

# **Vote Switching in European Parliament Elections: Evidence from June 2004**

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This paper is presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, held in Washinton DC, 1-4 September, 2005.

The fifth set of elections to the European Parliament in 2004 saw 25 countries sending representatives to the parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg, more than twice the number who participated in the first elections in 1979. On the face of it this presents anyone wishing to understand what happens at these elections with a great deal more variety and uncertainty than previously but this would ignore the fact that we have learned a lot about European Parliament elections in the last 25 years. We have observed significant regularities in the behaviour of European voters and have developed a theory – second-order election theory – which provides a sensible account of such regularities. On this basis we certainly have a set of expectations about what will happen not just in the 15 countries who participated in the last election of 1999 but also in those who participated for the first time in 2004. This is not to say that our expectations are very precise, nor that our theory is without blemish. Uncertainty remains to cloud any predictions, and there remain both features of behaviour that are unexplained by theory as well as facts which fit uncomfortably with it. This paper reviews the performance of the theory of second-order elections to date, and also considers the alternative merits of two theories which were developed to explain regularities in the behaviour of US voters in the congressional elections that occur in presidential midterm which show significant parallels with those of European Parliament elections.

Elections to parliaments within member states are held according to various timetables. Occasionally national and EP elections coincide (they always do in Luxembourg); more typically they do not but fall somewhere within the national parliamentary election cycle in each member state. While those elected to the European Parliament sit in European Party Groups, they are elected on national party lists, and hence it is possible to compare the performance of national parties in European Parliament elections with their performance in the preceding national election. It is also possible to compare turnout. When we do so we observe two pretty general patterns: governments lose votes compared to the preceding national election and turnout falls. In the US there are national elections every two years for Congress and every four years for the President. Congressional elections take place coincidentally with presidential elections, and again in the middle of a president's term of office – a 'midterm' election. Congressional midterm elections differ from the preceding congressional election in two respects: the president's party wins fewer votes, and turnout is lower. This pattern has endured throughout the twentieth century, almost without exception.

The theories that will be discussed here have generally sought to link the regularities in each context, to see the turnout and government or presidential loss as connected rather than separate phenomena. In the European context it is a central aspect of the theory of 'second order national elections' (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Reif 1985; Reif 1997). In the US context this is the contribution made by the theory of 'surge and decline' advanced by Angus Campbell (1960, 1966). A further

common aspect of each theoretical approach is that the results of the less important election are seen as interpretable only through an understanding of something exogenous. In the European case this is the national parliamentary election cycle; in the US case this is the presidential election cycle.

In the next section we will review two sets of theory. Special attention will be given to two things. Firstly, what is the source of the explanation and secondly, what is the mechanism of decision-making at the level of the individual that provides the expected change. Having done that we can then move on to consider the manner in which these theories can be applied to the 2004 European Parliament elections, what they explain and what they do not explain.

## **Second-order theory and some alternatives**

### *Second-order theory*

The concept of a second-order national election in fact has its roots in observations of electoral patterns in US midterm elections, as well as German regional elections but it was used by Reif and Schmitt (1980) as an explanation of the results of the first direct European Parliament election. Reif and Schmitt point out that elections differ in terms of how important people think they are and assume national general elections will be considered more important than European Parliament elections. Rather than distinguish elections as such they refer to different arenas of politics, with elections to bodies in the most important arena of primary importance and elections in other arenas of lesser consequence.<sup>1</sup> As long as national politics remain pre-eminent, general elections in parliamentary democracies are first-order elections. All others are second-order. Voters can be expected to behave differently in the two types of elections because of their differential importance. For a start, they will be less likely to vote in second-order elections because they and the parties know that such elections are less important. When they do turn out voters will be more mindful of the political situation in the first-order arena than that of the second-order arena. First-order issues, for instance, will dominate second-order ones.<sup>2</sup> In particular, voters may take the opportunity to signal their dissatisfaction with government policy despite the fact that the second-order election has no direct implications for government composition. Additionally, in making their choice voters are more inclined to follow their 'heart' in second-order elections, whose relative un-importance means there are no consequences. This explains why their behavior may differ from that in first-order elections, in which voters tend to follow their 'head'.

Although Reif and Schmitt do not develop a proper theory of the voter, some points are implicit in what they say. Essentially, at the core of second order theory is a relatively strategic voter who has a preference structure across two or more parties with more than one non-zero element. In other words, a voter does not simply support one party and reject the rest.

This strategic aspect can be further developed. Reif and Schmitt suggested that governments would perform particularly poorly when second-order elections occurred at midterm. The rationale for this is that midterm is a normal nadir of government popularity, brought about by a combination of popularity cycles, and the inevitability of unrealized expectations (see below). However, this is disputed by Oppenhuis et al (1996) who question the existence of such popularity cycles and instead focus on the importance of the election as a signalling device. This is also a function of the time since the last general election, and the time expected until the next one. When a second-order election follows close on, or is simultaneous with, a general election, it passes almost unnoticed. Hence turnout will be particularly low (but not in the case of concurrent elections where turnout in both contests tends to be at the same level). Those who do vote will please themselves, voting with the 'heart'. However, when a second-order election takes place on the eve of a general election, its importance as a sign of what will happen at that general election is considerable. In such circumstances turnout will be rather high (relative to other second order elections) and voters are more likely to signal their discontent with a party or government. The 'referendum' element of second-order elections is thus contextually located, not by levels of government dissatisfaction or economic trends but by the timing of the second-order election in the first-order election cycle.

A second development of second-order theory is the suggestion that the differential importance of elections is better represented by a continuum than by a categorisation (van der Eijk et al 1996). Not all second-order elections are equally unimportant but not all first-order elections are equally important either. In fact, where general elections have few implications for the choice of government, because a system of consociational democracy operates for instance, then they may differ little from second-order elections in the same system. Perhaps only in countries where general elections are expected to bring about some alternation of government control does it make sense to see local or European parliament elections as second-order.

We now turn to some alternative theoretical approaches, developed to account for US midterm election results. We begin with the theory of surge and decline, and then deal more fully with the so-called referendum element of such elections, already alluded to above.

### *Surge and decline*

The original theory of Surge and Decline was presented by Angus Campbell (1960). We call this "Campbell\_1". The theory seeks to explain differences in turnout and support for the president's party between midterm and preceding presidential elections in the United States but Campbell himself saw it as having a more general relevance. In his original formulation of surge and decline theory Campbell suggested that although the theory was specifically intended to illuminate well-established patterns in US political behaviour it was likely that:

the basic concepts... - political stimulation, political interest, party identification, core voters and peripheral voters, and high- and low- stimulus elections - are equally applicable to an understanding of political behaviour in other democratic system' (Campbell 1960: 62)

The expectation is that in presidential elections people are likely to depart from their 'normal' pattern of political behaviour. This is because such elections are (relatively, in the US context) high stimulus elections. The higher stimulus of a presidential election promotes two types of change. First, it draws those to the polls who do not usually vote, those Campbell calls 'peripheral' voters. Lacking a strong party attachment, peripheral voters are likely to be swayed disproportionately by the circumstances of the moment to vote for the winning party. At the next midterm election, these voters stay at home, thus adversely affecting the president's party. The high stimulus also means that regular, or 'core' voters are more likely to be swayed by the advantage circumstances give to the winning party to depart from their normal partisan behaviour, only to return to their habitual behaviour in the lower-stimulus midterm. Again, this is to the disadvantage of the president's party. Presidential elections are thus a departure from an equilibrium that is restored at the subsequent congressional election.

After reviewing some individual level evidence and arguing that it does not support classic surge and decline theory, James Campbell (1993) provides a revised version of surge and decline in which the mechanism of a higher/lower stimulus remains much the same but the impact of that on different types of voters changes. We call this "Campbell\_2". On the basis that the individual level evidence does not support the differential turnout of independent voters in the two types of election, James Campbell argues instead that the difference in the result is caused by the return to the midterm electorate of partisans of the losing party in the previous election ('disadvantaged partisans') who were cross-pressured by short-term forces and abstained, and the switching back of weaker partisans who defected due to the same cross pressures. In his revised version of surge and decline theory it is strong partisans who move from abstention to voting, and weak partisans and independents who switch. The important concept in the revised model is that of cross-pressure. Strong partisans may find themselves cross-pressured in a presidential year, wanting to vote for their normal party but preferring the candidate of the opposition. They resolve the conflict by abstaining. Weaker partisans have no problem with the cross-pressures and simply switch parties. "Campbell\_2" is a revision of "Campbell\_1".

### *Referendum theory*

A quite different explanation for midterm losses is the referendum theory advanced by Tufte

(1975). In sharp contrast to surge and decline, which finds the roots of inter-election decline in the upsurge at the previous election, referendum theory locates it in the record of the administration. However, as in surge and decline theory, the roots remain external to the election itself, since they are located in the record of the administration rather than of Congress. Midterm elections are essentially a referendum on the government's performance, in which voters express their approval or disapproval through voting for or against those representing the president's party. The mechanism of change lies in the decision by at least some midterm voters to reward or punish the party of the president. The election provides an occasion at which voters can signal their dissatisfaction. This view is expressed most clearly by Tufte and we refer to his theory as "referendum".

Tufte considers two separate causes of approval: the public's general satisfaction with the president's performance and the trends in economic development. His analysis uses these to predict the magnitude of swings against the incumbent party, and he shows these can be predicted with a high degree of accuracy. There is nothing in the theory of a referendum itself to explain why swings are almost always adverse, but Tufte suggests that this stems from two further trends. The first is that presidential popularity tends to decline through a term of office; the second is that the performance of the economy tends to be better at the time of presidential elections. Of course, to the extent that neither is the case, the president's party should not suffer at midterm.

Unlike surge and decline, Tufte's referendum theory does not directly link turnout and midterm loss but others have attempted to do so within referendum theory. Kernell (1977) asserts a 'negativity' hypothesis. Like Tufte, Kernell sees the midterm election as strongly influenced by perceptions of the president's record but he offers a more fundamental account of why this is bad news for the president's party. According to Kernell, judgements on presidential performance are always biased in a negative direction because – as a social-psychological rule – negative impressions are always more salient than positive ones. Moreover, voters are more likely to act on negative impressions. Hence, there will be more people dissatisfied with the president than there were two years ago; dissatisfied voters will also be more likely to turn out than satisfied ones, and, having turned out, will be more likely to vote against the president's party.<sup>3</sup>

Having outlined various theories we now turn to examine their relative value in accounting for features of European Parliament elections. The following analysis deals largely with the central point at issue between the competing theories, the explanation of government losses. It deals only indirectly with turnout, in as much as differential turnout is essential to such explanations.

## **Explaining government vote loss in European Parliament elections**

Much of the work on second order-elections has followed Reif and Schmitt (1980) in examining election results, using aggregate data. Regarding 2004, analyses have already been completed which indicate that the patterns of gains and losses in these elections are in line with those in the previous five sets of European Parliament elections (e.g. Marsh 2005a; Hix and Marsh 2005; Schmitt 2005a). The 'success' of second-order theory in this context is unsurprising, and in line with previous work at this level although it is evident that patterns in post-communist states are not quite the same as those in the older member states. This paper focuses on the individual level. This is more challenging as it brings into to question not so much what is happening but who makes it happen. In particular we want to observe the pattern of voter mobility across the two elections (general to EP) and see how well it matches the expectations of the various theories already discussed. The approach follows previous work using the 1999 European election study (Marsh 2003; Marsh 2005b).

Specific expectations, derived from the discussion above, are as follows:

- H1 That most of the change is away from the government (Surge and decline: Campbell\_1)
- H2 That government will lose more votes to non-voting than opposition parties, and many more voters will switch parties away from them than towards them (Surge and decline: Campbell\_1)
- H3 Independent voters are less likely to turn out at European elections than general elections, relative to partisans (Surge and decline: Campbell\_1)
- H4 Low interest voters are more likely to switch or abstain from government parties (Surge and decline: Campbell\_1)
- H5 There should be a higher defection of partisans at general elections than European elections (Surge and decline: Campbell\_1)
- H6 Opposition partisans who abstained last time will rejoin the opposition side (Surge and decline: Campbell\_2)
- H7 Weak opposition partisans who voted for the government last time will return to the opposition (Surge and decline: Campbell\_2)
- H8 There should be a shift away from the government by voters dissatisfied with its record (Referendum)
- H9 Satisfied government supporters abstain more than dissatisfied ones who are more likely to switch (Referendum); strong government partisans also abstain (Campbell\_2)

- H10 Change and stability are a function of first order concerns so left-right attitudes may affect decisions to switch or stay (Second order)
- H11 Second-order concerns are not relevant: i.e. European attitudes do not affect the decision of voters to switch (Second order).

Earlier work on the 1999 elections gave mixed results. Partisanship did matter in explaining voting patterns with defections more common in general elections, and non partisans less likely to vote in EP elections, sustaining the sort of 'normal' vote interpretation of mid-term elections put forward by Campbell\_1. Government popularity, however, proved a poor guide to defections, and gave little support to the simple referendum interpretation of these elections. Second-order interpretations were supported in as much as patterns of vote switching were consistent with the view that some voters have multiple preferences: switchers have another option, abstainers do not. However, contrary to second-order theory, Europe did appear to matter with government defectors significantly more critical about further integration than those who stayed loyal. This result is broadly in line with some recent aggregate studies suggesting anti-European parties and parties divided on Europe suffer in EP elections (Ferrara and Weishaupt 2004; Hix and Marsh 2005).

There are two particularly significant points of interest in the 2004 elections. The first is to see if the impact of European attitudes in 1999 was a quirk, or whether it is repeated and, if it is, whether or not it is strengthened. The latter might be expected, given the further erosion of the old 'permissive consensus' and the very visible success of anti-EU parties in a number of countries. The second is possible variation between old and new member states. This may have several sources. One is that party attachment might have a rather different meaning in new democracies and represent much more a short-term attraction than a long-term predisposition (e.g. Schmitt 2005b). Another is that the very instability of party systems in many post-communist states hardly testifies to strong attachments and does not provide favourable conditions for the development of attachments (e.g. Sikk 2005).

Data for this paper is from the European Election Study 2004. About 27,000 interviews were carried out with electors just after the 2004 elections in all EU member states apart from Malta. Between 500 (in Cyprus) and 2100 (in Sweden) electors responded to questionnaires, with an average of over 1100 in each country. Country samples have been weighted so that each sums to 1000.<sup>4</sup>

Operationalisations are as follows:

- Vote change: differences between recalled vote at the last national election and reported EP vote<sup>5</sup>
- Partisanship: Feeling of being close to a party, measured on a 4-point scale: not close, sympathiser, quite close, very close. This is coded from -3 (very close to opposition party to +3 (very close to government party) with not close as zero
- Government popularity: approval or disapproval of the government's record to date, running from -1 (disapproval) through zero (DK) to +1 (approval)
- Views on Europe: item on attitude to Unification which uses a 1-10 point scale to indicate whether integration has gone too far or should be pushed further. This is recoded here as a 10 point scale from -4.5 (too far) to +4.5 (further).
- Left-right self placement: Respondents were asked to place themselves on a 10 point left right scale from 1 (left) to 10 (right)
- Political interest: Four point scale self-assessed interest in politics from none (0), a little (1), somewhat (2) to very (3). Missing values were coded 0.

Table 1 contains the evidence of voters' movements between the two elections, general (GE) and European (EP), showing in each case whether they voted for a government party, an opposition party, or did not vote. This provides a basis for evaluating the surge and decline hypotheses 1-3 and 6. We can see from Table 1 that the government parties lost a higher proportion of votes than did the opposition – retaining only 51 per cent of their GE votes as opposed to the opposition's 65 per cent. We can also see that erstwhile government supporters are also more likely to abstain than they are to defect (although they were no more more likely to abstain than erstwhile opposition voters). Amongst clear non-habitual voters, that is those who did not vote in the EP election, the government did marginally worse last time than the opposition ( 30 percent of 9,069 as opposed to 30 percent of 10,772: 31 percent as against 37 percent.) Interestingly, there is no difference in the propensity of government and opposition voters to abstain: shifts in aggregate support are not due to differential turnout. The marginal figures indicate a small under-recall of government support here, although not enough to suggest government support from such voter was significantly higher in the general election. A rough adjustment of these figures to allow for errors in recall would still indicate that 2004 non-voters did not favour the government parties in the previous general election. There is relatively little evidence of significant shifts from abstention to voting as might be expected from Campbell\_2 (6) although what remobilisation there was did benefit the opposition by a ratio of more than 3:1.

(TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

There are some differences here between new and old member states and it should be said that the under-recall of government voting is more severe in the new states: only 42 percent of those who recalled voting in the general election claimed to have voted for the government but in those elections 48 percent of voters did so.<sup>6</sup> In the old states government parties kept 56 percent of their votes compared to 39 in the new states, and oppositions kept 72 percent and 53 percent respectively. When it comes to the EP votes of GE abstainers, these clearly favour the opposition in both sets of countries by a ratio of 3:1. Non-habitual voters were also more likely than more habitual voters to have favoured the opposition in the previous general election in both sets of states. In general then differences are slight but the new states did show more volatility.

In multiparty systems there is of course a switching of parties that is not apparent in table 1: that between government parties or between opposition parties. In all 26 percent of stable government voters switched government party ( 24 percent in the old countries, 32 percent in the new ones) but 46 percent of stable opposition voters did so; 72 percent in the new accession states shifted opposition party. This is a remarkable degree of volatility across the two elections in the new member states.

Surge and decline theories direct most attention to the party attachments of voters, arguing that tendencies to stay, abstain or switch vary across different categories. We thus need to know something of the character of the voters in the different cells. Table 2 makes this clearer, breaking down the voter transition matrix in Table 1 by party attachment., coded here as simply 'Opposition', 'None' and 'Government'.

(TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE)

Campbell\_1(3) would lead us to expect independents who voted for the government in the national election to abstain in the European Parliament election, whereas partisans who crossed over should return. This is what we find. Of the independents who voted for the government last time, 39 percent abstained in the European election and more stayed with the government (36 per cent) then switched (25 per cent). Partisan defection was rare in the general election but of the tiny number of 'disadvantaged' partisans who defected to the government last time, 55 per cent returned, compared to only 14 per cent who stayed and 32 per cent who abstained. Campbell\_2 (6) predicts partisans of the non-government party should move from abstention back to their party. However, there are very few of them and, while 24 per cent returned, 67 per cent continued to

abstain. Campbell\_2 (7) also predicts that independents should switch back from the government, but this was less common than abstention. A further expectation from Campbell\_1 (5) is that there should be more defections – that is, those identifying with one party but voting for another – in general elections than in European ones. The numbers are very small here. Only 8 percent of partisans who voted defected in the national election and 10 percent in the European election. On the whole these results suggests the original theory, Campbell\_1 is more useful here than the revised one, Campbell\_2.

These results hold generally true for both the old and new member states. Overall there seems to be very little difference in the patterns observed. Only with respect to the last point concerning the probability of defecting is there an interesting difference. Here we see that partisan defections are less common in national elections in the old member states (11 percent in EP election, 6 percent in the general election) but more common in national elections in the new accession states: 14 percent as against 9 percent. This pattern in the old states is the reverse of what was found in 1999, when general elections involved more defection but of course, overall, the percentages are small.

While this detailed analysis is necessary to test some ideas of surge and decline theory, and to give some idea of the numbers involved, a more general and multivariate analysis is preferable to consider the other expectations. Such an analysis also allows us to control for the country factor in our data set. We are particularly interested in those voters in the first and third rows, those who voted for or against the government last time, and in how their behaviour in this 2004 election is related to characteristics like partisanship, satisfaction, and their views on Europe.

Table 3 contains sets of coefficients which indicate the impact of a set of predictors on the probability of shifting or abstaining rather than staying with the government party (this is the reference option). Table 4 shows the impact of the same set of predictor variables on the probability of shifting or abstaining, rather than staying with the opposition party (this is the reference option). The cell entries are log odds ratios which show the average change in the odds of defection or abstention relative to stability, and the associated p-values. We can use these two tables as evidence in relation to the expectations outlined earlier, starting again with those from surge and decline theory.

(TABLES 3 AND 4 ABOUT HERE)

As these results show, partisanship is linked significantly both to abstention and defection patterns, both in the case of previous government and non-government parties. For former government voters, as partisanship inclines towards the government it seems to have more impact on defection than abstention. The odds of defection from the government are more than halved with a one point increase in attachment, whereas the odds of abstention drop a little less. Pro-government attachment also hugely raises the odds of defecting (back perhaps) from the opposition but as we have seen there are few such deviant government partisans. On interest (H4) it is apparent that more interested voters are about half as likely to abstain than stay or switch. This holds both for those who voted for government parties and for non-government parties in the previous general election.

Expectations 8 and 9 from referendum theories offer two different possibilities: that defection or abstention from the government is a function of approval (Tufte), and that abstention is not a function of approval but that defection is (negative voting). Results point to the weakness of negative voting theory but give some support to referendum theory. There is the expected tendency for voters to leave the government when they are dissatisfied: the odds of doing so rather than staying increase by more than 60 points. There is no sign at all of negative voting, which would require a link between disapproval and switching but not between disapproval and abstention. The coefficients are quite similar and equally significant.

Second order theory rests on the assumption that voters have preferences across a number of parties and that different elections provide different contexts in which they select from their set. However, it suggests that voters will be motivated by first order issues rather than second order ones. This is a difficult thing to test but we make a start here by comparing the impact on defection and abstention of two general sets of issues: those relating to European integration and those relating to the left-right dimension. In each case we have taken the most simple specification, asking whether the left-right and pro-/anti-integration position have anything to do with defection. The results appear to show that a voter's views on the EU are not connected to the probability of changing party blocs but are related to abstention. This gives some support to H10. A one point increase in support for integration is associated with a significant drop in the odds of abstention but not of defection.. This is not a strong relationship but it is consistent across erstwhile government and opposition supporters. In contrast, left-right position does appear to have an impact on switching as well as defection, particularly for erstwhile government supporters. In other words, pro-EU voters are more likely to vote, but left wing voters are more likely to switch.

These results generally hold true consistently across the old and new member states but there are exceptions, most notably with respect to the attitude dimensions. Left-right orientations are linked more consistently to abstention in the new states, particularly amongst those who voted for opposition parties last time. Left-right orientations (i.e. being more left wing) are linked more closely to defection in the old states: erstwhile government voters are about one-quarter less likely to defect when they are one point more right wing, a change which makes erstwhile opposition voters about one quarter more likely to defect. There are also differences with respect to party attachment which seems a stronger determinant of stability in the new member states. A one point increase in attachment to a government party is associated with a change in the odds of staying of about 3:1 in the new states as opposed to less than 2:1 in the old ones among erstwhile government supporters; among erstwhile opposition supporters the odds of changing increase by over 4:1 as opposed to about 2:1.

In two further pieces of analysis we explored the importance of voters' relative utilities for different parties, replicating analysis of 1999 (Marsh 2003, 2005) as well as exploring the volatility within the opposition parties. First, using the party utility measures developed by van der Eijk (Tillie, 1995; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996) we examined how the distance between the highest utility for a government party and the highest utility for an opposition party impacted on voters decisions to switch, abstain or remain loyal. This analysis was kept separate because of the much greater degree of missing data on these questions, the overall N for analysis dropping by about 30 percent. This variable proves to have a strong impact on vote choice. Government voters who perceive a positive differential between the two sets of parties are much less likely to defect, and less likely to abstain; similarly, opposition voters who perceive a differential are more likely to defect and abstain. In each case the effects on switching are much greater than those on abstention. The inclusion of this variable leaves the relative importance of other variables, and conclusions drawn above, unchanged. But it does indicate the possibility that voters do consider a number of parties in the vote choice set and where differentials are small, may change their vote decision from election to election.

Volatility within the opposition parties – a topic not envisaged by US mid-term election theories – is best explained by party attachment but political interest and attitudes to the EU play a small part: those more interested are more likely to remain loyal, as are those more pro-EU, although both coefficients are significant only at the .05 level. Those who switch within the set of government parties are simply less partisan. These relationships, particular within new member states, will be explored further in a later version of this paper.

## **Discussion**

This paper has examined the expectations we might have about the 2004 elections in the light of available theoretical work both on European Parliament elections and the analogous US midterm elections. We contrasted the US-based theories of Angus Campbell and his successors with Reif and Schmitt's theory of second order elections on the basis that all seek to explain the comparable patterns of regularity in different political systems. There are differences between the theories. These lie chiefly in different conceptions of what motivates the average voter, with surge and decline allowing for more strategic, 'rational' behavior than the other theories, but they also lie in the behavior that each was developed to explain. Surge and decline and referendum theories focus on behavior in a two-party system with a separation of powers and an electorate which is easily categorized as identifying with one party or another. In parliamentary democracies none of these conditions applies. Two-party systems are rare, even if they are liberally defined; there is no separation of powers, and party identification, as the concept is understood in the US, is much less easily separated from immediate voting intentions. Nonetheless, the assumption with which this paper began was that such theories are at least potentially applicable in the different circumstances. Second-order election theory has grown out of this literature but offers explanations for matters outside the normal ambit of US focused studies, such as the shift of votes from larger to smaller parties, as well as adapting previous insights to understanding electoral change in sub- and supra-national elections.

On the whole we discovered all three areas of theory do offer some understanding of the mechanics of individual vote change. The expectations derived from surge and decline theory are only in part confirmed by the data. First of all, there is mixed evidence that government losses can be seen as a consequence of voters returning to 'normal' behaviour. While defections do not appear to be much greater in European elections, it seems that defections by partisans were not significantly more apparent in general elections than European elections, a finding which runs counter to some popular wisdom that European elections are contexts in which partisanship counts for little. We also see at the individual level that independent voters are more likely than others to abstain at the lower stimulus election and that partisanship is linked to shifts in and out of the voting public in some of the expected ways, although it is evident that 'peripheral' voters alone are not responsible for the losses suffered by governments. It must be acknowledged that these findings may be distorted by the fact that we have only recall evidence for the last national election. We badly need widespread panel data on these elections, something that is not yet available for more than the odd country (e.g. Heath et al., 1999). Even so, the distortions in recall might be expected to strengthen links between partisanship and recalled choice rather than weaken them and the evidence

here should certainly not be discounted on that point. In general the findings give more value to Campbell's original formulation than his namesake's revised version. While not every expectation is fulfilled, nor can all be dismissed.

Traditional referendum theory gets some support. The individual level analysis revealed modest results with respect to government popularity but it is clear that this factor does help to explain voting shifts.<sup>7</sup>

Evidence with respect to the attitudes of voters, a focus prompted by second-order theory again was mixed. As expected, attitudes to the EU do not seem to account for vote switching between government and opposition. In contrast left-right orientations do help account for such changes, with left wing voters more inclined to shift towards or stay loyal to opposition parties. However, abstention by general election voters does seem to be more common among less pro-EU voters. These results are based on rather crude measures and more sophisticated specifications are certainly possible. Governments in general tend to be favourable to integration: we would therefore expect opposition voters to be motivated more by anti- than by pro-integrationist views. An alternative specification, using a voter's closeness to the EU position of the government [mean position of government parties as seen by all voters] gave very similar results. We also explored other specifications for left right, including a moderate-extremist folding of the left right scale. Arguably, most governments are centrist and the opposition should attract more extremist voters (or they might go to more "outspoken" coalition (or opposition) parties). There was some support for this, but the unfolded scale was considerably more powerful and we opted for simplicity. Second order theory suggests voters will opt for the closest party on the major dimensions on national politics. This specification will be tested in a subsequent version of this paper.

There are some contrasts here with a similar analysis using data on the 1999 elections. In particular, the traditional referendum theory is much better supported here, and the signs that the EU mattered to government defections is now absent. However, the relevance of surge and decline theory and the patterns of change by party attachment are very similar. There are also some contrasts between patterns in the new and old member states although for the most part the picture is quite similar. Differences are greatest with respect to the issue scales with anti-EU abstention and left defection confined to the old member states.

This paper has largely focussed on a review of theories of lower stimulus elections, exploring differences and similarities between them, in order to assess what each can tell us about European Parliament elections. Most offer something of value, although some have a wider potential than others. What we can say is that we certainly did not lack useful tools for generating expectations about the 2004 elections and for analysing them in retrospect. We have shown several clear patterns in previous results, many of them quite consistent with theory and thus interpretable

in such terms. We have also reported on many similarities between the old and new member states in respect to the dynamics of change, although volatility in the new states remains much higher than in the old states. Moreover, certain types of volatility, that within the sets of parties in government or in opposition, is not envisaged by theories of surge and decline or ‘referendums’, but might be in accordance with second-order theory regarding the differential prospects of large and small parties. Weak party attachment seems to be a factor in all of this, but more work needs to be done to explore the precise patterns of within-camp changes. .

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**Table 1 European Parliament Election Vote and Recalled National Election Vote**

	<i>EP vote recall</i>				Unweighted N
	Opposition	None	Govt	Total	
<i>national vote recall</i>					
Opposition	65	30	4	100	10,772
None	14	82	4	100	3,406
Government	19	30	51	100	9,069

Source: European Election Study 2004.

Note: Weighted for analysis to equalize country size

**Table 2 Recalled National Vote by Party Attachment and European Parliament Vote**

<i>national vote recall</i>	attached to ...	<i>EP vote recall</i>			TOTAL	unweighted N
		<i>opposition</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>govt</i>		
	<i>opposition</i>					
	opposition	73	25	2	100	6,336
	independent	56	39	5	100	3,966
	government	34	27	39	100	420
	TOTAL	65	30	4	100	10,772
	<i>none</i>					
	opposition	28	70	2	100	573
	independent	11	86	3	100	2,555
	government	10	67	24	100	278
	TOTAL	14	82	5	100	3,406
	<i>government</i>					
	opposition	55	32	14	100	650
	independent	25	39	36	100	3,581
	government	10	23	67	100	4,838
	TOTAL	19	30	51	100	9,069

Source: European Election Study 2004.

Note: cell entries are row percentages. Ns are weighted to equalize country size

**Table 3 Factors explaining EP choices of general election supporters of government parties: Multinomial Logit Estimates (odds ratios)**

	<i>All</i>	<i>Old 15</i>	<i>New 10</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Old 15</i>	<i>New 10</i>
	<b>EP Opposition vote</b>			<b>EP Abstained</b>		
Government approval (4 point scale)	0.677 (0.000)	0.659 (0.000)	0.766 (0.002)	0.723 (0.000)	0.716 (0.000)	0.762 (0.000)
Positive attitude to EU (10 point scale)	0.981 (0.198)	0.989 (0.503)	0.954 (0.149)	0.949 (0.000)	0.943 (0.000)	0.952 (0.072)
Left right (10 point scale)	0.898 (0.000)	0.875 (0.000)	0.953 (0.200)	0.923 (0.000)	0.917 (0.000)	0.937 (0.042)
Pro-government attachment (7 point scale)	0.418 (0.000)	0.447 (0.000)	0.335 (0.000)	0.646 (0.000)	0.696 (0.000)	0.522 (0.000)
Political interest (4 point scale)	0.890 (0.016)	0.897 (0.052)	0.874 (0.181)	1.537 (0.000)	1.521 (0.000)	1.557 (0.000)
Observations	6797	4985	1812			
Pseudo R squared	0.21	0.19	0.22			

Note: Country dummies included but not shown; p values in parentheses. Reference category is support for government parties in EP election.

**Table 4 Factors explaining EP choices of general election supporters of opposition parties: Multinomial Logit Estimates (odds ratios)**

	<i>All</i>	<i>Old 15</i>	<i>New 10</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Old 15</i>	<i>New 10</i>
	<b>EP Government vote</b>			<b>EP Abstained</b>		
Government approval (4 point scale)	1.546 (0.000)	1.570 (0.000)	1.543 (0.001)	1.049 (0.196)	1.108 (0.033)	0.980 (0.730)
Positive attitude to EU (10 point scale)	1.027 (0.317)	1.019 (0.506)	1.017 (0.751)	0.940 (0.000)	0.962 (0.007)	0.916 (0.000)
Left right (10 point scale)	1.602 (0.018)	1.222 (0.000)	1.203 (0.003)	1.025 (0.628)	1.018 (0.289)	0.931 (0.001)
Pro-government attachment (7 point scale)	2.817 (0.000)	2.529 (0.000)	4.239 (0.000)	1.318 (0.000)	1.308 (0.000)	1.341 (0.000)
Political interest (4 point scale)	0.951 (0.567)	0.890 (0.224)	1.218 (0.236)	1.837 (0.000)	1.757 (0.000)	1.949 (0.000)
Constant	7532	5424	2395			
Pseudo R squared	0.20	0.18	0.19			

Note: Country dummies included but not shown; p values in parentheses. Reference category is support for opposition parties in EP election.

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## NOTES

The authors wish to express their gratitude to the TCD Arts and Social Sciences Benefaction Fund and to Jane Suiter for research assistance on this paper.

- 1 Second-order elections theory can be seen as an early exploration in the then uncharted territory of multi-level governance (e.g. Hooghe and Marks 2001).
- 2 As the policy reach of multi-level governance grows within the EU an increasingly large body of issues is dealt with in both first- and second-order political arenas (see again Hooghe and Marks, appendix table 1). What is referred to here is therefore the specifics of the national and the European arena, which is the political standing of the national government on the one hand, and the future direction of European integration – whether one should speed it up or slow it down – on the other.
- 3 For a concise review of some other variants see Campbell, 1993.
- 4 Full details on EES website: <http://www.ees-homepage.net>
- 5 An alternative operationalisation would be to contrast the EP vote with vote in a hypothetical general election at the same time. This was used by Oppenhuis et al ‘The Party Context: Outcomes’, pp. 287-305. It has the advantage of removing the bias of recall data but the disadvantage of being subject to the same second-order effects of any opinion poll taken between election. However, Oppenhuis et al’s findings on the existence of switching and abstention contributing to government party losses are similar to those in the analysis here (below).
- 6 The error is 7 percentage points in the EP elections: the survey shows 30 percent as against a target figure of 37 percent. Corresponding figures for the older member states are zero percent for the general election vote and –2 for the EP election vote.
- 7 Mixed results have also been found in the US context: see Niemi and Weisberg 1993: 209.