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## It takes two: how Eurosceptic public opinion and party divisions influence party positions

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### ABSTRACT

Do parties respond to voters' preferences on European integration in elections to the European Parliament (EP)? Following recent research that shows political party responsiveness to Eurosceptic attitudes during EP elections is conditioned by party characteristics, this article seeks to understand how party unity on European integration affects party responsiveness to Euroscepticism. It argues that when Eurosceptic attitudes among voters are high and the parties are divided in their position on European integration, parties will be more responsive to voters and take a more Eurosceptic position. To test the theoretical expectations, the study uses data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, the Euromanifestos Project, and European Election Study for 1989–2009 for over 120 parties across 20 European Union member states. The findings have important implications for understanding the nature of democratic representation in the European Union.

**KEYWORDS** Euroscepticism; public opinion; intra-party divisions; party positions

Euroscepticism and Eurosceptic parties are on the rise across Europe. In addition to the historic Brexit vote, which resulted in a majority of voters in the United Kingdom voting to leave the European Union, increasing Euroscepticism among voters has also been met with the success of Eurosceptic parties. In the 2014 elections to the European Parliament, Eurosceptic parties finished first or second in several countries, including Denmark, France, Hungary, and the United Kingdom (see Treib 2014). In national elections, Eurosceptic parties, such as the *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats) and the *Perussuomalaiset* (Finns Party) have entered national parliaments with 10–20% of the vote. With this tide of Euroscepticism sweeping Europe, how are parties more generally responding? And, moreover, what explains when parties become Eurosceptic?

As organisations that link voters to decision-makers (Dalton *et al.* 2011; Lawson 1980), we expect political parties to be responsive to voters' issue

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priorities and preferences. Recent research has found that parties do respond to voters' issue priorities by shifting their issue emphasis, but that this responsiveness is conditioned by the electoral context, party size, and internal party dynamics (Klüver and Spoon 2016; Spoon and Klüver 2014; van de Wardt 2014; Wagner and Meyer 2014). Other research has found that, similar to parties' responsiveness to voters' issue priorities, responsiveness by parties to shifts in voters' policy preferences is not uniform. It is conditioned by party type (Adams *et al.* 2006; Ezrow *et al.* 2011), electoral system (Steenbergen *et al.* 2007), politicisation of the issue (Steenbergen *et al.* 2007), and party organisation characteristics (Schumacher *et al.* 2013).

In the European context, Williams and Spoon (2015) find that larger parties are more likely to respond to public Euroscepticism and to shift their positions in comparison to small parties. But how do internal party characteristics condition party responsiveness? It is to this question that we turn in this article.

Recent research has demonstrated that party divisions have important political ramifications, such as decreasing the ability of parties to drive public attitudes (e.g. Ray 2003), as well as influencing voters' impressions of parties' competencies and voters' subsequent decision to support them (e.g. Greene and Haber 2015). Scholars have also shown that internal party dynamics condition a party's issue emphasis and policy positions (see e.g. Schumacher *et al.* 2013; van de Wardt 2014; Wagner and Meyer 2014). Building on this extant research, we thus argue that intra-party divisions condition a party's responsiveness to voters' Euroscepticism.

Similar to Williams and Spoon (2015), we find that, in general, parties are not responsive to public Euroscepticism. However, following recent research which has found that parties respond to multiple stimuli (e.g. Adams *et al.* 2004, 2009; Ezrow and Hellwig 2014; Schumacher *et al.* 2013), we demonstrate that parties do respond when an increase in aggregate public Euroscepticism is conditioned by divisions within a party on European integration. To understand this relationship, we examine parties' responsiveness to voters' Euroscepticism from 1989 to 2009 in 20 EU member states. More specifically, we look at the responsiveness of 121 parties in five elections to the European Parliament.

This study proceeds as follows. First, we present our theoretical argument about party responsiveness. We then develop our hypotheses concerning intra-party division and how it conditions party responsiveness to public opinion. In the next section, we discuss our data and methods. Finally, we present the results of our empirical analysis and conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for political responsiveness, the nature of European elections, and democratic legitimacy in the European Union.

## Public opinion and intra-party division

As Downsian (1957) actors, political parties are focused on maximising their votes and ultimately winning elections. The desire to win elections drives parties'

behaviour, although they may be motivated by different underlying goals (Strøm and Müller 1999). In order to win elections, parties must be responsive to voters. Research has demonstrated that parties' responsiveness to voters' issue priorities is conditioned by party characteristics, electoral context, and party organisation and resources (Klüver and Spoon 2016; Spoon and Klüver 2014; Wagner and Meyer 2014). Parties, for example tend to be more responsive to voters in national elections in comparison to European elections. Scholars have, moreover, shown that parties respond to voters' shifts in issue preferences as well. When the electorate shifts left, for example, parties tend to follow (see e.g. Adams *et al.* 2004; 2006; 2009; Ezrow and Hellwig 2014).

Focusing on the responsiveness of parties to voters in the European context, Steenbergen *et al.* (2007) demonstrate that parties do respond to voters' preferences, but that responsiveness varies across the electoral context. Similarly, Steenbergen and Scott (2004) show that after the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, parties were more responsive to the policy preferences of their supporters. When parties' positions were further from their supporters, they lowered the salience of European integration. Arnold *et al.* (2012), moreover, find that the electorate's position concerning the EU influences parties' positions on the EU. Our first hypothesis thus follows from this extant finding:

*H1: When Euroscepticism among voters in the previous election ( $t-1$ ) is higher, parties will become more Eurosceptic in the current election ( $t_0$ ) in comparison to parties facing less Euroscepticism.<sup>1</sup>*

Turning to internal party dynamics, recent research has demonstrated that parties are far from unitary actors. Parties are complex organisations comprised of supporters, activists, and leaders, all of whom may have different goals and preferences. These intra-party divisions, moreover, can influence parties' electoral success, policy positions, coalition choices, and roll call votes (see e.g. Bäck 2008; Budge *et al.* 2010; Ceron 2016; Greene and Haber 2015, 2016; Harmel and Tan 2003).

While party leaders may be primarily office seeking (Laver 2005), there are other groups within the party that may be more focused on votes or policy (Strøm and Müller 1999). Leaders often face trade-offs regarding which one goal to focus on. Party leaders, moreover, do not all address the preferences of these various groups in the same way (Adams *et al.* 2006; Ezrow *et al.* 2011; Kitschelt 1988; Przeworski and Sprague 1986). Niche party leaders, for example, tend to respond to their supporters instead of the entire electorate (Adams *et al.* 2006; Ezrow *et al.* 2011; Kitschelt 1988); whereas leaders of catch-all parties hope to attract the support of both voters and supporters (Harmel and Janda 1994; Kirchheimer 1966; Przeworski and Sprague 1986). However, as party leaders 'are motivated above all by a desire to remain party leaders' (Luebbert 1986: 46), then it follows that they would respond to the policy-focused groups within the party, such as members of parliament, party

members, or other party elites (see Lehrer 2012). Importantly, voters, supporters, and party leaders may have different policy priorities and preferences. Building on this assumption, various studies have demonstrated that parties respond differently to voters and supporters. They find that parties are often more responsive to the priorities and preferences of supporters (see e.g. Adams *et al.* 2006; Dalton 1985; Ezrow *et al.* 2011; Miller and Schofield 2003).<sup>2</sup>

Researchers have demonstrated that one of the outcomes of internal divisions within a party can be changes in party policy preferences (Harmel and Janda 1994; Harmel and Tan 2003). Viewing this through the lens of an opportunity structure for the party, we would expect that as internal divisions increase, party leaders will use this as a cue to change the policy direction of the party. Further, it might be expected that party leaders would seek to change the policy direction of the party to a middle ground between the different internal divisions, hoping to defuse the division, and bring the party together by appealing more broadly (see e.g. Somer-Topcu 2015; Van Heck 2016). This will help the party to attract more support. In particular, this may be expected for left–right policy domains as these policies have traditionally been heavily contested, and if party leaders do not mend party divisions regarding a traditional (i.e. left–right) policy area, they risk losing supporters to other parties.

This same expectation may not follow for the issue of European integration, however, as there has been a ‘permissive consensus’ among large, governing parties in favour of increased European integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Marks *et al.* 2002). This suggests that Europhilic supporters of these large, governing parties do not choose a party based on the issue of European integration but rather on traditional, left–right issues. This also indicates that the issue of European integration is likely less to be salient to Europhilic supporters of large, governing parties than left–right issues, and that these supporters are unlikely to abandon their party based on the issue of European integration. At the same time, divisions within parties on the issue of European integration may signal that European integration has become salient to some party supporters and that there is heightened dissatisfaction with the party leadership’s Europhilic stance.<sup>3</sup> As European integration is less salient to Europhilic voters, and more salient to Eurosceptic voters, it follows that incongruence between a party leadership’s stance and a party supporter’s stance on integration would have a greater influence on Eurosceptic supporters.<sup>4</sup> Thus, party leaders should respond to their Eurosceptic supporters by becoming more Eurosceptic in the hopes of keeping those supporters in the fold, which is our second hypothesis.

*H2: When parties are more divided on support for European integration, they will be more Eurosceptic.*

Beyond a desire to maintain their leadership position, party leaders must also be focused on the health of the political party. In particular, party leaders have the goal of leading the party to electoral success (see Strøm and Müller

1999). Thus, the position shifts of political parties are, in large degree, the result of deliberate steering by party leaders to achieve electoral success (see Adams *et al.* 2004; Budge 1994).

Importantly, in guiding the political party, leaders have two distinct constituencies to which they must listen – voters and internal party groups. If they only listen to voters' preferences, then they may isolate different groups within the party. Similarly, by only responding to the preferences of supporters or activists, they may alienate voters. The first scenario may endanger a party leader's position in leadership, while both scenarios may harm the party's overall vote-seeking potential, thus leaving a party leader in the difficult position of balancing the preferences of internal party groups (i.e. supporters, activists, etc.) and the preferences of voters. Indeed, van de Wardt (2014) finds that parties will focus less on the EU issue when their supporters are divided, preferring instead to focus on issues on which there is more consensus. Looking specifically at European integration, Steenbergen and Scott (2004) find that parties de-emphasise the issue when their position is further from that of the mean position of their supporters, defined as all voters who share the left–right orientation of the party. Schumacher *et al.* (2013), however, find that it is both party organisation – whether a party is activist-dominated – and mean party voter position that influences party position change. By appealing to both voters and activists, moreover, this signals that the party leader is seeking to maximise their vote share. This finding follows that of several researchers who argue that parties respond to multiple stimuli – voters, past election results, rival parties' policy shifts, and global economic conditions (e.g. Adams *et al.* 2004, 2009; Ezrow and Hellwig 2014).

As most parties desire to win elections (Downs 1957), it only follows that their leaders will respond to their different constituencies both inside and outside of the party. Building on Schumacher *et al.*'s (2013) research on parties' responsiveness to multiple stimuli, we thus argue that when an increase in aggregate public Euroscepticism is conditioned by divisions within a party on European integration, parties will shift their policy positions and become more Eurosceptic, which is our third and central hypothesis.<sup>5</sup>

*H3: When Euroscepticism among voters in the previous election ( $t-1$ ) is high and when intra-party division on support for European integration is also high, parties will become more Eurosceptic.*

## Research design

To measure our dependent variable, we use each party's position on the EU in its European Parliament election manifesto. This measure is derived from the Euromanifestos Project (EMP) data (Braun *et al.* 2010; Schmitt and Wüst 2012). The Euromanifestos Project codes 'quasi-sentences' from the European Parliament election manifestos of the different parties that take part

in the election as belonging to a particular policy dimension. Once a 'quasi-sentence' has been classified into a policy domain it is coded as either positive or negative.<sup>6</sup> The final Euromanifestos Project data reports the percentage of 'quasi-sentences' on a particular policy domain that are positive and negative, where applicable. This data is provided for the manifestos of parties that competed in the European Parliament elections from 1979 to 2009. Given the availability of data for our independent variables, we are only able to include the 1989–2009 Euromanifesto data. Our final dataset thus includes 121 parties in 20 EU member states across five elections.<sup>7</sup> As many of the parties appear more than once, we treat the data as panel data (Steenbergen *et al.* 2007).

The dependent variable – a party's position concerning the EU – is operationalised as the difference between the percentage of 'quasi-sentences' that are coded as positive towards the EU (*per108*) and the percentage of 'quasi-sentences' that are coded as negative (*per110*) towards the EU in each party's manifesto (see Schmitt and Wüst 2012). This procedure is common in the literature (see Braun *et al.* 2010; Klingemann *et al.* 2006; Williams and Spoon 2015). To increase the ease of substantive interpretation, and following Williams and Spoon (2015), we rescaled the dependent variable to range from 0 to 10,<sup>8</sup> with a larger value indicating that a party is more positive about the EU. Although this variable can theoretically range from 0 to 10, its range in our dataset is 3.60 (United Kingdom Independence Party in 1999) to 6.15 (*Parti Communiste Français* in 1999). The mean for this variable is 5.15, which is slightly pro-Europe, and the standard deviation is 0.32. As this variable is measured in a similar manner to that of Williams and Spoon (2015), the distribution is identical.

In order to test the above three hypotheses, we use three independent variables. The independent variable used in testing hypothesis 1 is derived from European Election Study (EES) data (Egmond *et al.* 2013; Schmitt *et al.* 1997, 2009; van der Eijk *et al.* 1993, 1999). The independent variable used to test hypothesis 2 is derived from the 1988 and 1992 Ray–Marks–Steenbergen (RMS) expert surveys (Ray 1999; Steenbergen and Marks 2007), and from the 1999, 2002, and 2006 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker *et al.* 2015).<sup>9</sup> Finally, the independent variable used in testing hypothesis 3 (our central hypothesis) uses a combination of European Election Study and RMS/CHES data.

The independent variable for hypothesis 1, which specifies that political parties respond to the level of Euroscepticism in a state, is the aggregate level of Euroscepticism in a state in a given year. This measure is based on the question 'Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad, don't know?' This question was asked in all European Election Studies from 1989 to 2009. We measure Euroscepticism as the percentage of respondents in a given EES Voter Study who answered this question with the response, 'a bad thing'.<sup>10</sup>

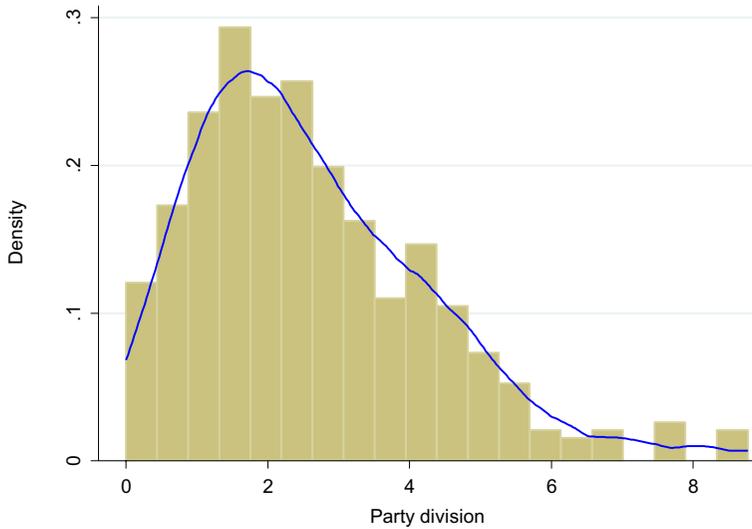
In hypothesis 1, we expect that a party's position concerning the EU at time  $t$  is influenced by aggregate Euroscepticism in a state at time  $t-1$ , thus we lag our

measure of aggregate Euroscepticism, matching aggregate Euroscepticism in a country at time  $t-1$  with party position on the EU at time  $t$ . We use a lagged variable, as previous research suggests that responsiveness to public attitudes is not simultaneous (see Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Spoon and Klüver 2014), rather, parties need time to respond to voters.<sup>11</sup> Theoretically, this variable can range from 0 to 1.0; the range of this variable in our dataset is 0.01 (Portugal in 1999) to 0.47 (the Czech Republic in 2004). The mean for this variable is 0.13 with a standard deviation of 0.10.

In hypothesis 2, we examine how party division on the issue of European integration affects party position on integration. We test this expectation using data on party divisions from the RMS/CHES. In these surveys, experts were asked to indicate the degree of division within a party on the issue of European integration. In the CHES, experts placed parties on a scale ranging from 0 (completely united) to 10 (completely divided). The earlier RMS expert surveys asked respondents to place political parties on a scale ranging from 1 (complete unity) to 5 (leadership position opposed by a majority of party activists). We re-scaled the RMS expert survey to range from 0 to 10.<sup>12</sup> Further, we matched party manifestos at each election with the last expert survey that occurred before that election or the concurrent expert survey where possible. Thus, the 1988 RMS expert survey was matched with party manifestos from the 1989 election, the 1992 RMS expert survey was matched with party manifestos from the 1994 election,<sup>13</sup> the 1999 CHES was matched with party manifestos from the 1999 election, the 2002 CHES was matched with party manifestos from the 2004 election, and the 2006 CHES was matched with party manifestos from the 2009 election. The party division variable, therefore, theoretically ranges from 0 to 10, with 0 being the most unified. The range of this variable in our dataset is 0 (multiple parties in multiple years) to 8.77 (*Socialdemokraterne*, Danish Social Democrats, in 1992). The mean for this variable is 2.67 with a standard deviation of 1.57. This variable is skewed towards unity, with most parties having a division value of less than 5 (see Figure 1).

Hypothesis 3 states that when both intra-party division on the issue of European integration is high and public Euroscepticism is also high, parties will be more Eurosceptic. To test this hypothesis, we generate an interaction term between the lagged overall level of Euroscepticism in a state and the level of division in each party on the issue of European integration.

We also include a number of control variables in the analysis. To begin, as divided parties in general will be more responsive to public Euroscepticism because the historical position for the majority of parties is support for the EU (see Marks *et al.* 2006) and division indicates an increasingly Eurosceptic party, we control for parties whose default position is Euroscepticism. We thus include a dummy variable for those parties that can be considered single-issue Eurosceptic parties and are seen as 'associative issue owners' (Walgrave *et al.* 2012) on the issue of European integration, in that there is a spontaneous



**Figure 1.** Distribution of party division.

Note. The figure shows the distribution of the party division variable. The solid line is the Kernel density plot.

association between an anti-European position and these parties in the minds of many voters.<sup>14</sup>

We incorporate into the analysis several additional variables that focus on party and party system characteristics. First, to account for the possibility that a party's left–right position influences its position concerning the EU (see Hooghe *et al.* 2002), we control for a party's position on the left–right spectrum at time  $t$ .<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as evidence suggests that far-right parties, such as the French *Front National*, are opposed to European integration for reasons of national sovereignty (see e.g. Taggart 1998), we include a dichotomous variable indicating whether a party is part of the far-right party family using the EMP categorisations.<sup>16</sup> Second, following previous research (Williams and Spoon 2015), we include variables that control for a party's size and its status as a member of government. Political party size is measured as the percentage of the vote that the party received in the last national election prior to an EP election. A party's status as a member of government is measured as a dichotomous variable with a value of 1 if that party is a member of the national government at the time of the EP election. We expect larger parties to be more responsive and governing parties to be less responsive to public Euroscepticism. Third, as the importance of the issue of EU integration to each political party may influence its position on the EU, we have included a variable denoting the salience of this issue for the parties. This measure is derived from the RMS/CHES data. Similar to the above measure of party division, experts were asked to rate the importance of the EU integration issue for each party.<sup>17</sup> This variable ranges

from 2.15 to 10 and the mean value is 6.58. Fourth, it is possible that political parties are responding to the positions of other parties within the system (see Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009). Therefore, we include a lagged measure of the average EU position of the party system, excluding the focal party. This measure is based on the re-scaled lagged dependent variable, and ranges from 4.44, the most anti-EU (Greece in 1994), to 5.95, the most pro-EU (Portugal in 1999).

We also include several time-related and contextual variables. First, we use a dummy variable denoting whether an observation occurred before or after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty, which was signed in December 2007, reformed the legislative procedures of the European Union, increasing the policy-making powers of the European Parliament. These changes led to rising Euroscepticism among both parties and voters. Thus, the Lisbon Treaty dummy variable controls for the possibility of an 'era effect' for all observations that occur after its signing in 2007 (i.e. Euromanifestos from the 2009 EP election). Second, we expect that once a country has adopted the euro, parties in that country will be more pro-EU. Thus, we include a dummy variable indicating whether the euro had been introduced as the common currency in a particular member state at a given time. Third, we control for the length of a state's membership in the EU in years. As length of EU membership may have a quadratic effect on party position, we also include the squared term. Finally, to account for the possible effect of the economy on party Euroscepticism, we include a control for GDP/capita in the country at the previous European Parliament election. The data for this variable is derived from the World Bank (2016) and is in 2016 US dollars. See the Appendix for the descriptive statistics of all variables included in the analysis.

Our dependent variable is normally distributed, indicating that an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model is most appropriate. Due to the time-series cross-sectional nature of the data, it is possible that the dependent variable at time  $t-1$  influences the dependent variable at time  $t$ . Thus, we need to consider including a lagged version of our dependent variable in the analysis. However, as the use of OLS regression with a lagged dependent variable will reduce our  $N$  significantly, and may lead to issues with autocorrelation (Plümper *et al.* 2005), we rely upon a Prais-Winsten transformation technique for OLS with robust standard errors. A Prais-Winsten regression is a feasible generalised least squares regression that addresses autoregressive(1)s and, through transformation, is able to use the first observation that would otherwise be lost by using a lagged term. Furthermore, as our data includes parties nested within countries and years, which may result in the error terms violating the assumption that data is independently and identically distributed, we clustered our standard errors by country-year.

## Results

We present the results for hypotheses 1 and 2 in Model 1 (Table 1). As lower values of the dependent variables indicate more Eurosceptic manifestos, a negative

**Table 1.** Party responsiveness to Euroscepticism

DV: Party EU position at $t_0$	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Coeff.	Std. Err.
Euroscepticism $t_{-1}$	-0.262	0.307	0.372	0.490	0.296	0.569
Party division	0.010	0.015	0.042*	0.024	0.015	0.028
Party division* Euroscepticism	.	.	-0.217*	0.125	-0.216*	0.121
Eurosceptic party	-1.026***	0.238	-1.071***	0.244	.	.
Left-right position of party $t_0$	0.052**	0.024	0.053**	0.023	-0.011	0.030
Right-wing party	-0.222**	0.104	-0.227**	0.103	.	.
Party size	0.292	0.182	0.336*	0.180	0.122	0.190
Government party	0.064*	0.033	0.064*	0.034	0.008	0.034
EU salience	0.012	0.015	0.009	0.014	0.010	0.016
Avg. EU position in party system $t_{-1}$	-0.142	0.101	-0.145	0.102	0.000	0.109
Lisbon Treaty	-0.063*	0.036	-0.061*	0.036	-0.072	0.056
Euro	-0.035	0.050	-0.036	0.049	-0.027	0.076
GDP/capita	-0.002	0.002	-0.002	0.002	-0.001	0.003
Years in EU	0.002	0.007	0.003	0.006	0.000	0.010
Years in EU <sup>2</sup>	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Constant	5.588***	0.530	5.529***	0.534	5.282***	0.528
N	276		276		162	
R-squared	0.906		0.899		0.873	
Rho	0.368		0.348		0.249	
Clusters	53		53		51	

Note: Table entries are Prais-Winsten regression coefficients correcting for panel-specific autocorrelation in error terms over one period (AR1) with panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the party's position on the EU.

\* $p \leq 0.10$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

coefficient suggests that the variable leads to a more Eurosceptic manifesto. The coefficient for the public Euroscepticism variable (H1) in Model 1 is negative, but statistically insignificant. The coefficient for the party division variable (H2) in Model 1 is positive, indicating that when parties are more divided they are more supportive of the EU in their manifestos. Although this finding is contrary to our expectation, it is also statistically insignificant. Albeit somewhat surprising, these results demonstrate that neither the level of public Euroscepticism nor divisions within the party *alone* influence a party's position on European integration.<sup>18</sup> This follows extant research on parties' positions on the EU (see Williams and Spoon 2015) and that parties respond to multiple stimuli (see Schumacher *et al.* 2013).

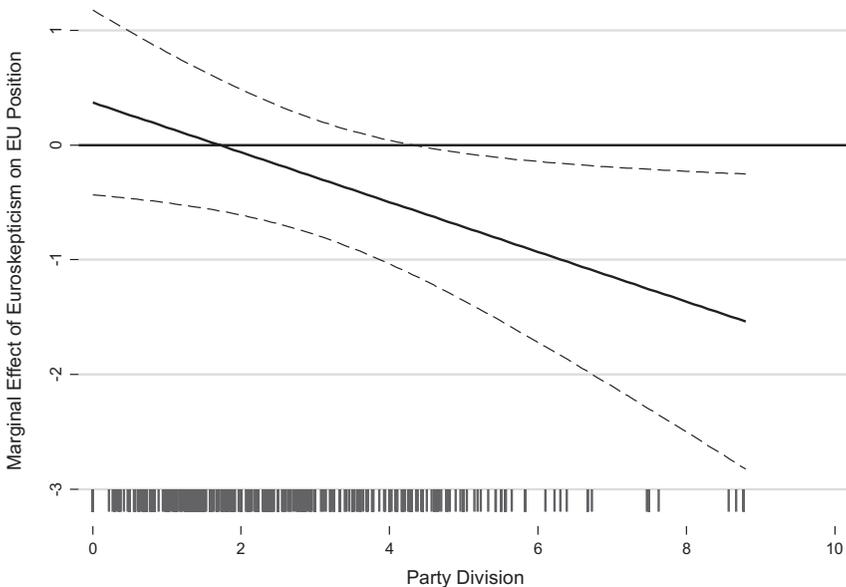
Turning to hypothesis 3, Model 2 (in Table 1) presents the results of our central argument – that a party's responsiveness to public Euroscepticism is conditioned on intra-party divisions. The interaction term is negative and statistically significant. This finding supports hypothesis 3, indicating that as parties become more divided on the issue of European integration, they are more responsive to public Euroscepticism.

To further support hypothesis 3, we performed a robustness check of our results in which we exclude niche and communist parties from the analysis.

We do this as our theory suggests that the traditional position of large, mainstream European parties is support for the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Marks *et al.* 2002), with division indicating increasing Euroscepticism among those in the party. However, niche parties and communist parties may tend towards Euroscepticism rather than support for the EU.<sup>19</sup> Model 3 (in Table 1) displays the results of this analysis with niche party and communist parties removed from the sample.

As Model 3 illustrates, the interaction between party division on the issue of European integration and public Euroscepticism remains negative and statistically significant even after removing niche and communist parties from the analysis. These findings further confirm hypothesis 3 and follow our theoretical expectation that party division on the issue of European integration influences the effect of public Euroscepticism on party positions.<sup>20</sup>

As recommended by Brambor *et al.* (2006), we have computed a marginal effects plot to demonstrate how party division on the issue of European integration conditions the relationship between public Euroscepticism and party Euroscepticism. Figure 2 (based on the results from Model 2) shows the marginal effect of public Euroscepticism at time  $t-1$  on party Euroscepticism at time  $t$  as party division concerning European integration varies. The 90% confidence intervals are represented by the dashed lines and the distribution of the party division variable is reported using tick marks along the x-axis.



**Figure 2.** Effect of public Euroscepticism on party Euroscepticism as party division varies. Note. This figure is based on Model 2. It shows the marginal effect of voters' Euroscepticism on party EU position as party division varies. The dashed lines are the 90% confidence intervals. The tick marks along the x-axis are the distribution of the party division variable.

As Figure 2 demonstrates, public Euroscepticism has a greater effect on party Euroscepticism as parties become more divided on the issue of European integration. When parties are more unified, the effect of public Euroscepticism on the position of political parties regarding the European Union is not discernible from 0. However, as party division surpasses 4.0 (about 1 standard deviation from the mean), we can say with 90% confidence that parties become more Eurosceptic. There is a clear substantive marginal effect of public Euroscepticism on party positions regarding the EU, with party support for European integration decreasing by about 0.5 points or 5%.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, as party division reaches 6.0 (about 2 standard deviations from the mean), party support for European integration drops by a full point, or 10%. This suggests that when party division is greater than average, political parties become more responsive to public attitudes regarding the European Union. This further confirms our theoretical expectation that increased Euroscepticism among intra-party groups amplifies the importance of responding to public Euroscepticism for a party.

To illustrate this relationship, we can examine two British parties. In 1999, the UK had the eighth highest level of public Euroscepticism in the dataset at 23.1%. The Liberal Democrats had a very low party division score of 1.88 and a relatively EU-supportive party Euroscepticism score of 5. Conversely, in the same year, the Conservatives had an exceptionally high party division score of 5.00 (a score in the 92nd percentile of our dataset) and a party Euroscepticism score of 4.84, which is in the top quarter of observations in our dataset. Thus, the Conservative Party, which was more divided on the issue of European integration, was also more responsive to public Euroscepticism than were the less divided Liberal Democrats. It is perhaps this division within the party that encouraged David Cameron to agree to hold a referendum on the UK's exit from the European Union in June 2016.<sup>22</sup>

Beyond our central findings, several control variables have statistically significant effects on party Euroscepticism. First, in both Models 1 and 2, the dichotomous variables for right-wing and Eurosceptic parties are both negative and significant, indicating that these parties are less supportive of the EU. Second, in both models, the results regarding the continuous left-right variable demonstrate that right-wing parties are more supportive of the European Union. This finding, although surprising on its surface, is most likely due to the fact that many right-wing parties (i.e. the *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*, the French Union for a Popular Movement, or the *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, German Christian Democratic Union) are mainstream parties which tend to be more pro-Europe (see Bakker *et al.* 2015). Third, in Models 1 and 2, the coefficient for a party's governing status is positive and significant, and the coefficient for party size is significant in Model 2 (and is just outside of the 10% level of significance in Model 1). This finding follows previous literature (Marks *et al.* 2002), which has shown that larger parties and

government parties tend to be more pro-EU. Finally, among our contextual variables, only the dummy variable denoting whether an observation is after the signing of the Lisbon Treaty is significant in both models. This result suggests that parties were more Eurosceptic after the Lisbon Treaty was signed. This supports findings in previous studies (Williams and Spoon 2015).

## Conclusion

Following recent research (see Arnold *et al.* 2012; Williams and Spoon 2015; also see Steenbergen and Scott 2004; Steenbergen *et al.* 2007), we have argued that parties respond to public Euroscepticism. However, we find that party responsiveness to public Euroscepticism is not uniform across all parties (for similar results, see Williams and Spoon 2015). In this article, we have posited that certain internal party characteristics influence the relationship between public Euroscepticism and party Euroscepticism. More specifically, we hypothesised that parties will become more Eurosceptic when the public is more Eurosceptic *and* when the party is more divided on the issue of EU integration. Indeed, our findings, based on data from the European Election Study, the Euromanifestos Project, and the RMS/CHES, demonstrate support for this argument. We find that party division on the issue of European integration conditions party responsiveness to public Euroscepticism. When a party is more divided on the issue of European integration and public Euroscepticism in a state is higher, that party will be more Eurosceptic.

These findings provide important insights for our understanding of political responsiveness, European parliamentary elections, and the nature of democratic governance in the European Union. Regarding political responsiveness, our results lend greater support to previous research (see Arnold *et al.* 2012; Steenbergen and Scott 2004; Steenbergen *et al.* 2007), which found that political parties respond to more than the public's general left–right positioning. Moreover, the above findings build on extant research (see e.g. Williams and Spoon 2015) on what explains party responsiveness to public attitudes towards European integration. Perhaps most importantly, we offer further evidence that parties respond to multiple stimuli, and that these stimuli amplify each other's effect (see Adams *et al.* 2004, 2009; Ezrow and Hellwig 2014; Schumacher *et al.* 2013). These results, moreover, demonstrate that to understand a party's position on a given issue, it is crucial to consider factors both inside and outside of the party.

Second, our findings have implications for our understanding of the importance of European Parliament elections. It has long been understood that parties view EP elections as second-order (see Reif 1984; Reif and Schmitt 1980). As such, parties are less responsive to public opinion and attitudes in the run-up to, and during, these elections (Spoon and Klüver 2014). The above results, taken in tandem with the findings of Williams and Spoon (2015), suggest that

political parties are actually responsive to public attitudes during EP elections, at least on the issue of European integration. This further implies that European elections may be growing in importance to both the public and political parties, as the introduction of the *Spitzenkandidaten* in the 2014 EP elections may have demonstrated (see Corbett 2014; Hobolt 2014), thus offering some evidence that they are no longer wholly second-order elections.

Finally, these results address the concern of many scholars, who have argued for decades that the EU suffers from underdeveloped democratic institutions, or a democratic deficit (see e.g. Føllesdal and Hix 2006). As democracy is predicated upon the responsiveness of policy-makers and political parties to the public's attitudes and preferences (see Dahl 1971), and party responsiveness is considered to be an important aspect of democratic linkage (Dalton *et al.* 2011; Lawson 1980). Our findings that political parties in the European Parliament are responding to the public's policy preferences indicate that the European democratic deficit may be less pronounced than previously believed.

Although this study provides significant insight into party responsiveness in the EU, there are still several unanswered questions. First, we would like to examine how the existence of a Eurosceptic party in a system influences political party responsiveness to Eurosceptic attitudes. That is, when a Eurosceptic party exists in a party system, does this cause other parties to be more responsive to the level of Euroscepticism? Second, it is important that future research examine how changes in public Euroscepticism lead to changes in party positions on European integration. This can provide us with a more direct test of party responsiveness. Third, it may prove fruitful to examine party responsiveness in EP elections regarding issues beyond European integration. More precisely, do political parties discuss specific policy areas in EP manifestos to a greater degree when the public prefers that the EU address a particular policy area? Fourth, a more thorough examination of how the salience of the EU integration issue for the party conditions the effect of public Euroscepticism on party Euroscepticism will be useful. It would also be interesting to examine how the salience of the EU integration issue in a party influences the conditional relationship of public Euroscepticism and party division on party Euroscepticism. Finally, although we demonstrate that political parties respond to public attitudes during EP elections; it is still necessary to develop a clearer understanding of how changes to party positions affect voter decisions in EP elections. Party responsiveness only matters for democratic governance in as much as the public is aware of party position changes and base their vote upon these changes (see e.g. Adams *et al.* 2011; Somer-Topcu 2015). Thus, future studies must examine whether changes to party positions results in changes in vote choice.

## Notes

1. Importantly, as this study builds on Williams and Spoon's (2015) findings, we test a similar baseline hypothesis.
2. While it would be interesting to examine party responsiveness to Euroscepticism among party supporters versus the mass public, this analysis is precluded by data restrictions. There are not enough survey respondents for each party to determine an accurate measure of Euroscepticism among party supporters. This is particularly problematic for smaller parties. Further, it is also important to note that other studies have found that parties do not respond differently to voters and party supporters (see e.g. Green 2011; Klüver and Spoon 2016; Williams and Spoon 2015).
3. There are certainly exceptions to this trend. The British Conservatives' support for the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union is one such example.
4. Note that although it is difficult to measure the attitudes of party supporters regarding the issue of European integration using public opinion data (see note 2), measuring party division allows us to identify a split between party leaders and party supporters.
5. We recognise that the relationship between public opinion, intra-party division, and party position may be iterative. While these are certainly interesting relationships, examining them is beyond the scope of this study. Future research should look at how parties' positions influence public opinion and intra-party divisions.
6. According to the Euromanifestos coordinators, 'a "quasi-sentence" is a set of words containing one and only one political idea' (EES 2009: 20). Importantly, there are some dimensions, such as *per501*, which focuses on environmental protection, that are only positive.
7. The countries included in our analysis are: Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
8. We rescaled the EU position variable using the following equation:  $(\text{Difference in Positive and Negative Comments}) + 100) / 20$ .
9. Combining the RMS and CHES datasets has been used by other scholars, most notably by Edwards (2007, 2009).
10. We follow other research that has measured Euroscepticism in this manner (see e.g. Williams and Spoon 2015). In calculating the aggregate level of Euroscepticism in a state, those who answered 'Don't Know' were removed from the sample.
11. We recognise that five years is a considerable time lag and that parties may be responding to voters' more recent preferences. But, as there is variation in the timing of when parties craft their manifestos before an election, it is not clear how much of a lag is appropriate (see Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008). Thus, for consistency across parties and countries, we use the previous EES to measure voter Euroscepticism. As a robustness check, we also ran the models with concurrent Euroscepticism and the interaction term was only significant when the sample was restricted to non-niche, communist, or right-wing parties.
12. Following Preston and Colman (2000), rescaling was done using the equation  $(\text{original variable} - 1) / (\text{number of response categories} - 1) * 10$ .
13. As the first election of MEPs in Sweden, Austria, and Finland occurred in 1995 and 1996, respectively, the 1992 RMS expert survey was matched with the 1995 party manifestos in Sweden and the 1996 RMS expert survey was matched with the 1996 party manifestos in Austria and Finland.

14. The parties we code as Eurosceptic are the following: the United Kingdom Independence Party, the Swedish *Junilistan*, the Danish *JuniBevægelsen* and *Folkebevægelsen mod EU* parties, and the Austrian *Liste Dr. Hans-Peter Martin*.
15. To operationalise a party's position on the left–right spectrum, we used data from the Euromanifestos Project. This data provides a left–right score (RILE) for each party in the dataset. RILE scores range from -100 to +100 with -100 being the most left. We rescaled these data to a 0 to 10 scale using the equation  $((\text{RILE}) + 100)/20$ . As a robustness check, we also re-ran our analysis using the CHES left–right measure. The results for both our main variables of interest and for the left–right variable remain unchanged.
16. The correlation between the RILE score and the far-right party variable is only 0.18.
17. Data from the 1988 and 1992 (1996 in the case of Austria) RMS surveys and the 1999, 2002, and 2006 CHES surveys were used to develop this measure. The response scale for the question of EU integration salience differed across these surveys and therefore was rescaled using the same formula used to rescale the party division variable.
18. It is also important to keep in mind that as party division on the issue of European integration is, by definition, a split in the party on this issue, it is logical to expect the party to take a rather centrist stance on European integration, and therefore be neither overly supportive of the EU nor overly opposed to the EU.
19. We identified niche and communist parties using the party family coding from the Euromanifestos Project data. A party is considered a niche party or communist party if it was coded as a green party, (post)communist party, nationalist party, regional party, or special interest party in the EMP data (see Adams *et al.* 2006). As Eurosceptic and far-right parties are considered niche parties, they are also removed from the analysis, and therefore the dummy variables denoting whether a party is Eurosceptic or far-right are not included in the analysis.
20. As an additional robustness check, we follow Greene (2016; see also Hellwig 2012; Vavreck 2009; Williams *et al.* 2016) and include an additional interaction term between GDP/capita and party incumbency in Models 2 and 3. Our results remain unchanged. Further, the interaction between GDP/capita and party incumbency status is statistically insignificant in both models.
21. Following the suggestion of Berry *et al.* (2012), we graphed the effect of party division on party Euroscepticism as public Euroscepticism varies (x-axis). This is displayed in Figure A1. As can be seen, there is a negative effect of level of party division on party position regarding the EU; however, with the exception of the rare event when public Euroscepticism is 0, the marginal effect of the level of party division on party EU position cannot be differentiated from 0. This supports our hypothesis that increased party division amplifies the effect of public Euroscepticism. However, increasing public Euroscepticism does not amplify the effect of party division.
22. We recognise that Cameron's decision was perhaps equally influenced by increasing support for UKIP (UK Independence Party) and concern over losing voters over this issue.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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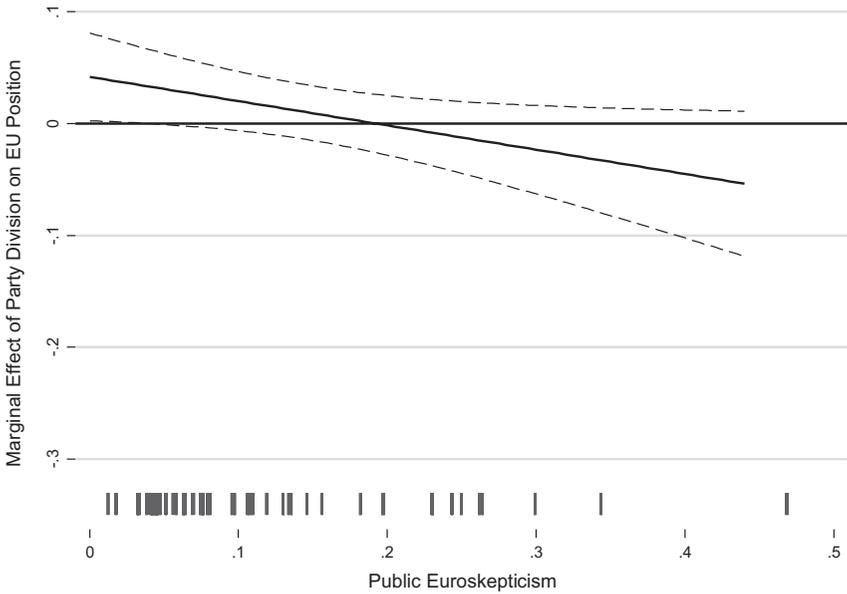
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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Descriptive statistics.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Party position on EU $t_0$	276	5.155	0.321	3.597	6.154
Party division	276	2.670	1.565	0	8.770
Euroscepticism $t_1$	276	0.130	0.096	0.012	0.470
Left–right position of party $t_0$	276	4.352	0.847	2.395	6.796
Eurosceptic party	276	0.011	0.104	0	1
Right-wing party	276	0.080	0.271	0	1
Party size $t_1$	276	0.154	0.135	0.003	0.506
Government party	276	0.330	0.471	0	1
EU salience	276	6.443	1.552	2.15	10
Avg. EU position in party $t_1$	276	5.119	0.167	4.437	5.953
Lisbon Treaty	276	0.359	0.480	0	1
Euro	276	0.406	0.492	0	1
Years in EU	276	25.964	14.709	5	52
GDP/capita	276	20.881	12.020	4.804	74.971



**Figure A1.** Effect of party division on party Euroscepticism as public Euroscepticism varies  
 Note: This figure is based on Model 2. It shows the marginal effect of party division on party EU position as public Euroscepticism varies. The dashed lines are the 90% confidence intervals. The tick marks along the x-axis are the distribution of the public Euroscepticism variable.