What Role for the Party Group Leader? A Latent Variable Approach to Leadership Effects on Party Group Cohesion in the European Parliament

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Previous research has identified several structural and situational factors that affect party cohesion in parliamentary voting behaviour. The potential role of leadership has been neglected so far. The authors apply a latent variable approach to model leadership effects in roll call votes from the European Parliament (EP), 1979–2001. Other things being equal, their findings suggest that a small but significant 7 per cent share of the total variance in party group cohesion is due to the party group leaders. About 40 per cent of this leader component can be accounted for by their experience inside the European institutions, their career prospects, and their ideological positions.

Keywords: *party cohesion; leadership; European Parliament.*

Introduction

On 26 May 2005, the leader of the European People's Party-European Democrats (EPP-ED) group, Hans-Gert Pöttering, had Roger Helmer voted out of the party group in the European Parliament (EP). Helmer, a British Conservative, had not followed the EPP-ED group line and had supported a motion of censure against the current Commission president, José Manuel Barroso, because of Barroso's supposed connections with the business world.¹ This incident illustrates one of the most powerful instruments that party group leaders can use to ensure party group cohesion² in spite of different levels of ideological heterogeneity. Recent studies of transnational party groups in the EP have found that EP party groups display an astonishingly high degree of voting cohesion, considering that they comprise a large number of different parties and nations of the EU (Hix 2002a, Kreppel 2002, Hix *et al.* 2005a). Theoretically, one would not expect an exceptionally high level of voting coherence for the members of the EP (MEPs) because, apart from their transnational party group, they have to consider their national party and their constituency as additional principals (Moe 1984, Hix 2002b, Miller 2005).

Cohesion in the parliamentary decision-making process is crucially important for party groups, because they are interested in keeping their promises to their

voters by maximising the party's chances to win majorities (Cox and McCubbins 1993). By surveying their party group colleagues, party group leaders ensure the trust of their voters (Bowler *et al.* 1999) and protect the 'brand name' for their party. Therefore, it can be expected that voting cohesion is not only a result of ideological homogeneity but also a result of party discipline imposed by the party group leaders.

One might argue that this mechanism of electoral punishment between voters and their parties is not as important in the EP as in national parliaments because EP elections are often 'second-order' elections determined by national political contests (Marsh 1998, Reif and Schmitt 1980, Hix and Marsh 2007). This means that re-election considerations of MEPs matter less than in national parliaments, where parliamentarians are motivated to dissent to please their constituents. This effect is reinforced by the fact that the national delegations within the party groups are mostly responsible when it comes to assigning important parliamentary positions (Kreppel 2002, Thiem 2006, Corbett *et al.* 2007). Furthermore, cohesion might matter less since the EP does not need to elect and support an executive as in parliamentary systems.

Nevertheless, cohesive party groups are desirable in the EP because they facilitate consensual and collective decision-making within the group and in dealings in the EP (for example, in the EP's Conference of Presidents), as well as with outside actors such as EU governments in the Council of Ministers (Judge and Earnshaw 2003, Corbett *et al.* 2007). Similar to others (Hix 1999, Faas 2003) we consider the position of the party group chairs of considerable importance because they have a strong personal interest to guard their reputation as party group leaders by ensuring cohesion. A good reputation might improve the chances to get more attractive positions within the EP such as the EP presidency. Party group leaders in the EP face the additional challenge to ensure attendance next to cohesion since low attendance rates are well known in the EP (Kreppel 2002).

Little is known, however, about how successful the party group leaders are in accomplishing their tasks. The ultimate goal of this paper is to determine the role that party group leaders play in fostering cohesive voting behaviour among party group members in the EP. Existing research on party group cohesion has so far focused on a list of explanatory variables ranging from ideology to institutions (Depauw 2003, Carey 2007). It has paid surprisingly little attention to the role of party group leaders in securing discipline in party groups. At most, several case studies illustrate the effect of single party leaders on their parties (Barber 1966, Norton 1987, Messmer 2003, Burden and Frisby 2004, Hefferman 2005).

Other studies outline the effect of institutions on the relationship between members and leaders, but they often do not take personal characteristics into account (see for example the case studies in Longley and Hazan 2000). In this paper, we will present a latent variable approach for analysing the influence of party leaders on voting cohesion in the EP, 1979–2001. This method will allow us to investigate two things: first, whether party group leaders make a difference, and second, which of their personal characteristics can account for

that difference. The EP is used as a particularly hard test case because party group leaders might have less influence than in national parliaments. Thus, finding an influence of personal characteristics of party group leaders in the EP will mean that these attributes are prone to matter more in national parliaments. In this way, our study is also a contribution to the general debate about 'party' effects on legislative behaviour (Cox and McCubbins 1993, Krehbiel 1993, Krehbiel 1999, Aldrich and Rohde 2001).

In the next section, we will present leadership characteristics that could be argued to explain the success of leaders. Subsequently, we summarise previous theoretical claims and empirical findings on the structural factors that potentially affect party group cohesion (third section). These factors will serve as control variables in our empirical model, so that we may approximate *ceteris paribus* conditions for the party group leaders. In the fourth section, we will briefly describe our data and in the fifth section we will explain how to incorporate the various independent variables in a multi-level regression model. The sixth section presents and interprets the statistical results. The final section summarises and concludes.

Leadership Determinants of Party Cohesion

The party group leadership has various means to motivate its deputies to behave according to the party line. Control can be exercised by party internal mechanisms or by using the parliamentary delegation chain (Müller 2000, p. 319). This delegation chain allows the party group leadership to control several offices such as cabinet posts, presidencies or committee memberships (Damgaard 1992, p. 320, Bowler *et al.* 1999, p. 10). Amongst the internal mechanisms are different forms of reporting which are an efficient instrument to ensure discipline, for example, when cabinet ministers have to report to the party group. Besides, party group sessions provide the opportunity to listen to various opinions to work on a unified party line and to communicate dissenting votes to the party group (Raunio 2000, p. 239). Other means are warnings or isolation in the party group (Damgaard 1992, p. 320, Bowler *et al.* 1999); an extreme case is the undated, signed resignation letters of party group members which can be published by the party group leadership as in the case of the Slovakian Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko (HZDS) (Heidar and Koole 2000b, p. 256). Other forms of punishment apart from blocking a re-election or a participation in a preferred committee is the expulsion from the party group as mentioned in the introduction (Damgaard 1992, p. 320). Next to these negative sanctions, positive instruments such as attractive trips abroad (Baker *et al.* 1999, p. 74), more attractive office space or better speaking time (Heidar and Koole 2000b, Carey 2004) are at the disposal of the whips.

However, little attention has been paid to the relevant characteristics of party group leaders in using these sanctions and thus ensuring cohesion in parliamentary research. Cox and McCubbins (1993), for example, have thoroughly analysed the impact of party leaders within the US Congress. They focus on

the ideological position of the leader by arguing that a party group leader must be a person who is able to internalise the goals of the party together with the goals of his constituency. However, they focused more on the different mechanisms in the US Congress – such as negative or positive agenda setting – that might be exploited by officeholders to secure coherence and success of the party (Cox and McCubbins 2005).

Although the effects of strong leadership on voting behaviour in the US Congress are also analysed by other studies (Sinclair 1992, Burden and Frisby 2004), specific leadership traits which might be responsible for these effects are not examined. The question of which personal traits might be most helpful for a party leader's success has not been outlined in more detail in comparative parliamentary research either. A more important and systematic strand of research regarding the influence of personalities on politics has developed in foreign policy analyses (for example, Kille and Scully 2003) and studies of heads of states or presidents (for example, Bunce 1981, Kaarbo 1997, Kaarbo and Hermann 1998).

In general, personality-centred leadership research in the political science literature starts with references to Weber's (1921) seminal observations on the effects of charisma.³ Weber referred to exceptional individual personality traits of a leader, which allow him to rule.⁴ The problem of this concept is the difficulty to measure it. In one instance, Van der Brug and Mughan (2007) assign a measure by citing how often journalists use the word 'charisma' when writing about certain party leaders. While this is a step in the right direction, we argue that charisma arises from the sort of leadership skills that elude direct measurement, and therefore have to be modelled as latent variables or residual categories.

Helms (2000) distinguishes between structural, personality-focused, and interactionist approaches in order to organise the sprawling literature on the role of leaders in political science. Where the structural approaches do not allow for a significant role of personality traits (choosing instead to emphasise the influence of the limiting factors of governmental systems like parliamentarism), the personality-focused studies concentrate on exceptional, individual characteristics of leaders. Helms (2000) labels approaches 'interactionist' when they consider both strands of research and postulate that leaders have the potential to develop personal leadership styles within an environment constrained by institutions. Which of the personal characteristics matters most is often decided by the institutional set-up in which leaders act, an approach which we consider most appropriate. Within the confines of European parliamentary rules, party group leaders enjoy the opportunity to show certain leadership traits in order to achieve their goal of maximum party group cohesion. Below, we will discuss those traits that we will consider in our analysis.

Experience

The previous experience of a politician can determine his interest in a certain policy issue and it can also influence his skill when dealing with certain situations

such as intra-party conflicts, international crises, and so on (Kaarbo 1997). Strøm (1993) shows that Norwegian parties traditionally select leaders with a great deal of seniority and loyalty, as well as a number of years of experience in parliament (for Ireland see Marsh 1993, and for the UK Punnett 1993). A crucial dimension of the concept of experience is expertise (meaning information advances), as well as knowledge of policy content, process details in negotiations, and information about the preferences of others (Wall and Lynn 1993). For parliamentary group leaders, we consider the party leaders' knowledge about the preferences of the party group members to be the most important ability for achieving consensus in the party group. This knowledge of the preferences of party group members is bound to grow with experience. Thus, we assume that expertise on preferences is based on experience, and that both characteristics denote the same leadership quality.

However, we distinguish between extra- and intra-parliamentary experience. The European parliamentary leaders differ in whether they possess national or EU political experience. Some of them, such as Valéry Giscard d'Estaing or Wilfried Martens, had been executives before joining the EP, whereas others, like Pat Cox or Hans-Gert Pöttering, have spent the entirety of their political careers at the EU level. Extra-parliamentary experience denotes political experience gathered by politicians before coming to the EP during time spent in a governmental function such as minister or prime minister. In these cases, certain qualities, such as the ability to identify compromises or to influence colleagues, are already instilled in the parliamentarians before serving at the EU level. Intra-parliamentary experience refers to experience gained in the EP by having been a member of a number of committees, or by having served a considerable amount of time. This experience grants additional knowledge on the in-house dealings of the EP.

Leadership Style and Career Prospects

The leadership style of a parliamentary group leader has the potential to increase the party cohesion by establishing party discipline (Barber 1966). In an extensive study of leadership styles, Kaarbo (1997) as well as Kaarbo and Hermann (1998) distinguish between several strategies which characterise the leadership of European executive leaders. These are strategies for dealing with conflict, for managing information, and for dealing with party factions and other parties. The issue of how they achieve cohesion plays a role, especially when looking at the role of parliamentary executive leaders. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher showed a rather combative style and became very controversial with party group members who did not agree with her, whereas her successor John Major developed a more consensual party management style (Kaarbo 1997, p. 569).

In the study by Kaarbo and Hermann (1998), information on leadership styles was collected by content analysis of interview responses of European executive leaders. With the same content analysis method, Kille and Scully (2003) investigated executive heads of intergovernmental organisations, using their public

speeches in hearings and question hours. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to repeat a similar exercise, since the relevant data – public speeches and interview responses – are not available due to a lack of exposure of European party leaders in the media. Given that party group leaders in the EP can have very different backgrounds and experiences, it might also be worthwhile to take into consideration the career goals of a leader, since these – as in the case of any deputy – are bound to determine his behaviour. Legislative research terms this idea the ‘last period problem’, describing the situation of deputies in their last parliamentary phase who are not motivated by re-election and will therefore behave differently from younger colleagues heading for a future career (Zupan 1990, Rothenberg and Sanders 2000, 2002). We will distinguish European parliamentary leaders by age, assuming that those who have become leaders at an advanced age are less likely to be motivated by career prospects.

Finally, we must address the ambiguous implications of roll call sponsorship. Although numerous motives may lead to the initiation of a roll call, some of them certainly can be attributed to leadership style. Obviously, one important reason for initiating a roll call can be to monitor the behaviour of individual party group members (Thiem 2006), something that imposes a more or less explicit pressure on them.

Ideological Position

The impact of the party (and its leaders) on voting cohesion has been examined extensively for the US Congress. Supporters of the theory of conditional party government (as outlined by Aldrich and Rohde 2001) assume a strong role of the party leader in times of strong intra-party preference coherence and strong inter-party preference divergence, because in such times the members of a party will assemble behind a leader. However, as Krehbiel (1999, p. 35) argues, such leaders might be ‘strong’ in terms of observed high voting cohesion during their term, simply because they are actually superfluous due to lacking incentives for defection. This has provoked a hunt for party effects on voting behaviour (a recent review of this literature can be found in Lebo *et al.* 2007, Roberts 2007). Often, the special role of the leaders is not explicitly examined in this kind of research. Cox and McCubbins (1993, 2005), however, develop theoretical and empirical models for which the party leadership is central. They conclude for the US Congress that leaders have an incentive to be most active in agenda setting in order to prevent votes for which the goals of the party and the goals of its members’ constituencies are in conflict.

In addition, Cox and McCubbins (1993) emphasise the importance of the position of the leader relative to its party. First of all, the ideological position is relevant for the question about who will get elected as a leader. On the one hand, Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991) argue that the party has an incentive to elect the party median as the leader, since he is suspected of having internalised the collective goals of the party. This will help him in pursuing party cohesion and

it will minimise the risk of a conflict between the views he has to propagate as a party leader and the view of his constituency. On the other hand, Grofman *et al.* (2002) have shown, based on the 'policy partisan position' theory of Clausen and Wilcox (1987) and by considering the actual voting mechanisms, that party leaders in the US Congress are usually located near the ideologically more extreme modal position.⁵

With respect to party discipline the two approaches do not come to very different conclusions: since the members of a party should have less incentives for shirking if the mode lies close to the median of the ideology distribution, a party leader near the median should be more successful. In the EP, the ideological distance between the party median and the leader might be of minor importance or bear different consequences than in US Congress, however. As an example, Giscard D'Estaing, a member of the Liberals, was appointed the leader of the Liberal and Democratic Reformist Group in spite of his considerable ideological distance. Although ideological proximity to the mean seems to be an important leader trait, it is thus questionable whether theoretical considerations concerning the US Congress can be transferred to the EP context without further ado. However, implementing a model⁶ such as that of Grofman *et al.* (2002) – which also builds on the relative distribution of the parties' ideologies – for voting cohesion in the EP, is clearly beyond the scope of this paper.

Structural Determinants of Party Cohesion

Many structural factors have been theorised and empirically demonstrated to impinge on party group cohesion. First, party groups differ in their ideological coherence, so that differing degrees of party discipline are necessary to ensure cohesion (Cox and McCubbins 1991). Officially, a deputy is only obliged to follow his conscience in many parliaments if his ideology is not the same as the party group line (Heidar and Koole 2000b). However, a party leader will always try to ensure that a party group member is motivated to follow the official line in order to ensure necessary majorities. Thus, the higher the ideological homogeneity of a party group, the fewer measures are needed by a party group to ensure discipline (Bowler *et al.* 1999). Some evidence suggests that left-wing party groups are more cohesive than liberal or conservative parties. For example, Damgaard (1995) claims that ex-Communist parties are more disciplined than liberal or conservative groups. Similarly, Pennings (2002) shows that EP party groups have different levels of cohesion, with the left-wing and green parties exhibiting higher levels than the Conservatives (see also McElroy and Benoit 2007).

Second, the size of the party group has been claimed to affect cohesion (Dion 1997, Heidar and Koole 2000a, Best and Heller 2005). The number of party group members can have different effects. On the one hand the sheer number of parliamentarians increases the coordination and monitoring costs (Olson 1968) and ups the probability that differing views will arise (Sieberer 2007). However, the size

of a party group also determines the fiscal and staffing means of a party group, because the EP financially supports party groups according to their size (Raunio 2000). A large party group therefore possesses a larger array of sanctioning mechanisms and incentives for compliance because it is better able to control positions such as the EP President, committee positions or attractive jobs such as rapporteurships (Kaeding 2004, Hausemer 2005). Furthermore, the larger a party group, the higher the chances that it affects a policy outcome so that a group worries more about cohesion. Hix *et al.* (2005b) could show that an increase in party group size leads to more cohesion.

Moreover, the EP is currently composed of 27 nations and over 160 parties. Thus it stands to reason that party groups that include a higher number of parties and a higher number of nations are more difficult to coordinate. For example, the European People's Party/European Democrats encompasses parties from all 27 member states. Party groups in the EP face a strategic choice, deciding between inviting parties to join their group (and thus making themselves more powerful) and having to ensure party cohesion.

A similar argument can be made regarding the growth of the EP due to enlargement over time. For example, Hix *et al.* (2005a) include indicator variables of the various EU enlargement periods in their model, in order to test whether an enlarged Union might lead to a decrease in voting cohesion.

The evolution of the EP can also be traced by looking at times when the powers and competences of the EP have widened considerably. The Single European Act and the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties are the notable milestones in this process. However, the potential consequences of these developments are unclear. On the one hand, it may be hypothesised that the growing significance of the EP has provided party groups with further incentives to coordinate and monitor their members' activities. On the other hand, it may be claimed that the widened scope of EU legislation has fostered the intervention of national principals, thus rendering voting behaviour less coherent.

Within the EP, it is also necessary to control for the size of the national delegation of the party group leader. Party group leaders might partly be recruited from the biggest national parties and member states in order to ensure that they have a better and more direct control over a large share of MEPs in their group. More generally, we hypothesise that party group cohesion is positively linked with the share of MEPs from a leader's national delegation within the group.

The extent to which a national party is able to influence the cohesion of a transnational party group may also depend on whether the party is represented in a respective national government (Faas 2003). Governments can function as additional principals if they consider parliamentarians as supporters of their policies. Hix and Lord (1995) demonstrate this kind of pressure using the example of the election of Jacques Santer as President of the European Commission. Hix *et al.* (2003) have concluded that the share of members in the EP who are from parties in government have a positive influence on party cohesion.

It seems that governments exert pressure on parliamentarians from their party in order to ensure the final adoption of laws in the EP, which they have already agreed on in the Council of Ministers.

Finally, party groups may initiate roll calls strategically in order to demonstrate their own cohesion and/or the lack of cohesion of their opponents (Kreppel 2002). This eventuality may be resolved by considering which party group has sponsored a respective vote. Of course, since the party group leader might have considerable influence on whether or not the party group shall sponsor a vote, this variable could also be considered being a leadership trait.

Data

In this section, we will present our data sources and the operationalisation of the variables. We build our analysis on data from roll call votes in the EP collected by Hix *et al.* (2005a, 2006).⁷

The roll call data includes information about virtually all roll call votes⁸ as well as the voting records and some additional information about all representatives in the EP from July 1979 until April 2004. At the level of the party groups, however, the data is limited. It contains information for only six of them: The European People's Party/European Democrats (E), the Socialists (S), the Greens (V), the Liberals (L), the Communists (M) and the Progressive European Democrats (G) and observations for these groups exist only until 2001. Our unit of observation is the single roll call vote i , by party group k . The first step is to compute the agreement index for each vote for each party group. We take the formula of the agreement index introduced by Hix *et al.* (2005a), which is based on Attinà (1990):

$$y_{ik} = \frac{\max(Y_{ik}, N_{ik}, A_{ik}) - .5[(Y_{ik} + N_{ik} + A_{ik}) - \max(Y_{ik} + N_{ik} + A_{ik})]}{(Y_{ik} + N_{ik} + A_{ik})} \quad (1)$$

Many of the propositions dealt with by the EP are rather acclamatory in character (Kreppel 2002). In these instances, guaranteeing party group cohesion is not a particularly difficult task. We have therefore omitted propositions that achieved an overall agreement of 0.95 and more. As far as the operationalisation of the control variables is concerned, we employ one structural factor that is specific to proposition–party leader dyads, namely the share of party group members from the leaders' national parties (*share of leader's national party*), which we compiled from the voting results.

For other time-varying structural conditions of the party groups such as whether a group had initiated a roll call or not (*sponsor of roll call vote*) or the *number of seats of the party group*, the respective information is also readily available in the voting data. To measure *partisan fractionalisation*, *ideological fractionalisation*,⁹ and the *share of national governmental parties*¹⁰ we have employed the operationalisation of Hix *et al.* (2005a).

The leaders' characteristics, on the other hand, were derived from numerous sources. First, we were able to rely on information collected by Hoyland *et al.* (2009) to identify the leaders and to compile such basic measures as the *age* at which they started serving as a chairman, and the number of *years they had served in the EP* before they became leaders. The ideological positions (1st dimension NOMINATE scores) of the MEPs and the leaders are also taken from Hix *et al.* (2005a). Based on this information, we are able to calculate (the absolute value of) the leaders' *ideological distance from the median MEP* of their party group. Additional information, such as the *number of committees and delegations*¹¹ they had served in and whether they had already collected *previous government experience* as well as whether they ever *headed a committee*, were collected from the internet sites of the individual leaders and the EP.

A Latent Variable Approach to Leadership Effects

As to the subsequent analyses of leadership effects, our aims are twofold: first, we want to determine empirically whether the leaders differ at all with respect to their achieved average levels of party group cohesion. To this exploratory end, we will break down the variance of our dependent variable into a component for each source of variation – propositions, party groups, and leaders. In doing so, we will also have to keep constant the structural conditions and situational factors that affect party cohesion, in order not to attribute those effects mistakenly to the leaders. Second, we want to determine to what extent eventual differences between the leaders can be traced back to the previously addressed leadership characteristics. The focus here is on the changes in the estimated variance components due to the inclusion of leader characteristics into our model. In the following paragraphs, we will describe the set-up of our model.

Agreement on proposition i under party group leader j can be modelled as:

$$y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \zeta_{1j} + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (2)$$

where ζ_{1j} is the difference between the grand mean β_0 of the agreement index and leader j 's average achieved agreement during her incumbency, and ε_{ij} is the residual for leader j on proposition i , for which the usual regression assumptions of a normal distribution with zero mean and some constant variance θ apply.¹² If we additionally assume ζ_{1j} to be a random variable that is independent of ε_{ij} and normally distributed with zero mean and variance ψ_1 to be estimated from the data, we get a simple random-intercept model of agreement that can be fitted using maximum likelihood.¹³

The parameter of primary interest in this model is variance ψ_1 , which allows us to infer whether leaders actually differ in their average achievement of party cohesion. In particular, we are interested in the proportion of the total variance of the agreement index that is due to the leaders. Having obtained estimates of β_0 ,

ψ_1 , and θ , and treating them as the ‘true’ parameters, we can also predict the random intercepts for individual party group leaders, ξ_{1j} .¹⁴ As such, this is merely a descriptive model. However, the model gets powerful when the issue is to explain leader differences from leader features. Next, we will introduce controls for the structural conditions at different levels. In the introduction to this paper, several pieces of research have been quoted that find inter-party-group differences in voting cohesion. These differences may result from a variety of factors, some of which are time-invariant. Hix and Lord (1997) argue that the Socialists are generally more cohesive in behaviour since all parties organised in this group have their origin in the same party family across Europe, which is not necessarily the case for the party groups on the right. Others are potentially variable over time, for example, the partisan fractionalisation of party groups. We will model time-invariant party group factors as a random variable as well. Time-varying factors will then be added to the model as covariates. In order to account for the time-invariant party group effects, we introduce a third level to Model 2:

$$y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \zeta_{1j} + \zeta_{2k} + \varepsilon_{ijk} \quad (3)$$

where $\zeta_{2k} \sim N(0, \psi_2)$ is a random intercept at the party group level that is assumed to be independent of ξ_{1j} and ε . Before, eventually, we consider time-varying party group effects, we add another level of complexity to the random part of the model, since proposition-specific traits, such as their closeness, salience, and their proneness to polarise the MEPs along the boundaries between party groups, may similarly affect the cohesiveness of roll call votes across leaders and party groups.¹⁵ Therefore, we extend Model 3 with another random intercept for propositions i :

$$y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \zeta_{1j} + \zeta_{2k} + \zeta_{3i} + \varepsilon_{ijk} \quad (4)$$

again, with and assumed to be independent of ε , ξ_{1j} , and ξ_{2k} . Note that the inclusion of a proposition-specific intercept has broken up the strict hierarchy of the previous model: While leaders are still nested in party groups (since a single leader does not head different party groups), different leaders and different party groups (at least in part) vote on the *same* propositions, that is, both leaders and party groups are *cross-classified* with propositions (see Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005).¹⁶

So far, we have accounted for structural conditions that are constant within party groups over time, and for eventual proposition-specific factors that similarly affect the leaders and party groups voting on them. Next, we include $Q = 6$ covariates that are specific to leaders and party groups *relative to propositions*, that is, sponsorship, party group size, partisan fractionalisation, ideological fractionalisation, share of MEPs from national governmental parties, and

share of the leader's national party:

$$y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \zeta_{1j} + \zeta_{2k} + \zeta_{3i} + \sum_{q=1}^Q \beta_q x_{qijk} + \varepsilon_{ijk} \quad (5)$$

Having fitted Model 5, we will be able to estimate the proportion of the total variance of that is due to the leaders,

$$\rho_j = \frac{\hat{\psi}_1}{(\hat{\psi}_1 + \hat{\psi}_2 + \hat{\psi}_3 + \hat{\theta})} \quad (5A)$$

And finally, we add $R = 6$ leader characteristics z_{rjk} to our model: Age, number of years in the EP, number of committees and delegations, ideological distance from party group median, and the two indicator variables for having served as the head of a committee and previous national government experience.

$$y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \zeta_{1j} + \zeta_{2k} + \zeta_{3i} + \sum_{q=1}^Q \beta_q x_{qijk} + \sum_{r=1}^R \gamma_r z_{rjk} + \varepsilon_{ijk} \quad (6)$$

This will allow us, among other things, to estimate the proportion of the variance of the random leader intercepts that is due to the manifest leader characteristics introduced in step 6, that being, $(\rho_j^{Model4} - \rho_j^{Model5}) / \rho_j^{Model4}$.¹⁷ Statistical results will be presented and interpreted in the next section.

Empirical Findings

Table 1 and Figure 1 summarise the results of the random-intercepts model of party group cohesion described in the previous section. We will first discuss the raw estimates of the model parameters in Table 1 before comparing the empirical Bayes predictions of the leaders' deviations that are depicted in Figure 1 for each regression model listed in Table 1.

Models 1–3 are simply descriptive models. According to the first model of Table 1, which lists the results of a multi-level regression model that incorporates nothing but the leaders' random intercepts, those intercepts vary significantly. One benefit of multi-level regression models is that they allow us to separate the amount of variance that is accounted for in each different level of analysis. Based on the variance of the leaders' random intercepts, we can thus conclude that this level accounts for a proportion of 6 per cent of the overall variance of the dependent variable.

Model 2 additionally considers the random intercepts of the party groups, in order to identify party groups which are easier to control, as is the case for the Green Party Group. The proportion of the variance of the dependent variable

Table 1: Estimates from the Random-Intercept Model of Party Group Coherence

Fixed Part	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Party Group Attributes:</i>					
Sponsor of roll call vote				0.006** (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)
Number of seats of party group				-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Partisan fractionalisation				-0.048 (0.114)	-0.012 (0.098)
Ideological fractionalisation				-0.002*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)
% of MEPs from national governmental parties				-0.013 (0.008)	0.014* (0.008)
Share of leader's national party				-0.122* (0.074)	-0.122* (0.065)
<i>Leader Characteristics:</i>					
Ideological distance from median MEP					0.141** (0.058)
Years in EP					-0.004** (0.002)
No. of committees and delegations					0.000 (0.004)
Headed committee (dummy)					0.035* (0.019)
Previous government experience (dummy)					0.019 (0.018)
Age					-0.003*** (0.001)
Constant	0.866*** (0.012)	0.861*** (0.022)	0.862*** (0.020)	0.938*** (0.100)	1.085*** (0.105)
RANDOM PART:					
Leaders (Variance)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.000)	0.001*** (0.000)
Party groups (Variance)		0.002*** (0.000)	0.002 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Votes (Variance)			0.004*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)
Log restricted likelihood	-12540	-12546	-12986	-12999	-13008
Wald (9 d.f./15 d.f.)	.	.	.	27.16***	46.99***
LR-Test (6 d.f./6 d.f.)	.	.	.	26.69***	18.31**
No. of party groups	6	6	6	6	6
No. of leaders	31	31	31	31	31
No. of propositions	10136	10136	10136	10136	10136
No. of observations	36030	36030	36030	36030	36030

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

that is due to the random intercept of the leaders slightly increases to 6.5 per cent for this second model. The random intercept of the party groups, on the other hand, accounts for 7 per cent.

In Model 3 we include yet another set of random intercepts, which control for legislation-specific attributes like the policy area or time periods after institutional changes (pre- and post-Maastricht, for example) or the various

Figure 1: Bayes Predicted Intercepts of the Party Group Leaders for Each Model of Table 1

enlargement rounds. As the lower panel of Table 1 demonstrates, this causes the estimated variance of the party group intercepts to cease being significant. The intercepts of the leaders and of the single propositions, by contrast, are shown to deviate significantly from the pooled regression intercept. Thus we may conclude that voting cohesion differs demonstrably across leaders, as well as across the single propositions. The latter signifies that the closeness of the vote, its salience, or other proposition-specific characteristics cause the agreement index to differ across the different propositions. What exactly drives this result is not the focus of this paper, and thus we treat the random intercept of the propositions simply as an important control – one that will ultimately allow us to perceive more clearly the actual effect of the leaders on voting coherence. After all, the random intercepts for the propositions account for 11 per cent of the total variance of the dependent variable. At the same time, we are still able to trace back about 6.6 per cent of the variance of the agreement index to the leaders, whereas for the party groups the variance level is 5.8 per cent.

In the next step (Model 4), we take a closer look at the structural conditions the leaders face within their party groups. Some groups might simply offer better conditions for their leaders because they are more homogeneous, for example, in terms of the preferences of the members. Although the inclusion of the structural variables significantly improved the fit of the model, few of those structural factors actually exert a highly significant influence.

The first substantial insight to be gleaned from this extended model comes in the fact that the party group that sponsors a particular roll call generally shows a significantly higher agreement index on that roll call. This result is important since it is in line with the emerging literature on roll call sponsorship (Thiem 2006). The second substantial insight from the model is that the more ideological perspectives the group encompasses, the more difficulties the leader has in disciplining the members. This remains the single highly significant factor at the level of the party groups. Apart from the share of the leaders' national party in the party group, which has only a weak significance – and presumably counter-intuitive – negative effect, all other party group level covariates (such as the size of the group or the partisan fractionalisation as well as the share of the MEP from national governmental parties) do not contribute to our understanding of what determines voting coherence of a party group in the EP. Comparing these results with those reported by Hix *et al.* (2005a), one might wonder whether accounting for the multi-level structure of the data can cause the results to differ substantially. However, the results are not as different as it might seem at first sight: the impact of partisan fractionalisation is still negative in our model, although it does not reach a conventional level of statistical significance. In addition, Hix *et al.* (2005a) find a positive but very small coefficient of ideological fractionalisation. Although the impact of this variable turns out to be significantly negative in our analysis, it is also close to zero.

The main question of this study, however, is whether the leaders still exert a perceivable influence, given those structural controls at the level of the party

groups. This appears to be the case, as the random part of Model 4 in the lower panel of Table 1 reveals, since the variance of the random intercepts at the level of the leaders is still highly significant. Furthermore, the proportion of variance of the dependent variable related to the leaders even increases slightly, to about 7 per cent. This constitutes resoundingly clear evidence of the importance of party group leaders in the production of voting coherence in the EP.

In addition to the confirmation of the leaders' overall influence on voting coherence, our analysis also allows us to take a closer look at the leaders' various traits, so that we might better understand what constitutes a good leader. This is what is done with the final Model 5 in Table 1.

Although the inclusion of the specific leader variables in the fixed part of the model improves the model's fit, it is remarkable that the variance of the random intercepts, at the level of the leaders, remains highly significant. Although they cause the explanatory power of this random intercept level to decrease by about 40 per cent, as compared to the previous model, the random intercepts of the leaders still account for about 4.2 per cent of the overall variance.

Taking a closer look at the traits we tested explicitly in Table 1, we find that the ideological distance of the leader to the opinion median of the party group has a positive and significant impact. This means that the more pronounced the position of a party group leader is, the more successful s/he may be in achieving unity. Given the theoretical presumptions introduced above, this might be surprising. However, the theories about the impact of the ideological distance between the leader and the party median are not clearly adapted to the EP. This remains a puzzle that is beyond the scope of this article. We acknowledge, however, that this is important and thus worth examining more closely in future research.¹⁸

The other variables that have a significant effect on the success of party group leaders are their age, the time they have spent in the EP before becoming leaders, and whether or not they had ever served as a committee head before. Concerning time spent in the EP, the negative coefficient signifies that pure experience derived from being a normal MP does not lead to more success. Rather, it is the qualified experience of being a committee chairperson that conveys abilities and experience in dealing with opinion outliers or coordinating groups. Having guided a committee might serve as a useful training ground, allowing a leader to get to know various interest patterns, to find means to reconcile conflicts, and thus to develop intra-parliamentary expertise. The results of the variables for duration and for committee leadership also demonstrate that it is not the sheer quantity, but rather the specific quality of experience that causes stronger leadership skills. This result is also confirmed by the fact that the coefficient of the variable accounting for the number of committees in which a MEP had served before his time as leader cannot be confirmed at a conventional level of significance (Table 1).

These confirm that young leaders are obviously more ambitious and thus make rather successful group coordinators. By contrast, colleagues who are more advanced in years at the time they become party group chairmen, like

Charles Pasqua (who took office at 72 years of age), might not have considered their office as something to devote too much attention to.

For each model listed in Table 1, Figure 1 contains a plot that depicts the leaders' predicted intercepts and the corresponding confidence interval. The predicted intercepts in the first plot correspond more or less to the observed mean voting coherence per leader. If we plot 1 and 2, it is obvious that the significantly positive deviations of Claudia Roth (1994–98), Magda Aelvoet (1997–99) or Heidi Hautala (1999–2002) predicted from Model 1 are clearly attenuated, as we control for party group effects, indicating that it is generally easier to ensure cohesion in the Green Party Group. However, as the results in the corresponding column of Figure 1 suggest, this has only minor consequences for the predicted deviations of the individual leaders. The comparison between plots 4 and 5 in Figure 1 allows us to identify those successful leaders whose leadership skills we are not controlling for.¹⁹ We would, for example, conclude that with our last model we have captured all the leadership skills of the Christian Democrat Egon Klepsch – who has a significant and positive impact in Model 4 but then loses the significant intercept in Model 5. The same might be said, according to our results, about one of the most successful party group leaders, Jean-Pierre Cot, who served as chairman of the important Committee on Budgetary Affairs for five years before becoming party group leader of the Socialist party group in 1989. Controlling for this trait renders his predicted intercept insignificant. Obviously, such expertise cannot easily be matched by extra-parliamentary experience (for example, previous national government experience). Wilfried Martens, who acted as Belgian Prime Minister for 13 years before leading the European People's Party Group (EPP) from 1994 to 1999 actually contributed to a lower party cohesion, as is indicated by his negative and significant intercept in all plots of Figure 1. We know that this negative result does not stem from the fact that he had to manage the integration of the British Tories into the European People's Party Group in the desire to overtake the Socialists as largest party group in the EP, since we controlled for ideological diversity of the party groups. Still, our models are not able to capture all reasons for Martens' failure: his predicted intercept stays significantly negative even in the last plot of Figure 1. The French left-winger Mr. Wurtz is an example of an experienced MEP who, however, never served as the head of a committee. He has not developed into a more successful leader by having served on 11 committees before becoming the chief of the radical left-wing party group. Given his negative intercept in plot 5 of Figure 1, and keeping structural factors as well as leadership traits constant, we conclude that he decreased the agreement index for his party group significantly during his time of chairmanship.

Conclusion

In this analysis we have modelled the personality of the party group leader – its impact on party group cohesion that cannot be expected from structural

conditions facing the party group alone – as a latent variable in a mixed-effects model. This impact of the party group leaders accounts for about 7 per cent of the variance of the party group voting coherence. Although this proportion is not overwhelmingly large, it is too large to be dismissed out of hand, as has been the case for earlier studies on this subject (see for example Hix *et al.* 2005a).

Taking a closer look at this latent variable, and trying to explain it through various leadership traits, reveals that those leaders who were able to collect experience as the head of a committee exhibit better leadership qualities, particularly compared to those who simply served as a member in several committees. Further, seniority seems to be a demonstrable obstacle to leadership, probably because older leaders simply have less to lose in their careers. Curiously, the more extreme leaders seem to be more successful in creating party cohesion. This is presumably because the act of reaching this stage in spite of a relatively extreme position coincides usually with having a strong personality.

Our results are telling also with respect to the broader debate on the role of the party in legislative decision-making. Finding a relatively small but significant latent influence of party leadership in the EP is notable because, as we outlined in the introduction, the leadership effect might be larger in national parliaments when governments depend on the cohesion of party groups. In addition, by breaking down the variance into a leader and a party group component, we contribute to a more differentiated discussion about what the impact of ‘the party’ can actually be in legislative decision-making: although in the national context, the party as such might have a considerable impact on ideological alignment, for example by providing a label that might foster re-election chances, this part of the variance is negligible in the context of the EP and can be captured by a measure of ideological diversity within the party group and by accounting for roll call sponsorship. The impact of the party (group) leadership, as it is also postulated, for example, by Cox and McCubbins (2005), is harder to capture, however. On the one hand, it might consist of the clever use of instruments such as roll call votes, which empirically are hard to disentangle from impacts on the level of the party group. On the other hand, as we have demonstrated, several personal traits of the party group leaders affect party coherence positively or negatively. More research into this direction should reveal whether party leaders can be a critical component to secure a party’s success and whether the parties tend to choose the right leaders.

Even after having controlled for all the structural preconditions and personal traits, we find about 4 per cent of the total variance of party group voting coherence to be dependent on the latent influence of the leaders. We are not able to offer a solid interpretation of this remaining unobserved heterogeneity, but we acknowledge that it would bear some important insight if examined more closely in subsequent research.²⁰ Regardless of the exact interpretation of leader traits, however, we suggest that the examination of voting coherence in

the EP – but presumably also in other parliaments as well – should not dismiss the leaders as a meaningful locus for analysis.

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Notes

1. Agence Europe, Bulletin Quotidien, No. 8594, 26/05/2005 and No. 8697, 15 June 2007.
2. Following Bowler (2000) and Hazan (2003) we distinguish party cohesion from party discipline. Whereas the former is simply a behavioural observation that members of a party vote together, the latter implies that the former is obtained not because of similar preferences but by disciplining mechanisms of the party group leaders.
3. For a theoretical outline on the influence of leadership of political leaders see Blondel (1987).
4. More modern approaches also now underline the effect of 'non-charismatic' leadership such as the skill to mediate conflict within the party (Ansell and Fish 1999).
5. The policy partisan position theory of Clausen and Wilcox (1987) assumes that the distribution of ideological positions of a party's members is usually skewed (towards the extreme) and that the party leader is chosen from the ideological area located near the mode of this distribution since this is the place where many members with very similar policy positions assemble.
6. Grofman *et al.* (2002, p. 100) summarise the consequences of their model as follows: 'When the modal and the median members of each party are close together, and when the medians of the parties are far apart, ... party members will have little incentive to break party discipline. If the party mode is far from the party median, however, then to the extent that the grouping around the mode defines the party's announced policy positions, many more members of the party will have reasons to be restless.'
7. We thank these authors for sharing their data with us.
8. Carrubba *et al.* (2006) observe that roll call votes (RCVs) are not a random sample from all the votes held in the EP. In particular, they argue party group leaders who normally control the selection of RCVs tend to choose, among other things, roll calls based on their expectations as to the level of coherence that a vote would produce. This may explain why the average level of party group coherence measured in RCVs is indeed substantially higher as compared to other votes. However, there is no a priori reason to assume that the party groups are differentially affected by this selectivity, once we control for who initiated the RCV. While we may therefore potentially

overestimate the overall level of cohesiveness, we are quite confident that eventually the observed differences between the party groups are not negatively affected by selection bias.

9. The measure of 'ideological fractionalisation' is operationalised as follows: for each national party, the absolute value of the difference between its left–right position and the weighted mean of the party group is multiplied with the share of the national party in the respective party group. The 'ideological fractionalisation' of a group is then the sum of all these values. It is based on data taken from Budge *et al.* (2001). The partisan fractionalisation of the party group on the other hand is one minus the sum of the squared share of all single national parties within the party group.
10. The share of the governmental parties in a group had also been compiled by Hix *et al.* (2005a) from information contained in Müller and Strøm (2003).
11. We count the number of committees and delegations to receive a measure of the quantity of experience whereas we approximate the quality of experience by measuring whether a leader had ever headed a committee. Counting the number of committees is, we think, the best way to measure the quantity of experience. Probably a better way would have been to measure the amount of rapporteurships, but this kind of data was only available for a small part of the sample period at the time we conducted this research.
12. The agreement index is theoretically bounded between 0 and 1. Linear models may yield out-of-bounds predictions in this case. We have therefore also used the logit transform of the agreement index. Substantial results have not changed dramatically, but the model fit has been worse with the transformed dependent variable. We therefore maintain the original metric.
13. At this stage, we could also assume ξ_{ij} to be a fixed leader-specific parameter. This would result in a conventional analysis-of-variance model. However, given the complexity of the model hierarchy still to be added, and given that we will also include leader-specific covariates at a latter stage, the random-intercepts approach is preferred (for details see Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005).
14. This may be done in a Bayesian framework (see Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005). Empirical Bayes predictions of the random intercepts use information on both the prior distribution of ζ_{ij} , i.e. $N(0, \psi_1)$ and the posterior distribution given the observed agreement y_{ij} :

$$\hat{\zeta}_{ij} = \hat{R}_j \frac{1}{n_j} \sum_{i=1}^{n_j} \xi_{ij}$$

where ξ_{ij} is the observed total residual that is averaged over the n_j observations per leader, and

$$\hat{R}_j = \frac{\hat{\psi}_1}{\hat{\psi}_1 + \hat{\theta}/n_j}$$

In other words, the empirical Bayes predictor of ξ_{ij} is the leader-specific sample mean of the estimated total residual, weighted by $\hat{R}_j$, a so-called *shrinkage factor*, since it shrinks ξ_{ij} towards the mean of the prior distribution (zero) if $\hat{\psi}$ is small, $\hat{\theta}$ is large, and/or n_j is small. Finally, the *comparative standard error* of the random intercept given the observed y_{ij} 's can be used for hypothesis testing regarding the differences between the leaders' random intercepts (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005):

$$S.E(\zeta_{ij}|y_j) = \sqrt{(1 - \hat{R}_j)\hat{\psi}_1}$$

15. Eventual effects of developments that affect the European Parliament as a whole, such as the EU enlargements and the three leading European treaties, may also be subsumed in these proposition-specific intercepts.
16. To fit this model in practise, we define an upper pseudo-level that comprises the entire data set. At this level, we add dummy variables for both party groups and leaders, and let their 'slopes' vary randomly, with their variances set equal for party groups and leaders, respectively, and with their covariances set to zero.
17. We have used Stata's xtmixed to fit the models via maximum likelihood. Empirical Bayes predictions of random intercepts are available as post-estimation commands. However, posterior variances and comparative standard errors still have to be calculated 'by hand'.
18. By including an interactive relationship between the distance measure and an indicator for positions of the leader relative to the modal and median members of the party that might be classified

as awkward or extreme according to the expectations of Grofman *et al.* (2002), we still found that distance mattered significantly positive for the 'normal' cases but also that distance is clearly an obstacle for such awkwardly positioned leaders.

19. We leave it to the judgement of the reader how exactly these unobserved skills shall be characterised. One suggestion would be that they can be subsumed under a rather vague concept such as 'charisma'. This is just an ad-hoc suggestion, however, and should be the subject of subsequent research.
20. Currently, the first author of this article is investigating in more detail the different use of disciplinary sanctions and rewards in four national assemblies and the European Parliament for the research project 'Party Group Discipline in Europe' (under the guidance of Stefanie Bailer, University of Zurich, and Prof. Simon Hug, University of Geneva, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation). The information of 80 qualitative structured interviews with party group leaders and parliamentary experts will be used to compile a comparative measure of party group disciplinary mechanisms across nations and countries. This research will enable more insight into the various disciplinary processes exerted by party group leaders.

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