in the competition among EP party groups for these roles. Each party group receives a quota of points proportional to its size,

with which it bids against other party groups for the right to choose the rapporteur on each legislative proposal in competitive auctions (Corbett et al., 2003: 117).

Once appointed, the rapporteur's first main task is to assist the EP in forming a position on the legislative proposal in question. The rapporteur can enlist the assistance of the committee staff in gathering the necessary information (Corbett et al., 2003: 118). Following a series of discussions with the committee as a whole, and sometimes involving key parliamentary figures outside the committee, the rapporteur produces a text that usually includes a list of proposed amendments. This report is then voted on by the committee before being submitted to the plenary session. During the discussions in the committee and in plenary, the rapporteur's report may be amended. Rapporteurs play an important part in the plenary debates that precede the final votes, and can offer their opinions on any additional amendments proposed on the floor (Corbett et al., 2003: 119–20). The outcome of the plenary vote becomes the EP's opinion that is transmitted to the Council of Ministers, the other legislative chamber in the European Union. Rapporteurs also play a key role in the inter-institutional negotiations that take place between the EP and the Council of Ministers (Farrell and Héritier, 2004).

Existing research on rapporteurs in the EP focuses mainly on the allocation of reports to different committee members. Kaeding (2004) examines report allocation in the Environment Committee. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) associated with environmental interest groups receive a disproportionate number of reports, suggesting that rapporteurs are preference outliers. In contrast, Hausemer (2006) finds evidence that more salient reports tend to go to MEPs from the party groups closer to the centre of the political spectrum. This is consistent with the view that the committee is responsive to the views of the median legislator, anticipating the open plenary amendment rule. Benedetto (2005) finds a positive correlation between EP party size and the number of reports received. Hoyland (2006), meanwhile, uses data on report allocation to test hypotheses regarding inter-institutional negotiations. He finds that MEPs from governing national parties receive more reports than MEPs from opposition parties. This, he argues, is because it is easier for these MEPs to obtain information regarding the policy alternatives that are acceptable to member states in the Council, thus placing the EP in a stronger bargaining position relative to the Council.

Although these studies identify the causes behind the allocation of committee reports, they do not tell us whether or not rapporteurs influence policy outcomes and, if so, in what way. The main contribution of the present study is to examine the policy impact of rapporteurs on the collective opinions of the EP. We examine the conditions under which rapporteurs influence the EP's opinions. We also assess two views on what motivates that influence. The first view is that rapporteurs' influence is motivated mainly by national interests, whereas the second view holds that rapporteurs' influence is motivated mainly by the interests of the EP party groups with which they are affiliated. The next section outlines our expectations in detail, after which we present the quantitative analyses that test these expectations.

Expectations regarding the extent and nature of rapporteurs' influence

The first part of this section considers the extent of rapporteurs' influence on the EP's opinions. We begin by discussing the informational theory of committees, according to which the main factor affecting the collective position of the EP is the position of the median MEP, not the rapporteur. This expectation is subsequently nuanced by identifying the specific conditions under which we expect the rapporteur to have influence. We then set out our expectations about what motivates rapporteurs when they exert influence on the EP's opinions.

The extent of rapporteurs' influence on the EP's opinions

The informational theory of legislative committees posits that, as agents of the plenary, committees' main function is to provide reliable information to the plenary without affecting the content of the chamber's collective position (e.g. Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1989, 1990; Krehbiel, 1991). According to this view, selection and monitoring mechanisms ensure that committee members cannot exert undue influence over the legislature's decision-making processes.

In the EP, some of the main implications of the informational theory hold: McElroy (2006: 5) concludes that committees are 'highly representative of the EP as a whole, in terms of both party and policy representation'. Moreover, rapporteurs appear to be highly constrained in their ability to affect decision outcomes in the EP. Party groups that do not receive the rapporteurship on a legislative proposal designate one of their members to act as shadow rapporteur, to monitor the work of the main committee rapporteur. In addition, the committee can overturn any aspects of the report that it disagrees with. Similarly, the open amendment rule in plenary means that it is possible for the EP to overturn any aspects of the adopted committee report it chooses (although amendments in plenary can be proposed only by party groups or a group of MEPs).

The informational theory of committees posits that the EP's opinion is affected by the position of the median MEP, not the position of the rapporteur. The location of the median MEP is, of course, defined by the distribution of policy preferences in the parliament as a whole, something the rapporteur has little influence over. More explicitly:

H1: The EP's collective opinion is the position of the median MEP.

This expectation should, however, be nuanced by considering the information advantages enjoyed by rapporteurs and the costs that other parliamentarians would bear if they were to monitor rapporteurs extensively. Rapporteurs have an information advantage in terms of both their knowledge of the legislative proposal in question and of the positions of actors in the other legislative chamber of the EU, the Council of Ministers. For other MEPs, it is costly to gather

information on the details of complex legislative proposals. If they are unwilling to invest the necessary time and energy, they may simply follow the rapporteur's recommendation.

Other MEPs become more involved in the EP's decision-making process, thereby restricting the rapporteur's room for manoeuvre, when the impact of this involvement has higher payoffs. Evidence from case studies suggests that other committee members and parliamentarians are more likely to challenge the rapporteur's position on issues that are more politically important (Benedetto, 2005: 72). One source of variation in the impact of other MEPs' involvement is the procedure that applies to the legislative proposal in question. During the period examined in this study, the two main legislative procedures in the EU were the consultation procedure and the co-decision procedure.¹ Although the EP's impact is far from negligible under the consultation procedure (Kardasheva, 2009; Thomson and Hosli, 2006: 414), the EP does have considerably more impact on decision outcomes when the co-decision procedure applies. Scully (1997) provides evidence that MEPs participate more when the EP has more policy influence. Therefore, when the consultation procedure applies, other parliamentarians are less involved in defining the EP's opinions. Consequently, we expect rapporteurs to have more leeway to impress their own positions on the EP's opinions when the consultation procedure applies.

H2: Rapporteurs have more influence on the EP's opinions under the consultation procedure than under the co-decision procedure.

Rapporteurs also have an advantage over other MEPs from their role as negotiators between the EP and the Council. This applies only under the co-decision procedure, in which differences between the institutions must be resolved before legislation is adopted. Negotiations between the institutions can take place at various stages of the co-decision procedure. Informal meetings, known as 'trilogues', can take place from an early stage. These are attended by representatives of the EP, the Council and the European Commission. The rapporteur is always a member of the parliamentary delegation, while other key members of the EP committee (such as shadow rapporteurs, party group coordinators and the Committee Chair) are involved to varying degrees. This gives rapporteurs an additional information advantage over other committee members and parliamentarians. Rapporteurs are the main brokers of information on member states' preferences to other MEPs (Farrell and Héritier, 2004). Rapporteurs may be able to use this brokerage position to their advantage by emphasizing Council opposition to policy initiatives they would prefer to block, and by de-emphasizing Council opposition to policy initiatives they would prefer to promote.

This advantage is particularly clear in the case of early agreements under the co-decision procedure. If an agreement is reached at these interinstitutional negotiations before the EP has issued its first-reading opinion, the EP plenary is presented with the agreed package and asked to approve it. Since any parliamentary

amendments at this stage would undermine the agreement, MEPs are under pressure to refrain from seeking amendments, particularly if the legislation is deemed to be urgent (Shackleton and Raunio, 2003: 179). In the informal meetings that lead to early agreements between the two chambers, rapporteurs are believed to have 'quite extraordinary latitude to set the agenda of negotiations' (Farrell and Héritier, 2004: 1200). Thus, when there are early agreements, the rapporteur has greater scope to influence the EP's opinion.

H3: Under the co-decision procedure, rapporteurs have more influence on the EP's opinions when there is an early agreement with the Council.

So far, we have argued that there are two conditions under which rapporteurs can exert influence on the EP's opinions. But what factors motivate rapporteurs' use of that influence?

What motivates rapporteurs' use of their influence

We consider two possible motivations: the first is that rapporteurs are motivated by national interests; the second is that rapporteurs are motivated by the interests of their EP party groups.

National governments maintain close contact with all MEPs from their state, regardless of MEPs' party affiliations. National representations hold regular high-level meetings with their MEPs and provide written briefings on current issues (Corbett et al., 2003: 280). Some member state governments present MEPs from their country with complete amendments for them to table, particularly regarding issues on which important national interests are at stake.² In addition, country-based lobbyists target MEPs from their country, and MEPs from all parties are generally reluctant to take positions that could be portrayed as conflicting with their national interests. Pressure from these sources tends to be much greater when the MEP is acting as the rapporteur (Corbett et al., 2003: 119; Rasmussen, 2008). Furthermore, national considerations are prominent in the selection of rapporteurs. Although report allocation is in principle controlled by EP party groups, once a group has secured a report through the bidding process, national delegations within the groups play a key role in determining who gets the report (Kreppel, 2002: 202–5; Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003). Consequently, we expect that:

H4: The EP's opinion is closer to the policy position of the rapporteur's home member state than to other positions.

We expect this relationship to be present when rapporteurs are able to exert most influence on the EP's opinions. As specified in H2 and H3, this is when the consultation procedure applies and when there are early agreements under co-decision.

The second view is that rapporteurs are motivated by the interests of the EP party of which they are members. Competition within the EP is structured around

party groups rather than national parties. Research on roll-call voting shows that MEPs tend to divide along the lines of EP party groups rather than national groups, and that these party groups compete largely on the traditional left–right dimension (Hix et al., 2007: 181). This has led many commentators to conclude that ideology is more important than nationality in shaping MEPs' behaviour (e.g. Noury, 2002). In addition to their ideological affiliations, another reason MEPs are expected to pursue the interests of their EP party group is that they depend on their party group for promotion within the EP (Hix, 2005: 90). Because party groups play an important role in the appointment of rapporteurs, committee members who do not perform to the satisfaction of their EP party leadership are unlikely to receive another report or to climb the EP party's ranks. This implies that rapporteurs' preferences are defined by the position of their EP party groups. This leads to the following expectation:

- H5:** The EP's opinion is closer to the policy position of the rapporteur's EP party group than to other positions.

Again, we expect to find this relationship when rapporteurs are able to exert influence on the EP's opinions: when the consultation procedure applies or when there are early agreements under the co-decision procedure.

Research design

In the present study, controversies raised by legislative proposals are represented as issue continuums or scales, using information from semi-structured interviews with key informants. This method of representing controversies spatially has been applied in a range of studies of decision-making in national and international politics (see e.g. Bueno de Mesquita, 2003; Bueno de Mesquita and Stokman, 1994). More details of the research design decisions taken when constructing the data set used in the present study can be found in Thomson and Stokman (2006). Reliability and validity tests, which yielded satisfactory results, are published in Thomson (2006) and König et al. (2007).³

An example of this way of representing controversies is given in Figure 1. These estimates were based on a series of seven in-depth semistructured interviews with key informants in Brussels, using a procedure that will be described in more detail later. The example is taken from a controversial issue raised by a proposal introduced in 2005 regarding the provision of services to air passengers with reduced mobility. The proposal aimed to tackle a problem whereby certain low-cost airlines operating in Europe were charging passengers with reduced mobility for services such as the use of wheelchairs. There was broad agreement that the practice of charging customers with reduced mobility for such services should be outlawed. However, a controversy arose about the allocation of responsibility for the provision of these services. One group of member states wanted airlines to provide these services as a rule. This is represented as position 0 on the policy scale.

Who should have responsibility for services for airline passengers with reduced mobility?

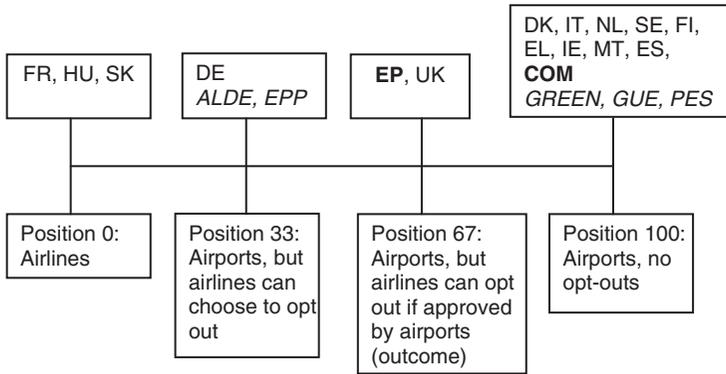


Figure 1. One of the controversial issues in the data set.

Notes: Proposal for a directive on the provision of services to passengers with reduced mobility (COD/2005/007). Transnational party groups indicated in italics; institutional actors indicated in bold. FR, France; HU, Hungary; SK, Slovakia; DE, Germany; ALDE, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; EPP, European People's Party; EP, European Parliament; UK, United Kingdom; DK, Denmark; IT, Italy; NL, the Netherlands; SE, Sweden; FI, Finland; EL, Greece; IE, Ireland; MT, Malta; ES, Spain; COM, European Commission; GREEN, Green Party; GUE, United European Left; PES, Party of European Socialists.

At the other extreme, represented as position 100, a group of actors wanted the airports alone to provide these services. These actors included the main left-wing party groups in the EP, a group of member states and the Commission. Between these extremes, two intermediate positions existed. Intermediate positions are placed on the 0–100 scale to reflect key informants' judgements on the political distances between the alternatives. Position 33 represents the preference of the German government, along with two EP party groups (the European People's Party and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe), which was that airports would be the default providers but airlines could choose to opt out of these arrangements and provide their own services. Position 67 represents the alternative sought by the UK government and eventually chosen by the EP in its opinion, which was that airlines could only opt out of airport provisions with the approval of the airports.

On this issue, many of the new member states did not take a clear position. According to one interviewee, this was because it was negotiated very soon after enlargement, and the new member states were eager to be seen as the 'good boys of the class', by acquiescing to the decision of the other member states. Furthermore, the Union for a Europe of Nations group in the EP did not take a clear position on this issue. Although the other main party groups did take a position, there were some national differences within some of these groups. For example, the German

Table 1. Distribution of selected proposals

Study	EP involvement	Council voting rule	Commission		Type of instrument	Commission proposals	Issues
			proposals selected by researchers	Issues identified by experts			
EU-15	COD	QMV	23	63			
		Unan.	5	12	Directives	30	78
	CNS	QMV	22	55	Regulations	33	79
Unan.		20	44	Decisions	7	17	
Total			70	174		70	174
Post-2004 EU	COD	QMV	12	30			
		Unan.	4	16	Directives	10	32
	CNS	QMV	6	20	Regulations	13	38
		Unan.	1	4	Decisions	–	–
Total			23	70		23	70

Note: COD = co-decision; CNS = consultation.

members of the socialist PES group supported the position of their national government (airports with opt-out – Position 33), rather than the PES group position (airports without opt-out – Position 100). National divisions within party groups are not represented in Figure 1.

A total of 93 legislative proposals were selected for the study, 70 from the period when there were 15 member states in the EU and 23 from the period following the 2004 enlargement to 25 member states (Table 1). Legislative proposals were selected according to three main criteria. First, each proposal was on the Council's agenda in the years 1999, 2000 or after the 2004 enlargement. Legislative proposals introduced up to December 2005 were included. Second, the selected proposals were subject to either the consultation or the co-decision procedures, the two most commonly used procedures. Third, the selection was restricted to proposals on which there was an indication of at least some political importance and controversy, either within the Council or between the Commission, the Council and the EP. Each proposal was mentioned in news services covering European affairs: *Agence Europe* in the EU-15 period or *Agence Europe* and *European Voice* in the post-2004 period. Furthermore, key informants had to identify at least one substantive disagreement between at least some of the actors. Directives, regulations and decisions were included in the EU-15 study, but decisions were excluded from the post-2004 study. The effect of changing the new services and instruments in the post-2004 study was to focus the selection on more high-profile proposals. In the EU-15 study, we found that many of the proposals we had initially selected were highly technical and not controversial at all. The policy areas represented most prominently in the selection of EU-15 proposals are agriculture and the internal

market, each with 14 proposals, although fisheries (seven proposals) and other policy areas are also present. Compared with the EU-15 study, the selection of proposals for the post-2004 study is more evenly distributed across different policy areas.⁴

Information on controversial issues and actors' positions on these issues was collected in semi-structured interviews with 263 key informants (125 key informants in the EU-15 study and 138 informants in the post-2004 study). These interviews typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. We required detailed information on actors' positions, which means our sources had to be close to the discussions. The Commission officials interviewed (31 in the EU-15 study and 17 in the post-2004 study) were usually responsible for drafting the proposals and monitoring the subsequent discussions. The officials from a range of permanent representations (69 in the EU-15 study and 80 in the post-2004 study, including new member states) were usually the responsible desk officers. The individuals from the EP (4 in the EU-15 study and 41 in the post-2004 study) were either MEPs or their assistants.⁵ A further nine officials from the Council secretariat and 12 from interest groups were interviewed in the EU-15 study. Where possible, information gathered from interviews was checked using documentary sources by comparing the information about actors' positions reported by informants with information in Council documents and/or documents pertaining to the proceedings in the EP.

During these semi-structured interviews, each of the controversial issues was represented spatially as a policy scale ranging from 0 to 100 that represents the range of the bargaining space.⁶ Usually, two or three issues were sufficient to represent the main controversies raised by a proposal. The informants estimated each actor's positions, defined as the decision outcomes favoured most by each actor at the time of the introduction of the Commission's legislative proposal, or as soon as the actor took a position thereafter. These actors include the member states, the EP and the Commission.

In addition, informants were asked to estimate the positions of the six main party groups within the EP on a subset of the legislative proposals selected. This information allows us to test whether the EP's opinions are congruent with the positions of median MEPs (H1) and of rapporteurs' EP party groups (H5). This subset of cases covers 14 of the 93 legislative proposals (38 of the 244 controversial issues). All of these proposals were subject to the co-decision procedure and are from the post-2004 period.⁷ We perform separate analyses on this subset of cases with this additional information.

The dependent variable in the following analyses is the absolute distance between the EP's first-reading opinion and each other actor's initial policy position on that issue. Note that, in the case of early agreements, the EP's first-reading opinion is also the decision outcome. The unit of analysis is the EP-actor dyad on each issue. For each of these dyads, there is an observation when both the EP and the other actor took a position. For the 38 issues on which we have detailed information on the positions of the EP party groups, there are 31 possible dyads (25 member states in that time period plus 6 party groups). The EP's opinions on

these legislative proposals contained policy positions on each of the 38 controversial issues. Not every member state and party group took a clear position on each issue. These missing cases are simply dropped from the analysis, leaving a total number of 995 dyads as observations for the first set of analyses below. In the second set of analyses, which focuses on the larger data set, which does not include information on the position of each party group, there are 3154 observations.

The explanatory variables of most interest are *Median MEP* (H1), *Nationality* (H4) and *Party Group* (H5). The variable *Median MEP* measures the distance between the position of the actor referred to in the dyad (the actor with which the EP is paired) and the position of the median MEP.⁸ The variable *Nationality* measures the distance between the position of the actor referred to in the dyad and the position of the rapporteur's home member state. We consider only the rapporteur from the committee that is tasked with producing a report, not the shadow rapporteur or MEPs from committees that are asked to give opinions in addition to the main committee. The variable *Party Group* measures the distance between the actor referred to in the dyad and the position of the rapporteur's transnational party group. We expect rapporteurs to influence the EP's opinions when the consultation procedure applies (H2) and when there are early agreements under the co-decision procedure (H3). To test these expectations, we include interaction terms where appropriate.

We also include two control variables to ensure the comparability of the distances across issues. The first control is the variable *Number of Alternatives*, which simply measures the number of policy positions taken by the actors, since this might affect the distances between the actors' policy positions. When there are only two alternative positions, for instance, the distances between any two actors will either be zero or 100 if the range of positions is 100. Also, the variable *Range of Positions*, which measures the distance between the two most extreme positions taken by any actor, is included. This variable takes a value of 100 when the actors take positions across the entire issue scale, which is generally the case. However, in a minority of cases, one extreme on the issue scale is represented by the status quo or by the Commission, while the EP's opinion, EP party groups and member states occupy a smaller range of positions. On these issues, the distances between the actors included in the analysis will tend to be smaller.

In the example referred to in Figure 1 concerning the provision of services for passengers with reduced mobility, the rapporteur (Robert Evans) was from the United Kingdom and a member of the Party of European Socialists (PES) group in the European Parliament. Given that this legislation was adopted by the EP in its first reading, following informal consultations between the Council and the EP, we expect the rapporteur to have exerted influence (H3). Indeed, the EP's opinion is the same as the position of the UK on this issue (H4). This position allocated responsibility to airports while including an opt-out clause for airlines if the airport approved. There is a perfect linear relationship between the distances from actors' positions to the UK position (the independent variable '*Nationality*') and the distances from actors' positions to the EP position (the dependent variable). This case

is less consistent with the median MEP hypothesis (H1). The median MEP on this issue took the position of 33 on the scale, favouring the allocation of responsibility to airports with an opt-out clause for airlines, regardless of airport approval.⁹ Similarly, this case does not support the party group hypothesis (H5). Mr Evans's PES group took a position of 100, favouring the allocation of responsibility to airports with no opt-out clause.

Analysis

The first part of this section presents the analysis of the subset of cases for which we have detailed information on the positions of the median MEP and the EP party groups. These cases consist of 995 observations associated with 38 controversial issues raised by 14 legislative proposals subject to the co-decision procedure from the post-2004 period. A minority of these cases (4 proposals, giving rise to 11 controversial issues and 319 observations) were subject to early agreements between the EP and the Council of Ministers. There are three important findings from this analysis. First, the EP's opinion is most congruent with the position of the median MEP. Second, however, when there are early agreements within the co-decision procedure, the EP's position is also related to the position of the home member state of the rapporteur. Third, there is no evidence that the EP's opinion is generally closer to the position of the rapporteur's party group than to other positions.

The second part of this section builds on these findings by examining variation in the effect of the rapporteur's nationality across the full set of cases, consisting of 3154 observations. With this larger dataset, we do not have measures of the positions of the median MEP's or EP party groups. The analysis of this larger set of cases confirms that, when there is an early agreement under the co-decision procedure, the EP's opinion is generally closer to the position of the rapporteur's home member state than to other member states' positions. This second analysis also adds that this effect of the rapporteur's nationality is present when the consultation procedure applies.

The effects of median MEPs and rapporteurs' affiliations

Table 2 presents the first set of analyses.¹⁰ The effect of the variable *Median MEP* is particularly strong. The EP's opinions are generally closer to the position of the median MEP than to other positions. From the coefficient associated with *Median MEP* in Model 1, for every one-unit increase in the distance between actor *i*'s position and the position of the median MEP, on the 0–100 policy scales, the distance between actor *i*'s position and the EP's opinion increases by 0.75 units on average. Since the variable *Median MEP* ranges from 0 to 100, moving from the minimum to the maximum value of this variable represents a very large political distance on a typical policy issue.

When a legislative proposal is subject to an early agreement between the Council and the EP, the rapporteur's nationality has a significant and strong effect on the position of the EP. Model 1 in Table 2 includes an interaction term between *Nationality* and the conditioning variable *Early Agreement*, which takes a

Table 2. Factors affecting the distance between the EP's opinions and other actors' policy positions

	Model 1: Interaction on 'Nationality'	Model 2: Interaction on 'Party Group'
<i>Nationality</i> (distance from other actor's position to position of rapporteur's home state)	-0.06 (0.07)	0.02 (0.07)
<i>Party Group</i> (distance from other actor's position to position of rapporteur's party group)	0.07 (0.14)	0.18 (0.18)
<i>Median MEP</i> (distance from other actor's position to position of median MEP)	0.75*** (0.13)	0.69*** (0.17)
Conditioning variable		
<i>Early Agreement co-decision</i> (1 = early agreement co-decision; 0 = regular co-decision)	-36.15*** (9.31)	12.16 (12.36)
Interaction variables		
<i>Nationality</i> * <i>Early Agreement co-decision</i>	0.64** (0.28)	
<i>Party Group</i> * <i>Early Agreement co-decision</i>		-0.56** (0.24)
Control variables		
<i>Number of Alternatives</i>	2.53* (1.46)	0.30 (1.41)
<i>Range of Positions</i>	0.24 (0.21)	0.27 (0.23)
Constant	-20.18 (19.51)	-21.67 (21.20)
R ²	.72	.71
F(p)	65.57 (0.00)	45.43 (0.00)
N	995	995

Notes: These analyses focus on co-decision issues only and include measures of party group and median MEPs' positions. OLS regression estimates with White's robust standard errors, clustered by issue. The dependent variable is the distance between the position of the actor referred to in the case and the EP's opinion.

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

value of 1 if there was an early agreement. Therefore, the coefficient associated with *Nationality* estimates the effect of *Nationality* when there was not an early agreement. This coefficient is negative, small and not statistically significant (-0.06). The coefficient associated with the interaction between *Nationality* and *Early Agreement* (0.64) allows us to estimate the effect of *Nationality* when there are early agreements. The addition of these two coefficients (-0.06 + 0.64) indicates that when there are early agreements, for every one-unit increase in the distance between actor *i*'s position and the position of the home member state of the rapporteur, the distance between actor *i*'s position and the EP's opinion increases by 0.58 (s.e. 0.29, p < .05).¹¹ This coefficient differs significantly from zero. The effect of the rapporteur's nationality is substantial in early agreements.

There is no evidence that rapporteurs' party group affiliations affect the EP's opinions. Model 2 in Table 2 contains an interaction term between *Party Group* and the conditioning variable *Early Agreement*. Therefore, the coefficient associated with *Party Group* estimates the effect of *Party Group* when there was not an early agreement. This coefficient (0.18) is positive, but does not differ significantly from zero. The coefficient associated with the interaction between *Party Group* and *Early Agreement* (-0.56) allows us to estimate the effect of *Party Group* when there are early agreements. The addition of these two coefficients ($0.18 + (-0.56)$) produces a negative coefficient of -0.38 (s.e. 0.24, not significant). This coefficient does not differ significantly from zero and is in the direction opposite to that expected. It indicates that, as the distance between actor i 's position and the position of the rapporteur's party group increases, the distance between actor i 's position and the EP's opinion decreases. A peculiarity of interaction terms is that the coefficient associated with the interaction term may be significant, whereas the estimated effect derived from it does not differ significantly from zero.

A re-analysis of variation in the effect of rapporteurs' national affiliations

We now examine the effect of rapporteurs' nationalities over a broader set of cases. In the following analysis, we examine all available cases from the full data set. In this broader analysis, we do not have a measure of the position of the median MEP or of the position of the rapporteur's party group on each controversial issue. Although this is a limitation, we have reason to believe that this does not bias our estimates of the effects of rapporteurs' nationalities. In the subset of cases examined in the previous section, there are only weak correlations between the variables *Nationality* and *Median MEP* ($r = .12$, not significant) and between *Nationality* and *Party Group* ($r = -.09$, not significant). Consequently, the omission of these variables is unlikely to bias our estimates of the effects of *Nationality*.

This larger data set gives us more statistical power with which to examine the effect of rapporteurs' nationalities and also the possibility of examining this effect under the consultation procedure as well as the co-decision procedure. The EP's opinions contained policy positions on 202 of the 244 controversial issues in the larger data set. The EP was less likely to take a position on issues raised by legislative proposals subject to the consultation procedure (89 out of 123 consultation issues) than issues raised by proposals subject to the co-decision procedure (113 out of 121 co-decision issues). Of the 113 co-decision issues on which the EP took a position, 24 came from proposals that were the subject of early agreements between the Council and the EP. Given the missing positions of the EP and of member states, there are a total of 3154 EP-member state dyads as observations in the analysis presented in Table 3. The analysis of the larger data set confirms the effect of rapporteurs' nationalities found in the above analysis of the subset of cases. The first noteworthy finding is that rapporteurs' national affiliations do not affect the EP's opinions when the regular co-decision procedure applies. The coefficient associated

Table 3. The effect of the rapporteur’s nationality on the distance between the EP’s opinions and other actors’ policy positions under different decision-making procedures

<i>Nationality</i> (distance from other actor’s position to position of rapporteur’s home state)	−0.05 (0.12)
Conditioning variables	
<i>Early Agreement co-decision</i> (1 = early agreement co-decision; 0 = regular co-decision and consultation)	−22.79*** (8.25)
<i>Consultation</i> (1 = consultation; 0 = co-decision)	−18.54*** (6.95)
Interaction variables	
<i>Nationality</i> * <i>Early Agreement co-decision</i>	0.32* (0.19)
<i>Nationality</i> * <i>Consultation</i>	0.35** (0.15)
Control variables	
<i>Number of Alternatives</i>	−2.77*** (0.91)
<i>Range of Positions</i>	0.41*** (0.06)
Constant	22.35 (6.20)
R^2	.14
$F(p)$	16.89 (0.00)
N	3154

Notes: These analyses focus on both co-decision and consultation issues. OLS regression estimates with White’s robust standard errors, clustered by issue. The dependent variable is the distance between the position of the actor referred to in the case and the EP’s opinion.

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

with the direct effect of *Nationality* (−0.05), which is small and does not differ significantly from zero, implies this inference.

The second noteworthy finding is that, in line with the above analysis, rapporteurs’ national affiliation affects the EP’s opinions when legislative proposals are subject to early agreements under the co-decision procedure. Adding the appropriate coefficients (−0.05 + 0.32), we obtain the estimated effect of *Nationality* when the proposal is subject to an early agreement (0.27, s.e. 0.14, $p = .06$), which is marginally significant. For every one-unit increase in the distance between member state i ’s position and the position of the rapporteur’s home member state, the distance between member state i ’s position and the EP’s opinion increases by 0.27. The size of the estimated effect is somewhat smaller than in the previous analysis, although still substantial.

The third important finding, which adds to the previous analysis, is that rapporteurs’ national affiliation affects the EP’s opinions when the consultation procedure applies. The estimated effect of *Nationality* when the consultation procedure applies is 0.30 (−0.05 + 0.35; s.e. 0.10, $p < .01$). Thus, for every one-unit increase in the distance between member state i ’s position and the position

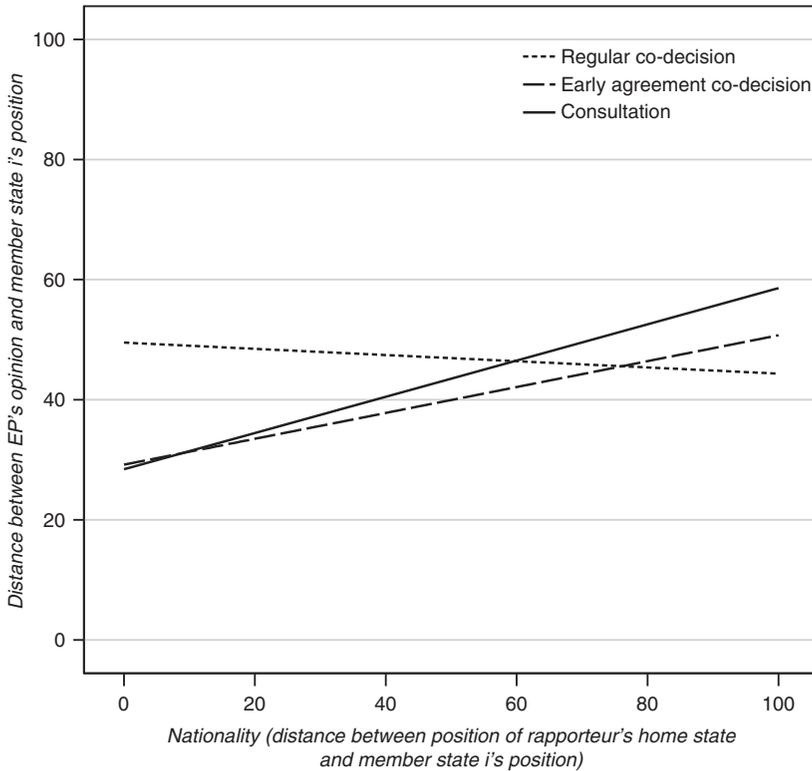


Figure 2. Effect of *Nationality* on the distance between the EP's opinion and member states' positions under various conditions.

Notes: Coefficients estimated with the regression in Table 3. Predicted values calculated with Clarify (King et al., 2000).

of the rapporteur's home member state, the distance between member state *i*'s position and the EP's opinion increases by 0.30.

Figure 2 illustrates the magnitude of the effects graphically by plotting the expected values of the dependent variable at different values of the variable *Nationality* under three different conditions. The effects of *Nationality* are positive and significant for cases subject to early agreements under the co-decision procedure and for cases subject to the consultation procedure. For the early agreement cases, when the distance between member state *i*'s position and the position of the rapporteur's home state is zero, the distance between state *i*'s position and the EP's opinion is expected to be 29.18 policy scale points. When member state *i*'s distance to the rapporteur's home state increases to the maximum value of 100, the distance between member state *i*'s position and the EP's position increases to 50.73. The effect of *Nationality* is somewhat stronger when the consultation procedure applies. Increasing the value of

Nationality from its minimum to its maximum values increases the distance between state *i*'s position and the EP's opinion from 28.43 to 58.58 policy scale points. As Figure 1 illustrates, a difference of 20–30 policy scale points can mean the difference between two substantially different policy alternatives.

Other factors may also condition the extent to which the rapporteur's national affiliation affects the EP's opinion. In particular, the effect of the rapporteur's nationality might be greater when the rapporteur is a member of a national party that is in government (and thus represented in the Council) or when the rapporteur is from a large member state. We believe there are weak a priori reasons to expect that these factors gauge rapporteurs' impact on EP opinions, but we examined them in an exploratory fashion. We report on these analyses in the Online Appendix. The results indicate that these factors do not significantly affect the impact of the rapporteur.

Conclusions

The informational theory of legislative committees posits that committees are agents of the plenary and that their main function is to provide reliable information to the plenary without affecting the content of the parliament's collective position (e.g. Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1989, 1990; Krehbiel, 1991). In accordance with the informational theory, we present evidence that the EP's opinion is generally most congruent with the policy position of the median MEP, regardless of the rapporteur's national or party group affiliations. Another implication of the informational theory has also been supported by previous research. The composition of legislative committees in the EP generally reflects the characteristics of all MEPs in terms of their party affiliations and ideological positions (McElroy, 2006: 5).

The present study adds nuance to the informational theory's account of legislative committees in the EP. The delegation of committee tasks to rapporteurs gives these individuals the potential, albeit a constrained potential, to influence decision outcomes in their favour. By formulating a report on the legislative proposal, the rapporteur sets the agenda for the EP's opinion. This agenda-setting power is severely constrained by the open amendment rules in both the committee and the plenary. Despite these constraints, rapporteurs possess information advantages that enable them to influence the content of the EP's opinions under certain conditions. These information advantages arise from the expertise that rapporteurs develop on the legislative proposals assigned to them and also from their knowledge of the preferences of actors in the other main legislative chamber of the EU, the Council of Ministers.

There are two conditions under which rapporteurs affect the EP's opinions. First, rapporteurs have a marked influence on the EP's opinions when the EP is limited to a consultative role in decision making. This finding is far from trivial. The EP's opinions have a notable influence on legislative outcomes even when the Council may formally set aside these opinions (Kardasheva, 2009; Thomson and Hosli, 2006: 414). Of course, compared with the co-decision procedure (or 'ordinary legislative procedure' as it is now known), the EP is in a weaker position

relative to the Council when it has only a consultative role. However, the EP's relative weakness is a source of strength for the rapporteur. Other MEPs are less likely to participate actively in the parliamentary decision-making process when the EP is limited to a consultative role because of the general perception that the EP has less influence on such proposals (Scully, 1997). This leaves rapporteurs with more discretion to define the contents of the EP's opinions.

Second, rapporteurs have a marked influence on the EP's opinions on legislative proposals subject to early agreements with the Council under the co-decision procedure. Rapporteurs are always present in the informal consultations that take place between the EP and the Council to formulate such early agreements. Other MEPs are generally involved to a far lesser extent. Rapporteurs' continual presence in these complex negotiations gives them a distinct information advantage over other committee members and MEPs with regard to the preferences of Council members. This finding supports previous research, which also highlights the importance of rapporteurs' crucial brokerage position in the inter-institutional negotiations that take place before early agreements are formulated (Farrell and Héritier, 2004).

Our findings support a positive, albeit qualified view of the role of the European Parliament in the EU's democratic policy-making process. One of our main findings is that the EP's opinion is influenced most by the position of the median MEP. In any political system, the median voter's position holds the unique claim to be the truly democratically justifiable policy outcome (McDonald and Budge, 2005). If the electoral system is unbiased, the median parliamentarian will reflect the position of the median voter. If parliamentary rules are unbiased, then the Parliament's opinion will reflect the position of the median parliamentarian. The present study does not address the first part of this mechanism, although it is known that the electoral connection between voters and their MEPs is weak. Our findings do, however, suggest that the EP's rules are unbiased since its opinions effectively reflect the position of the median MEP. The qualification to this positive view is that, under certain conditions, the EP's opinions also reflect the position of the rapporteur. This is particularly troubling with respect to early agreements under the co-decision procedure because the EP has greater influence on final decision outcomes under co-decision than other procedures and the practice of early agreements is becoming commonplace. Shackleton and Raunio also give voice to this concern when they pose the question: 'How far does the growth of informal trilogues effectively undermine the claims of the Parliament to fulfill the criteria of a legislative body?' (2003: 185).

To the extent that rapporteurs influence the EP's opinions, they appear to be motivated by national interests. Under the two conditions identified, the nationality of the rapporteur has a significant impact on the content of the EP's opinion. The EP's opinion is related to the policy position of the home member state of the rapporteur. The importance of national interests is consistent with attempts by national governments to influence their countries MEPs (Corbett et al., 2003: 280) and with national parties' efforts to monitor and control the actions of their MEPs (Raunio, 2000; Whitaker, 2005).

Our findings provide no evidence that rapporteurs' influence on the content of the EP's opinions is driven by the interests of their EP party groups. This is surprising because MEPs depend on the leadership of their EP party group for career advancement within the EP. In addition, party competition within the EP is structured around party groupings rather than national parties (Hix et al., 2007). One explanation for our surprising non-finding is that the complexity of many legislative proposals gives rapporteurs a considerable degree of autonomy from the leadership of their EP party group. Such autonomy may encourage rapporteurs to be receptive to other sources of potential influence, notably from national actors.

Future research should examine rapporteurs' impact on final decision outcomes. The present study examined the EP's opinions, which are an important element of inter-institutional decision-making in the European Union. Under early agreements, the EP's opinions are in fact the final decision outcomes. What impact, if any, do rapporteurs have on decision outcomes under other legislative procedures? As mentioned above, rapporteurs also represent the EP in the inter-institutional negotiations with the Council of Ministers that take place after the first reading (Farrell and Héritier, 2004). As such, rapporteurs also control the flow of information in these procedures (Farrell and Héritier, 2004: 1188). When there are disagreements between the Council of Ministers' common position and the EP's opinion, do the rapporteurs' characteristics help explain the EP's bargaining success relative to the Council? Here, too, we can examine the relative impact of rapporteurs' characteristics, including their nationalities and party affiliations.

Acknowledgements

The data on decision-making in the post-2004 period were collected by Javier Arregui, Robin Hertz and the present authors. We would like to thank Gail McElroy, Simon Hix, Clifford Carrubba and four anonymous referees for their constructive comments on earlier versions of this paper. The data set, codebook and do-file for the empirical analysis in this article, as well as the Online Appendix, can be found at <http://eup.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

Notes

1. Since the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, co-decision has been extended to a much greater range of policy areas, and is now referred to as the 'ordinary legislative procedure'. Only in a few areas, including the multi-annual budgetary frameworks and operational police cooperation, is the EP restricted to a consultative role under what is now known as the 'special legislative procedure'.
2. Interviews, Brussels, July 2006.
3. These tests consisted of comparing informants' judgements with information from Council and EP documentation, and comparing judgements from different informants. They show that informants' estimates of the positions actors favour usually match information reported in the documentation. When they differ, these differences are owing to the fact that the documents refer not to policy preferences but to the decision outcomes actors were prepared to accept during the course of the negotiations. Thomson (2006: 335) reports that 48 out of 53 positions reported by key informants matched information from

documentation pertaining to states' initial positions. Furthermore, 31 point estimates provided by key informants in the Council and the Commission were compared with estimates from informants in the European Parliament, and 30 were found to match perfectly or almost perfectly (König et al., 2007).

4. The 23 proposals included in the post-2004 study are sugar sector reform (CNS/2005/118), animal welfare (CNS/2005/009), agricultural fund (CNS/2004/161), CAP financing (CNS/2004/164), fisheries fund (CNS/2004/169), hake fish conservation (CNS/2003/318), conservation of fish in Biscay area (CNS/2003/327), the Regional Development Fund (COD/2004/167), including the general regulation of the Regional Development Fund (AVC/2004/163) also dealt with in the same co-decision package, the working time directive (COD/2004/209), LIFE environmental programme (COD/2004/218), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (COD/2004/19), port services (COD/2004/240), passengers with reduced mobility (COD/2005/007), data retention (COD/2005/182), waste (COD/2005/281), spirits (COD/2005/028), intellectual property rights (COD/2005/127), air pollution (COD/2005/183), pensions (COD/2005/214), broadcasting (COD/2005/260), payment services (COD/2005/245), Visa information system (COD/2004/287). A full list of the legislative proposals from the EU-15 study can be found in Thomson et al. (2006).
5. A larger number of informants from the EP were interviewed in the post-2004 study. This was necessary because part of that study, which will be discussed later, examines the positions taken by actors within the EP.
6. The use of scales of 0–100 is a useful heuristic device that is common to studies that employ this data collection procedure. In practice, informants round off estimates to the nearest five points. However, the 0–100 scale is useful if informants wish, for instance, to describe four policy alternatives that are evenly distributed along a continuum. For a longer discussion of the scaling procedures used, see, for example, Bueno de Mesquita and Stokman (1994), Bueno de Mesquita (2003) and Thomson and Stokman (2006).
7. On two of the post-2004 co-decision proposals (one on port services, COD/2004/240, and one on payment services, COD/2005/245), an insufficient number of experts from the EP were available for interview. These two proposals were excluded from the first set of analyses. The proposal on port services was rejected by the EP. Therefore, the EP's opinion is coded as the reference point, which is the decision outcome if no decision is taken.
8. The median position in the EP on each issue was identified by examining the positions of all EP actors on that issue. This analysis included the positions of each EP party group and the positions of any national delegations within those groups that defected from their EP group's position. The number of votes held by each of these EP actors was identified. The actor holding the median position from all MEPs (excluding those coded as not having taken a position) was then identified.
9. The median MEP position on this issue is 33 because a majority of MEPs took this position, including the EPP and ALDE groups along with the German delegation from the PES group.
10. The regressions presented in Tables 2 and 3 employ robust standard errors, White's heteroscedasticity-corrected standard errors (White, 1980), since an inspection of the residuals revealed that the data show signs of heteroscedasticity. The standard errors are clustered at the level of the issues in the data set. This measure addresses the fact that the observations that relate to the same issue are not independent of each other; the distance

between the EP's opinion and, say, Germany's position on an issue cannot be considered independently of the EP's opinion and France's position on the same issue.

11. The standard error and *p*-value were calculated by estimating the model with early agreements as the reference category and then taking the direct effect of *Nationality*. A similar procedure was applied to calculate the standard errors of the other interaction terms discussed later.

References

- Benedetto G (2005) Rapporteurs as legislative entrepreneurs: The dynamics of the co-decision procedure in Europe's parliament. *Journal of European Public Policy* 12(1): 67–88.
- Bueno de Mesquita B (2003) *Principles of International Politics: People's Power, Preferences and Perceptions*, 2nd edn. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Bueno de Mesquita B, Stokman FN (eds) (1994) *European Community Decision-making: Models, Applications and Comparisons*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Corbett R, Jacobs F, and Shackleton M (2003) *The European Parliament*, 5th edn. London: John Harper Publishing.
- Farrell H, Héritier A (2004) Interorganizational negotiation and intraorganizational power in shared decision making. *Comparative Political Studies* 37(10): 1184–1212.
- Gilligan TW, Krehbiel K (1989) Asymmetric information and legislative rules with a heterogeneous committee. *American Journal of Political Science* 33(2): 459–490.
- Gilligan TW, Krehbiel K (1990) Organization of informative committees by a rational legislature. *American Journal of Political Science* 34(2): 531–564.
- Hausemer P (2006) Participation and political competition in committee report allocation: Under what conditions do MEPs represent their constituents? *European Union Politics* 7(4): 505–530.
- Hix S (2005) *The Political System of the European Union*, 2nd edn. London: Palgrave.
- Hix S, Noury AG, and Roland G (2007) *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoyland B (2006) Allocation of co-decision reports in the fifth European Parliament. *European Union Politics* 7(1): 30–50.
- Kaeding M (2004) Rapporteurship allocation in the European Parliament. *European Union Politics* 5(3): 353–371.
- Kardasheva R (2009) The power to delay: The European Parliament's influence in the consultation procedure. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 47(2): 385–409.
- King G, Tomz M, and Wittenberg J (2000) Making the most of statistical analyses: Improving interpretation and presentation. *American Journal of Political Science* 44(2): 341–355.
- König T, Lindburg B, Lechner S, and Pohlmeier W (2007) Bicameral conflict resolution in the European Union: An empirical analysis of conciliation committee bargains. *British Journal of Political Science* 37(2): 281–312.
- Krehbiel K (1991) Are congressional committees composed of preference outliers? *American Political Science Review* 84(1): 149–163.
- Kreppel A (2002) *The European Parliament and Supranational Party System: A Study in Institutional Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McDonald MD, Budge I (2005) *Elections, Parties, Democracy: Conferring the Median Mandate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- McElroy G (2006) Committee representation in the European Parliament. *European Union Politics* 7(1): 5–29.
- Mamadouh V, Raunio T (2003) The committee system: Powers, appointments and report allocation. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 41(2): 333–351.
- Noury AG (2002) Ideology, nationality and Euro-Parliamentarians. *European Union Politics* 3(1): 81–111.
- Rasmussen A (2008) Time choices in bicameral bargaining: Evidence from the co-decision legislative procedure of the European Union. Paper presented at the *Fourth Pan-European Conference on EU Politics*, 26–27 September, Riga.
- Raunio T (2000) Losing independence or finally gaining recognition? Contacts between MEPS and national parties. *Party Politics* 6(2): 211–223.
- Scully RM (1997) Policy influence and participation in the European Parliament. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 22(2): 233–252.
- Settembri P, Neuhold C (2009) Achieving consensus through committees: Does the European Parliament manage? *Journal of Common Market Studies* 47(1): 127–151.
- Shackleton M, Raunio T (2003) Co-decision since Amsterdam: A laboratory for institutional innovation and change. *Journal of European Public Policy* 10(2): 171–187.
- Thomson R (2006) Comparison of expert judgements with each other and with information from council documentation. In: Thomson R, Stokman FN, Achen CH, and König T (eds) *The European Union Decides*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 329–347.
- Thomson R, Hosli M (2006) Who has power in the EU? *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44(2): 391–417.
- Thomson R, Stokman FN (2006) Research design: Measuring actors' positions, saliences and capabilities. In: Thomson R, Stokman FN, Achen CH, and König T (eds) *The European Union Decides*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 25–53.
- Whitaker R (2005) National parties in the European Parliament: An influence in the committee system? *European Union Politics* 6(1): 5–28.
- White H (1980) A heteroscedasticity consistent covariance matrix estimator and a direct test of heteroscedasticity. *Econometrica* 48(4): 817–818.