

Party Cohesion in the European Parliament

A large-N analysis on the relationship between the closeness of votes and party cohesion



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Introduction.

Among other scholars, a considerable amount of research on party cohesion in the European Parliament (EP) has been conducted by Hix in collaboration with scholars like Høyland, Noury and Roland (e.g. Hix, 2004., Hix, Noury & Roland, 2006). From this research there are a number of things that we already know about party cohesion and individual behavior of the MEPs (Members of European Parliament) in the EP. The voting behavior of MEPs is driven by three different type of objectives; getting re-elected, career seeking and policy seeking (Hix, 2004). These objectives lie at the basis on the voting decisions of MEPs and the consideration that a MEP has to make when a vote needs to be casted. One could imagine that MEPs would sometimes need to make choice which will have a negative impact on one of the three objectives. For example, when a vote needs to be casted and the policy objectives from a MEP differ from the EPG (European Party Group) line, a dissent from that EPG line could possibly have a negative effect on his/hers career seeking objectives.

In the field on International Parliamentary Assemblies (IPAs), the European Parliament (EP) has been the focus point of a large amount of research (e.g. Hix, Noury & Roland 2006., McElroy, 2006., Tsebelis, 1994). This is not that surprising, considering that the EP has been described as an IPA that is continuously growing in strength and power (Kraft-Kasack, 2008 p.535). Besides the established and growing impact that the EP has managed to achieve in the European political spectrum, the similarities between the US Congress, which has received more academic interest than any other legislative chamber, and the EP have resulted in the transfer of theories and methods from the US Congress to the EP and exploiting and testing them there (Hix & Høyland, 2014). In addition, it is important to have a comprehensive understanding about the existing literature on party cohesion. Among authors on party cohesion within legislative bodies there seems to be an agreement that the relationship between the legislature and the executive has a significant effect on the level of party unity (Van Vonno, 2016 p.32). Moreover, Van Vonno finds, in her overview of the literature on party unity, that the degree of government decentralization and the type of electoral system are institutional factors that affect the level of party unity within an assembly. By comparing the party cohesion in the EP with the closeness of the votes, this research can contribute to this body of knowledge on the causes of party unity within parliamentary institutions with different institutional rules and structures.

Concerning the effect that the outcome of a vote could have on the cohesion of political parties, Snyder & Groseclose (2000) have shown that in the US Congress, Congressmen will be more likely to follow the party instructions when a vote will be close than when a vote is lopsided. This effect is the result of higher degrees of discipline by the leaderships of the parties in the US Congress during votes that will be closer to a tie. From research on legislative behavior and party unity we know that party discipline pressures MPs to stay loyal to the party and follow voting instructions (Kam, 2009 p.21). Opposite from the findings of Snyder & Groseclose (2000), Hix, Noury & Roland (2009) find the opposite to be true. Thanks to the differences in the institutional structures of the assemblies, the last mentioned authors suggest that MEPs will indeed be more inclined to dissent from party instructions during closer votes. Hix et al. argue that during key votes that are likely to be close, national parties are less likely to break from their European groups during the vote, by giving the example of a high-stakes vote in July 2001 on the takeover directive (Hix et al., 2009, p.828)

These conflicting findings on the effect that the outcome of votes have on the party cohesion beg for a clear explanation backed up with data. While Hix et al. (2009) support their argument with the example of the above mentioned vote, an analysis over a larger sample of votes appears to be absent. Therefore in my thesis I will study whether *MEPs will be more inclined to vote against the instructions of their transnational party groups when the result of a vote will be closer to a tie*. The explanation behind this relationship is that MEPs will be less willing to defect from the EPG line when a vote is lopsided, because this would probably have a negative effect on of the office seeking objectives of MEPs, while not producing a positive outcome for their policy seeking objectives. During votes that are close to a tie, the MEPs would be more willing to face the consequences of a dissenting vote because the chance that policy objectives actually can be achieved by dissent grows as votes come closer to a tie. In this study I will test if these findings on the proposed effect by Hix et al. (2009, p.828) still holds up when it is conducted in a large-N analysis of all roll-call votes in the 6th EP.

Conceptualization of groups, parties and cohesion.

In order to have a comprehensive understanding about what it is that we want to research, a short overview of the concepts and definitions that are used will need to be set forth. For the

sake of clarity, the transnational European parties will be referred to as ‘transnational party groups’ or ‘EPGs (European Party Groups)’ where ‘party’ or ‘parties’ will refer to the political parties that are organized on the national level. Note that the ‘cohesion’ will refer to the cohesion of the transnational party groups and not the cohesion of the national parties. When looking at the difference in party cohesion of the transnational party groups in the EP during difference of closeness of the outcome of the votes, the closeness of a vote is not a delimited point. With expressions like ‘a close vote’ it is meant that the vote is question is closer to a tie than others. A lopsided vote will be the opposite of a close vote but there is not a strict line that delimits the close from the lopsided votes. This will be further explained later in the operationalization part.

Where confusion could arise is around the use of the terms that are related to party cohesion. Terms like party unity, party discipline, party cohesion and party loyalty often are being used interchangeably (Van Vonno, 2016 p.28). The two terms that best represent the variable that is measured in this research are party unity and party cohesion. In this study the term party unity will be seen as a state in which a party can be positioned with regard to the homogeneity of a specific party. The use of this term will be used mostly when referring to existing literature that does not specifically refer to party cohesion but is still relevant for this study. The term party cohesion bests describes the dependent variable in this study and will therefore be used most frequent. Following the definition of Özbudun (1970, p.305), party cohesion entails ‘*an objective condition of unity of action among party members*’. So party cohesion in this sense will be the conceptualization of the opposite of individual dissent by MEPs. In other words, party cohesion will represent the degree of MEPs in a specific transnational party group that vote in accordance with their party colleagues during a specific voting round.

Theoretical framework.

There seems to be an agreement among scholars that the institutional structure of an assembly is an important qualifier for the relationship between MPs and the parties (e.g. Hix, 2004., Van Vonno, 2016). First off, the relationship of the executive and the legislative branches of the political systems is important for the relationship of MPs and the political parties. In national assemblies, voting cohesion of the political parties is expected to be higher in parliamentary systems than in presidential systems. In addition, Carey (2007) found that in

parliamentary systems the governing parties will see a higher degree in unity, while such a difference between the governing parties and the opposition is not found in presidential systems. Second, the difference in electoral systems provides a variation of incentives for MPs. Party centered systems, in which the votes are casted on a party list, appear to have a higher degree of party cohesion than candidate oriented electoral systems (Carey & Shugart, 1995). In candidate oriented electoral systems MPs will have the incentive to gain positive support among the electorate. On the other hand, MPs in a party centered electoral system are dependent on their parties for the popular support so they would be more inclined to stay loyal to their parties in order to assure that they will be re-elected.

Alongside the importance of these theoretical findings on the institutional influence on party cohesion, one has to keep in mind that these theoretical frameworks, for the most part, originated from national parliamentary assemblies. It is still work in progress to find out in what sense these theories are applicable for international assemblies, such as the EP. The specific characteristics of the EP have to be kept in mind when applying the existing theories about party cohesion to the international assembly of the EU. As mentioned, parliamentary systems are expected to show higher party cohesion than presidential systems. While the EP does not fit in either of these systems, the missing of a clear government-opposition relationship can be expected to provide difficulties in the enforcement of voting discipline by the transnational party groups (Rainio, 1999 p.190). Moreover, the electoral system does not provide the transnational party groups with the basis on which party cohesion can be enforced. This is due to the fact that MEPs are dependent on their national parties for re-election and not on the EPGs. So MEPs will be more inclined to stay loyal to their national parties. The theoretical explanation for this result from Hix (2004) is that in systems where the parties control the candidate list for the elections, MPs would want to keep their parties satisfied, due to their desire to maintain or improve their position on the candidate list in order to get re-elected. Nevertheless, the individual MEPs are not the only actors that we need to take into account when assessing party cohesion in the EP.

Having discussed the effects that institutional factors can have on party cohesion, the importance of informal rules and norms for party cohesion must also be acknowledged. As Owens (2003 p.27) points out:

“...the reality of legislative decisionmaking – and therefore intra-party cohesion - is much more complex than constitutional and institutional formalities, and appears to depend more

on the extent to which values are shared among copartisans and decisionmaking is coordinated and centralised within political cultures that uphold collective values.”

If this observation is accepted, looking at the internal values and norms of the EP would give us a better prediction of the cohesion of the transnational party groups than just by looking at the formal properties of institutions. While norms and values within the EP are harder to define and account for, surveys conducted among MEPs can provide us with insight on some of the existing norms within the EP. When asked to rate the acceptability of dissent from the group line during votes, 53% of MEPs responded with ‘acceptable’ or ‘most acceptable’ (Bowler & Farrell, 1992 in Raunio, 1999 p.192). While this result comes from an older questionnaire, it does confirm that dissent by MEPs from their EPGs is not ruled out in advance.

As mentioned before, we are aware of a number of factors that can influence the voting behavior of MEPs (Hix, 2004); first, the voting pattern of a MEP can be driven by the policy objectives that the parliamentarian has set out for him/herself. Second, office seeking can be of influence for the incentives of MEPs to vote according to the transnational party group line because the transnational party groups can help MEPs to pursue their career goals within the European political system. Third, the voting incentives of MEPs can be influenced by their desire to be re-elected in the parliamentary assembly. Thanks to the formation of parties in legislative bodies, these factors do not come in conflict with each other in more instances than not. Still, there are instances that conflict between the stated factors can occur. When during a vote the instructions given by the transnational party groups differs from the way that the MEP wants to vote, he or she has to make the consideration whether a defection of the instructions will be worth the costs. This consideration will be different for members of legislative bodies depending on the party- and electoral- system that they are a member of.

Snyder & Groseclose (2000) have shown that in the US Congress, Congressmen will be more likely to follow the party instructions when a vote will be close than when a vote is lopsided. This is a result of enforced party discipline during high-stakes votes and the possibility of loss in electoral appeal of the party to the US electorate. However, in the EP the parliamentary elections have less to do with the performance of the transnational party groups than the national parties. Those transnational party groups cannot enforce party cohesion when a vote will be closer to a tie by offering the incentive to get re-elected (Hix et al., 2009 pp.829). Even though the lack of EPG discipline in the EP could mean that during lopsided

votes MEPs would be likewise inclined to vote according to their own policy preferences, when those policy preferences are different from the transnational party group line, party cohesion is relatively high during lopsided votes in the EP. Hix et al. (2009) explain this by arguing that during lopsided votes MEPs have an interest in keeping their policy objectives private when they don't correspond with the transnational party group line. However, this interest of MEPs would be trumped by their policy making objectives during votes that are closer to a tie. The risk of giving the transnational party group the notion that there are differences in opinions about policy might lead to a MEP not getting a key agenda-setting office on future issues, so this risk would only be worth the costs when MEPs have the idea that they have the chance that they actually have a decisive vote. Therefore MEPs will stay in line when a vote will be lopsided but be more willing to dissent from the group line when a vote will be closer to a tie.

Considering these findings I formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: If the result of a vote will be closer to a tie, party cohesion will be lower

In order to link these two variables the assumption is made that MEPs will be aware of the (general) outcome of a vote. The knowledge of the members of the parliamentary body on which direction the vote will go is necessary for the causal relationship between the two variables to work. This assumption can be made because MEPs will get the signals on which direction a vote will go and whether or not a vote will be lopsided or closer to a tie. This awareness can be achieved thru debates, deliberations with colleagues and signals from inside the parties.

While H1 would be rejected in the case of the US Congress according to Snyder & Groselecone (2000), MEPs will let their choices on votes depend less on the overarching political parties within the parliamentary assembly. Due to the electoral system in where the MEPs are dependent on their national parties, the loyalty to the national delegation will trump the prospects of future office positions that can be provided thru the transnational party groups according to Hix et al. (2009). But we cannot dismiss the ability of the EPGs to discipline their MEPs via their ability to promote or demote the MEPs on forehand.

Figure 1 shows a highly simplified model of the decision process that MEPs will have to undertake in order to decide whether or not to adhere to the transnational party group line according to the formulated hypothesis and assumptions made by Hix et al. (2009).

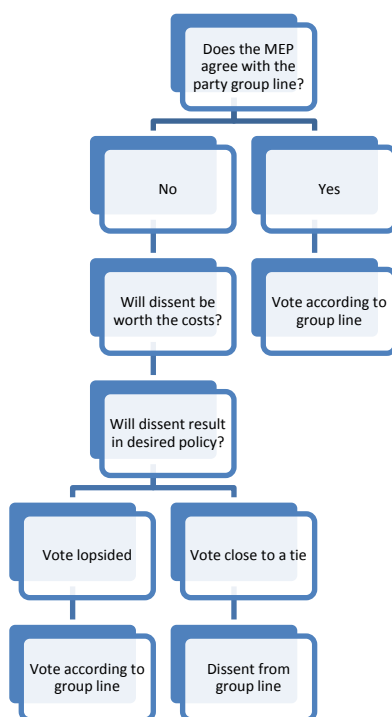


Figure 1.

This model follows the formulated hypotheses and thereby the assumptions made by Hix et al. (2009), in which they claim that MEPs indeed are more prone to dissent from the transnational party group line, backed up with the example of the vote on the takeover directive from July 2004. By testing this on a large-N dataset of roll-call votes from the 6th EP, we can derive whether the made assumptions are correct over the larger population or if the effect is only spuriously correct or only under specific circumstances and type of votes.

Case selection.

For understanding the legislative behavior in a party context in IPAs the EP is an obvious choice due to its unique party structure in International Organizations. For determining the cohesion during votes in the EP I will use a large-N analysis on a dataset of roll-call votes from the sixth EP provided by Hix. Although roll-call votes is not the only type of voting that take place within the EP, the availability of datasets on roll-call votes makes that these voting procedures are frequently used in research concerning legislative behavior. Therefore only the roll-call votes from the EP will be used in the analysis.

While the datasets of roll-call votes does not give an insight on the content of the vote, the availability of data and relevance to the research question result in the choice to use the datasets provides by Hix, Noury & Roland (2006). The lack of information provided by these datasets on the nature of the votes will result in the incapability to determine whether a specific vote will be higher on a MEPs ranking of the importance of a vote. The importance or weight of a vote could possibly be a factor on the decision making process of a MEP on whether or not to dissent from the group line. However, the datasets does provide us with the information on which policy area the vote is about. Therefore, from the lack of a better alternative and the available time-span for this research in mind, the policy area will be used as a control variable.

Due to the limited time in which I will need to conduct the research I will choose the datasets on the sixth elected EP, which entails the largest amount of MEPs and number of votes and is the most recent EP on which the data that I need is available. When the available time will prove to be sufficient, an analysis of the parliaments before the sixth one will be conducted also which could provide us with information over the transformation of the possible relationship between the variables over time that are researched in this thesis.

Research design, operationalization & methods of data collection.

In this research the focus will lie on the cohesion of the transnational party groups in the EP. The causes that influence the cohesion will be examined with special attention directed on the closeness of the outcome of a vote. The data will be retrieved from a dataset provided by Hix et al. (2006). The dataset includes information about all roll-call votes in the first six parliaments. The information provided includes all MEPs and their voting decisions from which the outcome of the vote will be deducted as well as the closeness of a vote. The dependent variable will be the EPG cohesion and the closeness of the votes will represent the independent variable.

For determining the outcome of a vote it won't be of interest whether a bill is passed or rejected. The property of a vote outcome that we will be interested in is on whether a vote is concluded with a large majority, a small majority, or a tie. For determining the 'closeness' of a vote the abstaining votes will be ignored. This decision is taken due to the fact that the 'closeness' of the outcome of a vote is not influenced by the number of abstaining votes (e.g. 99 yes 101 no 100 abstaining is as close as 149 yes 151 no 0 abstaining). In other words, a MEP will have the same chance to cast a crucial vote in votes where the number of yes's and

no's are close, no matter what the number of abstaining votes are. In determining the 'closeness' of a vote the number of yes and the number of no votes will be compared and the difference will be seen as the 'closeness' of a vote. In this case 0 will be representing a tie in the vote. Opposite from a tie, if the outcome is equal to the number of MEPs attending the vote, it will represent a unanimous outcome. Furthermore, the counts of votes on which the closeness of the votes is determined needs to be turned in an index. If a vote on which less MEPs have voted is unanimously decided the score could be equal to a vote on which more MEPs have voted but the result is closer to a tie. Therefore the difference between the number of yes and no votes needs to be divided by the total amount of casted yes and no votes. This will result in an index with scores between 0 and 1 in which 0 will stand for a tie in a vote and 1 a unanimous result.

For the EPG cohesion, the amount of MEPs from a single party group that cast the same vote will be the determinant. If more MEPs from one EPG would cast the same vote the party cohesion within that group will be higher. On the opposite side, if there is a strong division in the EPG on how its members voted the cohesion within that party will be lower. By using the Rice index the cohesion of the EPGs could be measured. The Rice index compares the number of yes and no votes and divides this number by the total number of casted votes (Hix et al., 2009, p.215). However, as pointed out by Hix et al. (2009), in the EP there also is the option for the MEPs to cast an abstaining vote. Therefore, it is important to include the abstaining votes for our equation. After all, if all the members from one EPG abstain from voting, the party is still cohesive. Moreover, the instructions given by a transnational party group to the parliamentarians could possibly be to abstain from the vote. In order to include the abstaining votes I will make use of the agreement index (Hix et al., 2009, p.215);

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

in which Y_i stands for the number of yes votes casted by EPG i on a vote, N_i the number of no votes and A_i the number of abstaining votes. This index represents the party cohesion during a vote and includes the abstaining votes. This agreement index has to be constructed for every party with every vote of the sixth EP. This way we can conclude what the party cohesion was during each vote. When the extent of party cohesion in the sixth EP is clear for each single vote, a statistical analysis where the relationship between closeness in vote outcome and party

cohesion can be conducted. In addition, the agreement score of the entire EP will be calculated by taking the weighted average of the agreement scores of the EPGs;

$$AIt = \frac{(AI1*(Yi1+Ni1+Ai1)) + (AI2*(Yi2+Ni2+Ai2)) + \dots + (AI8*(Yi8+Ni8+Ai8))}{(Yt+Nt+At)}$$

The chance that there is another variable that influences the independent and dependent variable must be considered. A possibility for this variable is the policy issues on which the votes are casted. The policy issues might help explain the distribution of MEPs on votes, considering that the cohesion within the transnational party groups can be different in different policy issues. The ideologies of the MEPs within a EPG can differ per policy issue, so the policy issues will be used as a control variable. The general policy issue that a certain vote is concerned with can be deducted from the same dataset in which the number of yes's and no's will be retrieved.

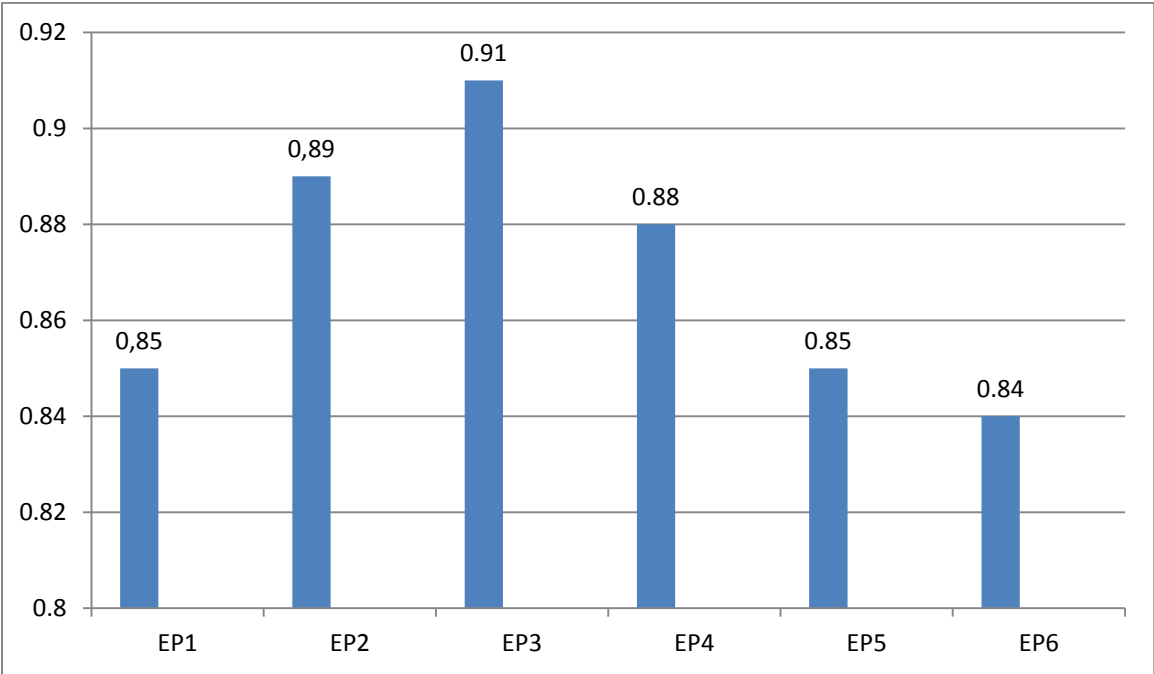
Methods of data analysis.

When the variables are computed, a statistical analysis will be executed in order to find out if there is a relationship between the closeness of a vote and party cohesion in the EP. Because we want to find out in how far a smaller difference in yes and no votes will be associated with a lower score in party cohesion we have to determine the measure of association. This calculation will be made for each individual EPG. Both the dependent and the independent variables will be set as scale (ratio) variables. This means that for the statistical analysis a regression analysis will find the relationship between the closeness of a vote and party cohesion. In order to find out to what extend the independent variable can predict the dependent variable a regression analysis will be used as well. The determinant for the correlation will be determined by the r and r square test.

Results.

In the analysis, the first six EPs are used. After computing the counts of yes, no and abstaining votes per EPG in the EP, the agreement scores can be calculated per vote for each transnational party group. By calculating the weighted average agreement index scores for each parliament as a whole per vote, the average score for each parliament over all votes can be determined. One thing that can be derived from the cohesion scores is that the cohesion within the EP floats around the 85-90% which is fairly high. But because the average scores do not reach the 100% mark we can conclude that dissent by MEPs does indeed take place, which is a confirmation for the theoretical framework.

Figure 2.:Average AI scores per EP



The cohesion in the EPs has grown up to the third parliament, after which a steadily decline in party cohesion took place. One thing that needs to be kept in mind in assessing these results is the size of the EP and the rise of the number of votes in the later parliaments. Moreover, the implementation of legislative directives require several votes which can skew our results which requires further adjustments of the data and the techniques used for the analysis.

When we look at the results concerning the relationship between the closeness of the votes and the cohesion of the EPG, there seems to be a weak relationship between the variables, but nonetheless present. By linking the independent variable, vote closeness, to the dependent variable, EPG cohesion the r^2 equals .134 (see table 1).

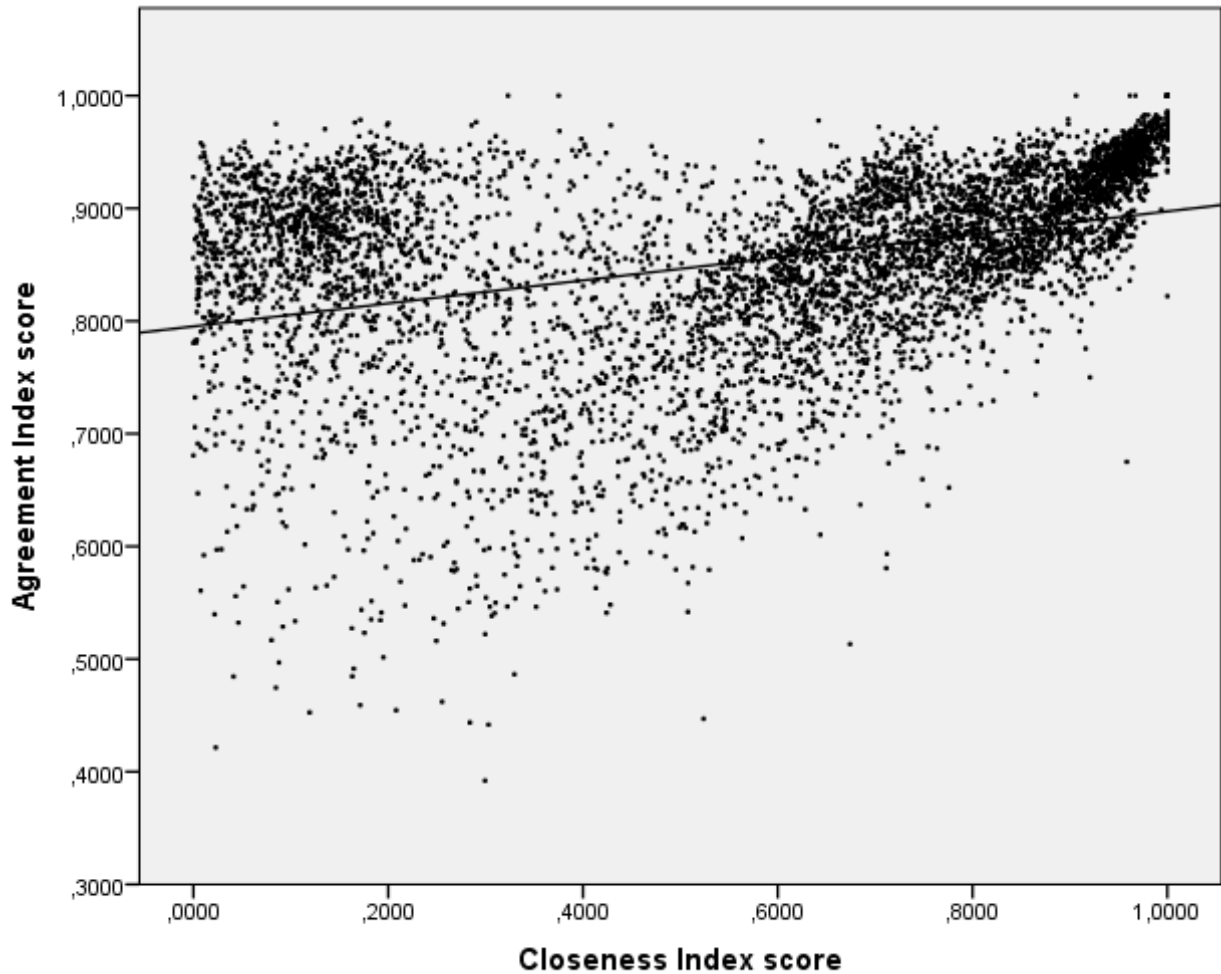
Table 1: Regression model closeness index - AI

	Model 1
(constant)	.975 (.002)
Closeness	.102*** (.003)
R ²	.134
Adj. R ²	.134
N	6191

Note: OLS-regression coefficients
with standard error between parentheses
*** $p < 0,001$, ** $p < 0,01$, * $p < 0,05$

When we looking at the scatterplot of the agreement index scores and the closeness of the votes, the amount of scores that are both lopsided and high in the cohesion scores, stand out. The cluster on the top right side in the scatterplot are the votes that are concluded by a large majority or even unanimously. These votes could possibly be the cause of observed relationship between the two variables that is represented by the R². With the use of the indexed scores of the closeness of the votes we are able to look at the differences in cohesion scores for different scores of closeness by including only the scores of votes that, for example, have a closeness score between 0 and 0.5. The points on the top right side of the scatterplot are of limited interest for us because if a vote is casted (almost) unanimously there is no room for dissent in the first place so the cohesion scores will be high no matter what. When a vote is close to a unanimous outcome, the AI score will be high because (almost) all the parties vote likewise. In other words, unanimity leaves no room for dissent which will result in high cohesion scores.

Figure 3.:Scatterplot AI score - closeness score



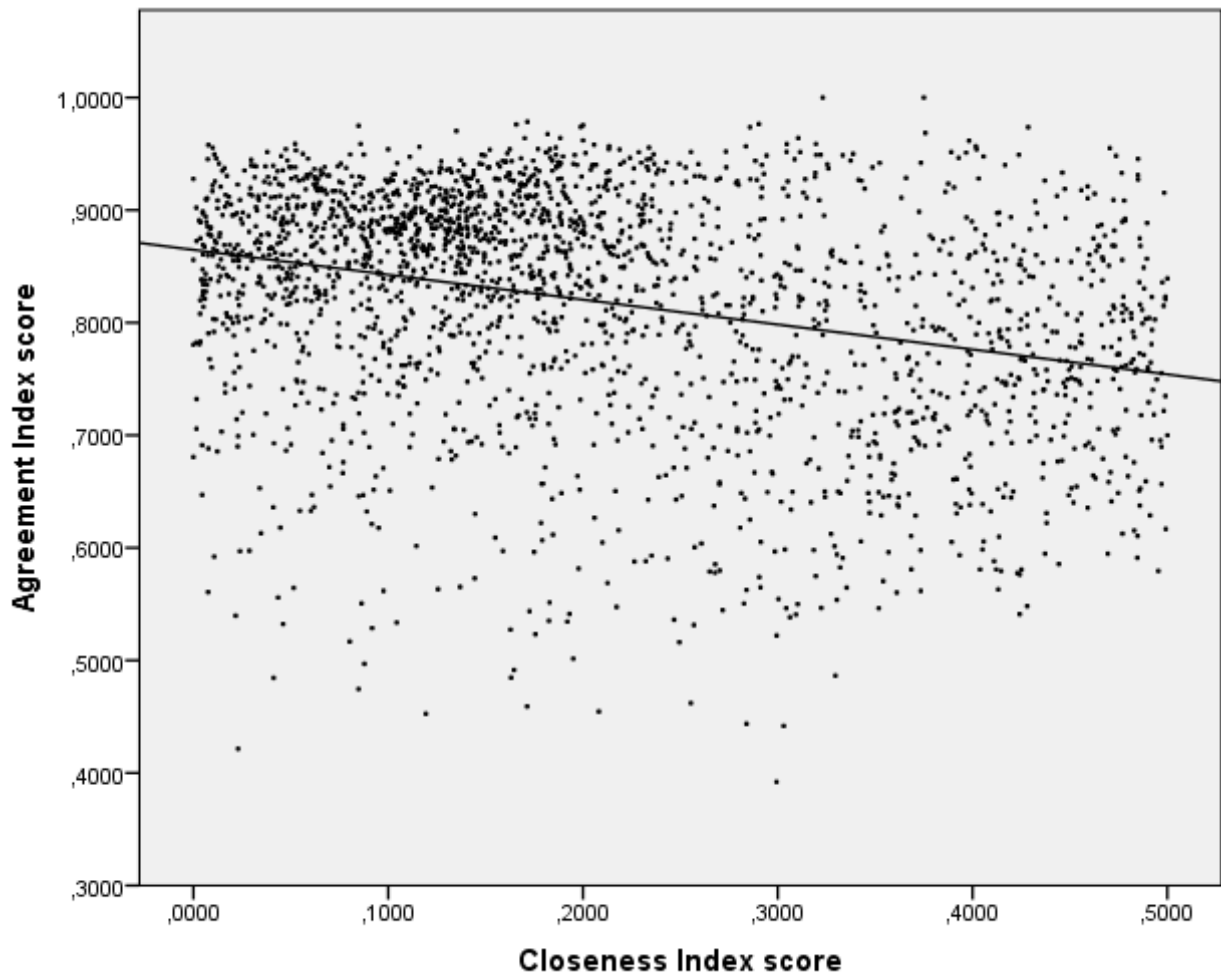
Note:, $R^2 = .134$

By looking only at the votes that reach up to an arbitrary point in the closeness score, the relationship between the two variables should remain present, if there would indeed be a relationship. The decision on what the line should be of the closeness index from where the cases will be included or excluded will be taken arbitrarily and we will have to look at different points of inclusion before the conclusions about the data can be made.

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Figure 4.:Scatterplot AI score - closeness score

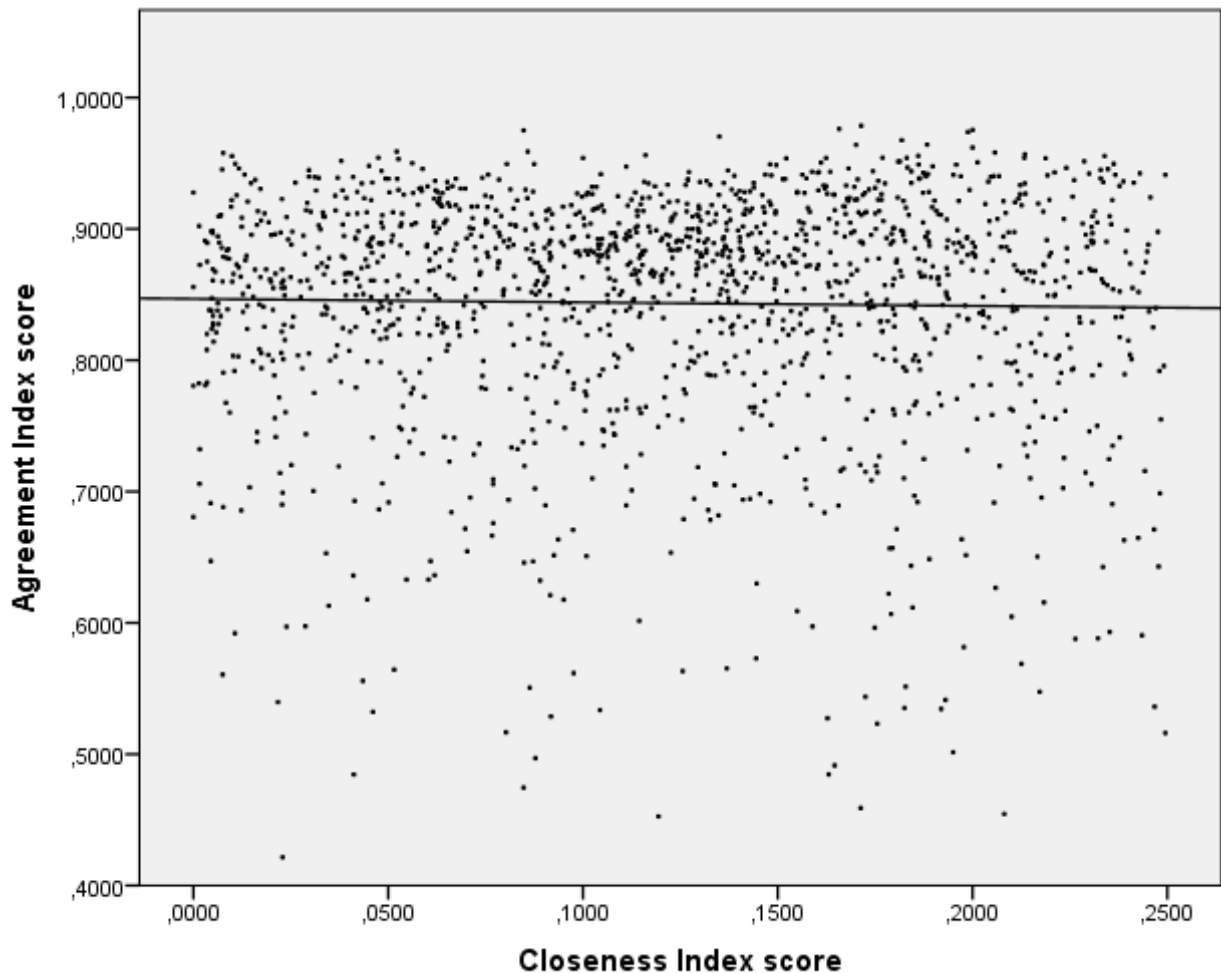


Note: Only cases >0.5 on closeness index are included, $R^2 = .090$

As we can see in the scatterplot in figure 4, the observed correlation between the variables actually falls apart when we only include the cases that fall between 0 and 0.5 on the closeness index. Moreover, the relationship even goes in the opposite direction what would mean that when a vote will be closer to a tie the EPG cohesion will be higher as well. This could be an indicator that EPG discipline in the EP is more present than the theoretical framework suggests. The cohesion scores that are situated between the .25 and .5 closeness index on the other hand appear to show relatively low cohesion.

From the last scatterplot it may seem that due to disciplinary actions from the EPGs, the cohesion is higher when votes are closer to a tie. This suggests that the EPGs are able to increase party cohesion when votes come closer to a tie. However, if only the cases are selected that have an closeness index score up to .25, this conclusion seems to fall short from the reality (see figure 5).

Figure 5.:Scatterplot AI score and closeness score



Note: Only cases >0.25 on closeness index are included, $R^2= 3,939E-4$

In this last scatterplot in which only the cases are selected that score up to 0.25 on the closeness index, the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables is basically nonexistent. One possible explanation is that the whips of the EPGs take a margin of error in account when they estimate the outcome of the votes and whether enforcing discipline will be helpful and necessary. Moreover, the estimation on what the result of a vote will be by party whips will not be exactly right per MEP, therefore they will probably keep a margin when they assess whether a vote will pass and whether disciplining will be necessary, which could possibly lie around the 0.25 point on the closeness index.

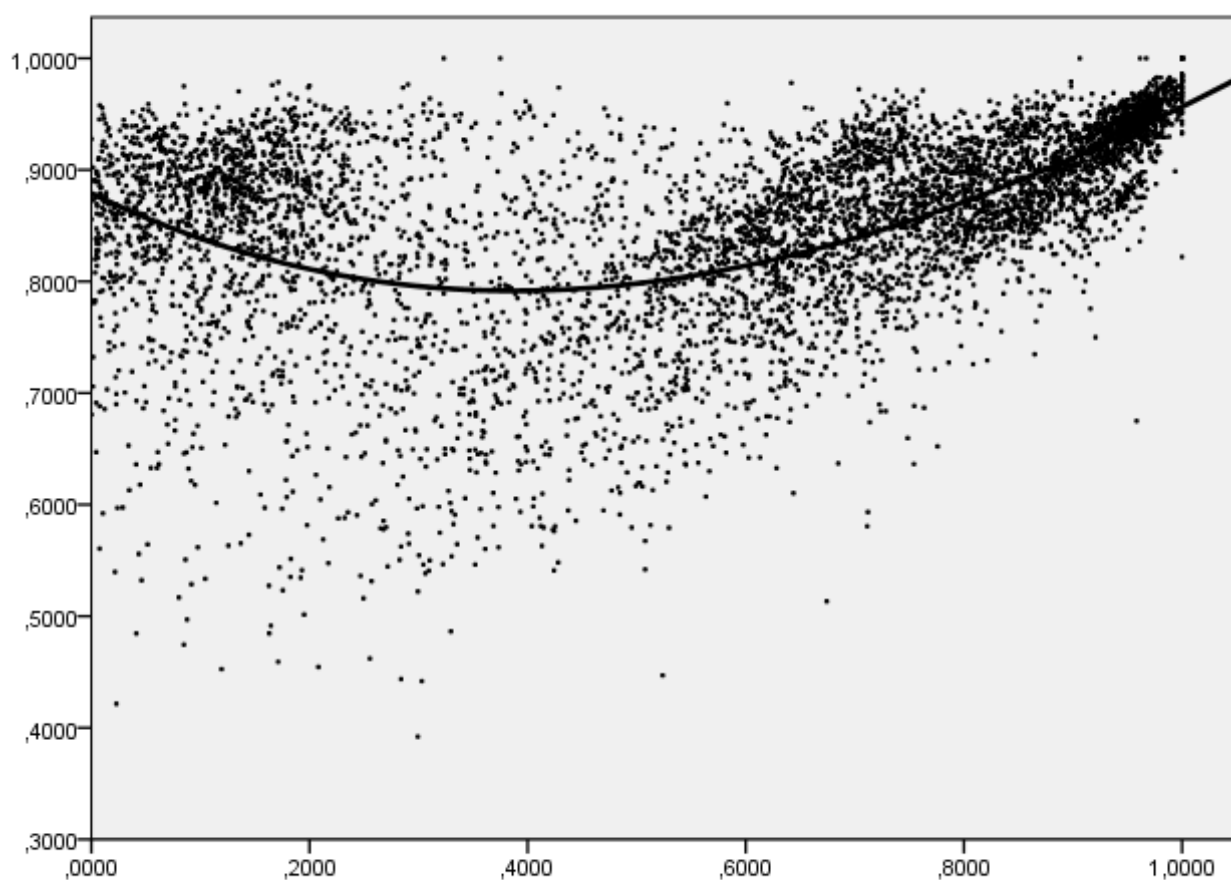
The average scores of the three clusters make clear that there is in fact a non-linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The clusters between 0 and 0.25 and between 0.5 and 1 have a relatively high cohesion score compared to the votes that lie in between those two clusters (see table 2) .

Table 2. Average AI scores clusters

Closeness score:	0 – 0.25	0.25 – 0.5	0.5 – 1
Average AI:	0,84	0,77	0,87

This would suggest that there is a non-linear relationship between the dependent and the independent variables, which is illustrated in figure 6.

Figure 6.: Scatterplot AI score and closeness score



Note: Cubic equation results in $R^2 = .301$, .000 significance

When we take into account our control variable, the model does not change for all policy issues. For four out of the twenty policy issues we get significant results, including; Agriculture, Constitutional and Inter-institutional Affairs, Fisheries and International Trade. What we can conclude from this is that during votes on some policy issues we can predict the degree of EPG cohesion better than with just the closeness score (see table 3).

Table 3. Regression model closeness index - AI

	Model 2
(constant)	.801 (.003)
Closeness	.102*** (.003)
Policy Issue (Ref.= Agriculture)	-.061*** (.005)
Budget	.003 (.005)
Budgetary Control	-.018* (.006)
Civil liberties, Justice & Home Affairs	-.003 (.004)
Constitutional and Inter-institutional Affairs	-.027*** (.005)
Culture & Education	-.012 (.007)
Development	.014 (.009)
Economics	.010 (.005)
Employment & Social Affairs	-.004 (.006)
Fisheries	-.023** (.007)
Foreign & Security Policy	-.008 (.004)
Gender Equality	-.012 (.007)
Industry, Research & Energy	-.007 (.005)
Internal Market & Consumer Protection	-.005 (.006)
Internal regulations of the EP	-.017 (.022)
International Trade	.041*** (.006)
Juridical Affairs	-.004 (.007)
Petitions	-.013 (.016)
Regional Development	.008 (.007)
Transport & Tourism	-.009 (.005)
R ²	.180
Adj. R ²	.177
N	6191

Note: OLS-regression coefficients with standard error between parentheses

*** $p < 0,001$, ** $p < 0,01$, * $p < 0,05$

Discussion:

By including the policy issues of the votes as a control variable in the model, it appears that four out of the twenty different policy issues have are significant. This means that these four policy issues influence our dependent variable. For the votes on the policy issues concerning Agriculture, Constitutional and Inter-institutional Affairs and fisheries this means that the party cohesion is expected to be lower. Votes on International Trade, on the other hand, will be expected to show higher party cohesion.

It appears that if different scores of closeness are included, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables changes. With this conclusion in mind, it is important to recognize what it is that we want to find out about the data and how it fits into the theoretical framework. In the theory for this research it is suggested by Hix et al. (2009) that MEPs would be more inclined to dissent from the EPG line when a vote is close than when a vote will be lopsided. This would come as a consequence from the willingness of the MEPs to dissent during close-call votes because during these close votes the chance to dictate policy and thereby achieve policy objectives is higher. Moreover, during lopsided votes MEPs don't want to show the opposing policy preferences from their EPGs because that could have negative impacts on their career seeking objectives without it having a positive effect on their policy objectives.

Coming from this theoretical framework, the EPG cohesion would be expected to shrink when MEPs have the sense that dissent could impact the outcome of a vote. Even though it is impossible within the scope of this research to asses when the MEPs perceive that their vote can have a decisive influence on the outcome of the vote, we can rule out the most lopsided votes. Following this logic, we wouldn't expect to find our hypothesis to hold when we look at the votes that have a closeness index score between 0.5 and 1. The point where the cohesion scores should drop, according to the formulated hypothesis, should lie closeR to 0 on the closeness index score. The exact point where this decline in EPG cohesion would start depends on the accuracy of the MEPs estimates of the vote outcomes and the point where the MEPs think that their vote could be decisive. Nonetheless, we would expect to find such a declining point when we only look at the votes under the 0.5 closeness line, but such a drop in cohesion scores is not found, neither when we use other inclusion points.

In the scatterplot from figure 3 we can distinguish three main clusters. The cluster in the far right top represents the votes that are both lopsided and high in cohesion. The

clustering in this corner was to be expected due to the fact that when votes are concluded by a majority that is close to a unanimous vote there isn't much room for dissent. In these votes the whole EP agrees on the vote so the cohesion will be high as a result. Therefore we are not that interested in these votes.

The second cluster lies roughly between .25 and .50 on the closeness index. This part shows a relatively low degree of cohesion which is somewhat surprising. According to Hix et al. (2009) we should expect that in this cluster the cohesion should be higher than the votes that have a closeness score under .25 because it was suggested that MEPs have an interest to vote according to the party line when they don't have a chance to influence the outcome of a vote. The average Agreement Index score, however, is .84 for votes under .25 on the closeness index, while for the votes between .25 and .50 the cohesion score is .77 (see table 2). These numbers and the results in figure 4 suggest that party cohesion actually increases when votes get closer to a tie. In contradiction to what Hix et al. (2009) suggested about EPG cohesion during close call votes, the same effect appears to take place in the sixth EP as in the US Congress, which was found by Snyder & Groselecone (2000). Therefore the analysis suggests that the hypothesis should be rejected.

The difference in party cohesion during different degrees of closeness of votes that is derived from the data suggests that EPG discipline in the EP is more prevalent than it was suggested in the theory, especially by Hix et al. (2009). One of the theoretical explanations for the hypothesis was that MEPs are more loyal to their national parties than their transnational party groups because the national parties are mainly responsible for the re-election of the MEPs. This argument can likewise be used to explain the results that we found. The low EPG cohesion on the votes between .25 and .50 on the closeness index can be seen as a result of low party discipline during these votes. The EPGs themselves wouldn't have much interest in enforcing cohesion during these votes because the result of these votes isn't that close to a tie and the EPGs would not be able to influence the outcome of the votes by enforcing discipline and thereby maintain cohesion. Furthermore, the national delegations in the EPGs aren't fully homogenous on their policy preferences, which could result in lower party group cohesion (Faas, 2003). The national parties sometimes switch between the EPGs and sometimes there are multiple national parties from one country that belong to a single transnational party group.

The question is then, why the party cohesion rises when the votes are closer to a tie. One obvious explanation is that party group discipline is more prevalent than our theoretical

framework would suggest. It would make sense that the transnational EPGs will have a higher degree of discipline enforcement when votes are closer to a tie, even though we know that the EPGs do not possess all the disciplining tools that parties in national assemblies have. The carrots and sticks with which the EPGs can try to get their MEPs in line, are the positions and career opportunities for which the EPGs can provide. Furthermore, the loyalty of the MEPs lies foremost with the national parties. These national parties also have an interest in keeping their corresponding EPGs content with their performance because the EPGs can provide opportunities for the national parties on policy and positions for their members. So where the EPGs miss the capability to enforce cohesion by depending on the ability to re-elect their members, the national parties do and they might also have an interest in keeping their corresponding EPGs satisfied with their performance.

Conclusion.

We have found that for the sixth EP the statement from Hix et al. (2009) about lower EPG cohesion during close votes doesn't stand up when it was tested over the whole population of votes. From the analysis of the dataset provided by Hix it appears that the party cohesion of the transnational party groups rises when the outcome of a vote gets closer to a tie. From the first results where we also included the unanimous votes it the hypothesis seemed to be correct. These unanimous votes however, don't leave room for dissent by definition and thereby caused the relationship that fitted into the hypothesis. With the exclusion of these unanimous and near-unanimous votes we found the opposite relationship between the closeness of votes and EPG cohesion. This is the opposite effect of what we would expect from the theoretical framework. We therefore have to conclude that the disciplining of the EPGs increases when votes are closer to a tie. On the other hand, during votes of which it is clear what the outcome will be, party cohesion shrinks, which we can conceive as a consequence of lower degrees of discipline from the EPGs.

One possible explanation for the results lies in the interests that the national parties themselves have. The national parties themselves can be seen as actors on which the carrots and sticks can be directed to by the transnational party groups. By pressuring the national parties, for which the MEPs are most loyal to, the EPGs can keep their members in line by threatening to take away, or offering them things like support on critical issues or desired offices.

While the hypothesis falls apart when it is tested on a the large dataset of the sixth EP, it is not unthinkable that the hypothesis holds true for certain types of votes. While the dataset does provide us with information about party cohesion and the vote outcomes, the content of the votes and the salience of the votes that the MEPs prescribe to them remains unknown, which might be of crucial importance for the hypothesis to work. One could imagine that the saliency of votes would impact the willingness of MEPs to defect from the instructions of their EPG. While the saliency might be different for different policy issues, which we have used as a control variable, a survey will need to be conducted among MEPs in order to find out which votes are important. When this knowledge would be available, further conclusions can be made about the conflict between the willingness to dissent of the MEPs and the disciplining capabilities of the EPGs.

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