Requested or Required: The Changing Composition of Roll Call Votes in the European Parliament

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Abstract

Roll call votes are widely used to study the behaviour of elected representatives under various conditions. However, in most legislatures, most votes are not recorded. Researchers' ability to generalize from roll call votes, therefore, depends on the similarity of voting behaviour between roll calls and other votes. Differences in voting pattern over time may be due to changes in coalition-pattern, differences in the agenda, or changing in the type of votes that get recorded, as a result of changes in the request-pattern or in procedural rules. Focusing on the European Parliament (EP), we demonstrate the pattern of recorded votes from 2004 to 2023, highlighting the difference between roll calls on part and whole votes. Roll call on whole votes have become more prevalent due to rule change requiring roll calls on a growing share of final votes. In contrast, roll calls on part votes must be requested. Comparing the effect of increasing the roll call prevalence across these different type of votes, and logics, we find no effect of roll call prevalence on neither vote margins, loyalty-scores nor unity scores on final votes. In contrast, for part votes, we do find that an increase in roll call prevalence correlates with increases in vote margins, loyalty-scores and unity-scores. As a result, differences in observed patterns of roll call voting over time may be due to different pattern in the recording of votes as well as behaviour changes. The former set of differences should be accounted for before concluding on the latter.

Introduction

In a roll call vote (RCV), the vote choice of each individual legislator is recorded. This makes RCVs a valuable source of information. Scholars use RCVs to infer preferences of individual legislators, to measure party cohesion and the dimensionality of the policy space (e.g. Godbout and Høyland, 2017). The measures derived from RCVs are then often used to study various aspects of legislative politics (Carey, 2009). In most legislatures, some votes are taken by roll call and some by other means such as a show of hands. Moreover, in many legislatures the default voting rule vary by procedure. So, while it is possible to identify a standard operating procedure within a parliament at a given point in time, it is not uncommon that a large proportion of votes as subject to a non-standard operating procedure (Hug, Wegmann and Wuest, 2015). When analysing voting in parliaments, it is essential to pay attention to how the rules of procedure, and potential reforms of these rules during the period under investigation, may influence the recording of votes, as well as legislative behaviour on those votes. Of particular relevance is the prevalence of recorded votes, rather than the absolute number of recorded votes (Ainsley et al., 2020; Hansen and Debus, 2012).

Although the rules of procedure regulate all aspects of parliamentary activities not regulated in higher laws and regulations, we focus on one particular aspect, the recording of individual voting decisions. In the European Parliament, these rules have recently been revised several times. As we will see, these revisions has resulted in changes in the the composition of roll call votes. We track the evolution of the rules of procedure over two decades, from 2003 to 2023 (for an detailed study of changes in the rules of procedure in the early parliaments, see Kreppel, 2002). Moreover, we

collect all votes from 2004 to 2023, showing how the composition of votes, recorded and not recorded, has evolved over time and how this evolution vary across vote-types depending, at least partially, on these rule-changes. We then show how the prevalence of roll call votes vary across policy areas and type of votes, partly as a result of these changes in the rules. We then demonstrate that the prevalence of roll call votes have differential effects depending on whether roll calls are requested or required. Only in the former case will it impact behaviour. In particular, we find that and increase in roll call prevalence correlates with larger vote splits, political group voting loyalty, and voting unity on part votes, which are always requested, while not on whole votes, which to a larger extent extent required. This finding questions existing studies that rely on reforms to the recording of final votes to make inferences about the representativeness of the whole population of roll call votes (Yordanova and Mühlböck, 2015; Hix, Noury and Roland, 2018).

In the first section we review the literature on challenges to inference when studying voting in parliaments where not all votes are recorded. While it is true that roll call votes are the only type of votes that allow for systematic study of individual level behaviour (Hix, 2002), it is unclear to what extent we can generalize to the population of all votes unless we have a clear understanding of the process by which some votes end up being roll called, while others do not (Carrubba et al., 2006). Unfortunately, most observers are not blessed with access to legislator level voting behaviour on votes that are not recorded by request or by procedure. Those that are, find that the recording of votes have a non-ignorable effect on how legislators vote (Hug, 2010). We expand upon this debate, and map out the different directions already attempted in order to mitigate this non-ignorable effect.

Then, in the second section we map out two competing theoretical accounts of the effect of recorded voting on legislative behaviour. The discipling account maintain that legislators are more attentive to the expectations of their principals when votes are recorded than when they are not. As a result, they are more likely to follow instructions and vote the party line on these votes than on unrecorded votes. In turn, party leaders are more likely to issue instructions and pressure their rank-and-file members on these votes. Also, they will request the recording of votes that are of particular interest to the party, given that they expect that their instructions and pressure on a recorded vote are more likely to secure them the outcome that they seek than what they would expect if the vote went unrecorded (Carrubba, Gabel and Hug, 2008). Alternatively, one may see the recording of votes as a signalling devise in a position-taking game (Snyder and Ting, 2005). Here, in a game between legislators, their electoral constituency and an interest group, the recording of votes allow legislators to credible commit to a policy that their electoral constituency, or electoral principal, prefer, thereby increasing their chance of being re-elected. In contrast, it the vote is not recorded, the legislators will be unable to prove that they voted in line with the interest of their constituency. As a result, they might as well take the compensation from the interest group and forego being re-elected. We spell out the empirical implications from these two theories for what we should expect to observe in terms of observable patterns in roll call votes.

In the third section, we provide an overview of the changes since 2003 in the EP rules of procedure as it pertains to roll call voting. Since 2003, there have been several noteworthy changes to the rules of procedure in this regard. One important gradual change has been the mandated recording of a large share of the final votes. Another

change has been the limitation of the scope for using roll call requests to disrupt the normal functioning of the Parliament. A third key change is the emergency procedures put in place to allow the Parliament to operate during the Covid-19 pandemic (Crego and Manko, 2022). We discuss how we expect these procedural changes to influence patterns of legislative behaviour.

Then, in the fourth section, we present the extensive data we collected on a range of different aspects of legislative behaviour in the European Parliament. We cover the period from the beginning of the 6^{th} Parliament in 2004 up to the present. Our data differ from Hix, Noury and Roland (2006), the most extensive data-collection effort in the context of the EP, as we have detailed data on all votes, not only roll call votes. Existing efforts to collect voting info beyond roll call votes have been limited to six months (Carrubba et al., 2006) or a year (Kaniok and Mocek, 2017), respectively. Our dataset currently span 19 years, and have a larger set of variables. We discuss our approach to this data-collection effort and present the main descriptive features of the data.

In the fifth section, we present our analysis of an the prevalence of roll calls matter for the margin of the vote splits, political group loyalty and and voting unity. We compare these effects across part and whole votes. The results show that an increase in prevalence of roll calls matter for the margin of the vote splits, political group loyalty and voting unity on part votes, but not for whole votes. These results raise some concern about the generalisably of studies of roll call requests that focus exclusively on prevalence of roll calls to all votes (Ainsley et al., 2020), as well as those studies that rely on reforms of the recording of whole votes to infer about the representativeness of all roll call votes (Yordanova and Mühlböck, 2015; Hix, Noury

and Roland, 2018).

The partial observability of legislative behaviour

Most applied research that use RCVs do not actively assess the representativeness of the RCV sample vis-a-vis the whole population of votes (Ainsley et al., 2020). Often, such information is not easily available from parliamentary records (Carey, 2009). However, there is a large literature that addresses the representativeness of RCVs, the ways in which RCV requests may change voting behavior and the downstream consequences of biased samples on three of the most commonly derived measures from RCV data: party cohesion scores, ideal point estimates, and the dimensionality of the policy space.

Generally, roll calls are not the most common type of votes in most legislatures (Ainsley et al., 2020). The absolute number of roll calls increases the less strict the requirements for requesting roll calls (Carey, 2009). However, RCV prevalence — the proportion of RCVs of the population of all votes — is unrelated to the RCV request threshold and, therefore, one cannot conclude that more RCVs correspond to a more representative sample or that rule changes that lower thresholds make samples more representative (Ainsley et al., 2020).

In an effort to uncover to what extent RCV requests are likely to influence voting behavior, Trumm (2015) surveys MEPs on their intention to defect from the political group position, and finds that MEPs report that they are less likely to defect, and vote with the national party, when voting is recorded. In their empirical analyses of RCVs, Høyland (2010) and Hug (2016) find evidence of party pressure, whereas

Finke (2015) and Thierse (2016) conclude that the pattern of roll call requests are more in line with a signalling logic.

Scholars have also addressed the consequences of selection bias in RCVs theoretically and empirically. Carrubba, Gabel and Hug (2008) develop a formal model where the party leadership request RCVs to discipline their rank and file. The decision to request RCVs depends on the heterogeneity in members' ideal points in a one-dimensional space. Their model demonstrates bias in cohesion scores estimated from RCV data. Ainsley et al. (2020) develop a formal model where RCVs are requested to signal a position. Their Monte Carlo simulations show substantial bias in cohesion scores, ideal point estimates, and the dimensionality of the policy space.

Carrubba et al. (2006) evaluate the bias in roll call votes along three dimensions, identity of the political group requesting the roll call, policy issue (committee responsible for the proposal voted over), and legislative importance (Legislative or Resolution). Along all of these three dimensions, it is highly unlikely, and rejected by χ^2 tests, that the roll call votes are requested proportionally to political group size; are equally representative of all policy areas, or primarily requested on the most important votes, procedure-wise. Political groups do not make requests in proportion their seat shares. Roll call votes are biased by policy areas. Moreover, as roll calls are more likely on resolutions than legislative votes, it is not the case that roll call represent the most consequential votes in terms policy-impact. Carrubba et al. (2006) conclude that roll call votes are a biased sample of all EP votes. Rather than being called at random, roll calls are requested for a reason. Carrubba et al. (2006) thus call for a theoretically informed account of roll call requests and how such requests influence subsequent voting-behaviour.

In a replication of the research design of Carrubba et al. (2006) on all votes from 2013, Kaniok and Mocek (2017) find that, in contrast to 1999, roll call votes are not substantively different from all other votes. In particular, they find that although there sometimes are significant differences, the magnitudes of those differences are not substantive. In their data, roll calls are not substantively more common on a particular type of vote or a particular policy-area. Their results also hold when final votes are excluded. However, they do not provide a systematic analysis of the distribution of roll call vote requests across political groups. They also acknowledge that there may be differences in the pattern of roll call requests across groups, even though there are no substantive differences across procedures or policy areas. Moreover, by replicating the research-design of Carrubba et al. (2006), Kaniok and Mocek (2017) limit themselves to descriptive analysis and χ^2 tests.

Other scholars have addressed the question of the empirical bias of roll call votes in the EP more directly. First, drawing on a reform in the rules of procedure which made roll call voting required on final legislative votes, Yordanova and Mühlböck (2015) compares MEPs political group loyalty in final legislative votes before and after this reform. Both the descriptive statistics and their fractional logit analysis of matched votes, focusing on the main political groups, indicate a positive effect of the reform on MEPs political group voting loyalty. The loyalty was higher when roll call voting occurred on all final votes than when roll calls had to be requested on final votes. They thus conclude that roll calls may, rather than providing an over-estimate of the groups voting loyalty, provide a depressed estimate of voting loyalty. In an analysis along similar lines, but with a different estimation approach, Hix, Noury and Roland (2018) do not find any systematic evidence of the reform on political

group voting cohesion. Moreover, they demonstrate that the positive effects found by Yordanova and Mühlböck (2015) may be sensitive to model specifications. They thus conclude that even if roll call votes are not representative of all votes, the bias is likely to be small and ignorable. Putting the findings of Kaniok and Mocek (2017) and Hix, Noury and Roland (2018) together, we may be tempted to conclude that the debate over roll call requests is much ado about nothing.

To sum up, there is a large literature on voting in parliaments, which relies on RCVs for the empirical analysis. To the extent that these studies are meant to paint a picture of parliamentary voting behaviour in general, one key assumption must hold: RCVs must be requested in a manner that allows the researcher to treat the selection process as-if random. As the critique presented in this section suggests, that is unlikely. Theoretically, roll calls can be seen as a disciplining tool for the party leadership to use in order to win votes, or as a signalling tool used to record a particular position, for example the party's unified stand against an unpopular policy. Neither of these logics are capable of producing as-if random data-sets of roll call votes. However, they do suggest that the higher the proportion of RCVs, the more representative the sample.

However, even if the proportion of RCVs is high, RCV samples may still be biased if the type of votes that are decided by roll call are systematically different from all other votes. For example, if all final votes are taken by RCV as is the case in the EP, then this sample differs from votes on amendments. Other structural differences could be on the vote type (legislation or resolutions in the EP) or policy areas. While the default approach is to lump all votes together, the most comprehensive comparison of roll call and total votes characteristics to date, covering one year of legislative activ-

ities in the EP, did show that the different vote types are not occurring at anything resembling proportionality. Coalition patterns may differ across types, procedure, and policy-areas, knowing the prevalence of roll call votes across as many observable characteristics as possible may help us one step along the route towards assessing the potential magnitude of the compositional part of the potential bias in RCVs. With this in mind, we describe the distribution of RCVs in the EP for the 2004 – 2023 period.

Theoretical accounts for the recording of votes

In this section, we account for two theoretical accounts for the recording of votes, the disciplining account and the signalling account. In the former, a request to record how legislators vote is made by political group leaders in order to induce a certain behaviour from the rank-and-file group members (Carrubba, Gabel and Hug, 2008). The key aspect is that it is easier for leaders to sanction their members for their behaviour when such behaviour is recorded for future reference than when it is not. Although certain other voting procedures, such as a show of hands, may allow those that are present to see who break rank with the party line, other voting mechanisms, such as electronic voting, or voice signal, make such observations less reliable (Saalfeld, 1995). Also, in this account, those that control the party nomination process, may draw on these records, and parliamentary group leaders may use the thereof, to induce otherwise unwilling members to toe the party line. In line with such an understanding of the role of recorded votes, Hix (2002) finds that, when receiving contrasting inducements, members of the European Parliament follow the lead from

the national party cue rather than the European level group leadership. Moreover, this effect grows stronger as the role of the national party leadership in the candidate selection process increases (Hix, 2004). By a similar logic, once rank-and-file members have started to defect on key votes, the sway of the party whip diminishes (Benedetto and Hix, 2007). Note however that Carrubba, Gabel and Hug (2008) are careful to note that parties are not necessary more unified on recorded than unrecorded votes, as they may be more divided on the votes where they request roll calls than on the votes where they do not. Along this logic, Hug (2016) tests the two-cutpoint ideal-point model proposed by Clinton, Jackman and Rivers (2004), and finds that there is more party pressure on these votes than on votes requested by other parties.

An alternative account is provided by signalling (Ainsley et al., 2020). Here, the rationale for requesting the recoding of votes is to publicly claim a position, or to publicly document the position taken by other actors. One version of this account link the rationale for requesting roll-calls to the extent of internal division within other parties. Put simple, parties request roll calls on votes where they are unified while others are divided, thereby threatening to expose this division unless the other party leader(s) put in an effort to unite the rank and file. An other version of the signalling logic focuses on the plausibility of a credible commitment in lieu of a roll call. Snyder and Ting (2005) model this as a game between the electorate, the legislators and a lobbyist. If voting is not recorded, legislators cannot credible commit to vote in the interest of the electorate and probably fail to secure re-election. As a result, they have an incentive to take to prize from the lobbyist and vote for the special interest. As this applies to all legislators, nobody is pivotal, so the prize they can demand from the lobbyist falls towards zero. However, if votes are recorded, the electorate

can see how the legislators vote, and reward those that supported the constituency interest over that of the special interest and re-elect accordingly, or not. This will in turn increase the cost of the lobbying as fewer legislators are willing to take the prize. Legislators willing to forgo re-election, can thus demand a higher prize for supporting the special interest. It can thus be in the interest of the legislators to record, and publish how they vote.

Note that in the first account, the decision to record of a vote, is believed to affect the outcome of the vote, as the party leaders make such a request in an attempt to pressure some of its rank-and-file members to change how they cast their vote. In the second account, it is not clear that legislators will change their behaviour. The point is that with the recording of the vote, they will be able to prove to outsiders that they voted a particular way. However, in the latter account, it is clear that the legislators, as a collective, has an incentive to record their voting decisions.

This concludes our review of the literature and the theoretical accounts. We now move on to first describe the evolution in the rules of procedure as the pertains to roll call voting, before presenting the pattern of the recording of votes.

Roll Call Voting: Rules of Procedure

In this section, we review the changes to the recording of votes, and the possibility to make such requests in the period from 2003 to 2023. We will show that while roll call voting is being required on a growing share of whole votes, it has become more difficult to request many roll call on part-votes. These changes are likely to affect the pattern in recorded votes.

In the EP, voting can take place by show of hands or electronically. MEPs have voting boxes on their desks and identify themselves by inserting an ID card into the voting box. Some votes are electronic but only the aggregate result — the total amount of yes, no, and abstentions — is recorded and on secret votes, only the end result is recorded. Since 2009, all final votes on legislative reports must be by RCV. In addition, RCVs can be requested by a political group or by at least one-twentieth of the Parliament's component members. Requests can be made to the President of the EP until the night before the vote. In the period of study, 2004 – 2013, 95 percent of all requests are made by one group. However, sometimes more groups request at the same time. In a few rare cases, all seven groups requested simultaneously.

In the Rules of Procedure that guided legislative business prior to 2004, roll call was required on two related votes only, the investiture vote on the Commission, Rule 32(2), and on the vote to sanction the Commission, Rule 34(5) (see Hix and Gabel, 2002). In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, roll-call voting had become the standard operating procedure under the remote participation regime. In this section, we lay out the key changes to the Rules of Procedure that affected the use to roll call votes.

The 15^{th} edition of Rules of Procedure of February 2003, stipulates, by Rule 129(5) that votes that are subjected to roll call requests must be voted on separately. Whether roll call or not, when voting on amendments, those deemed furthest from the original text are voted on first. If adopted, all other amendments are deemed rejected. By rule 133, voting is normally by show of hand, using the electronic voting system if the outcome is unclear. But the president can, by Rule 135(1) decide that voting is to be carried out using the electronic voting system. Rule 135(2) specifies that if

the vote is electronic only the numerical result shall be recorded unless a roll call has been requested. Roll calls can be requested by a political group or 32 members the evening before the vote, by Rule 134(1). Although Rule 134(2) specifies that roll call shall be taken in alphabetical order over the alternatives "yes", "no", and "abstain", by Rule 135(3) roll calls can be taken electronically if a majority of the MEPs request it. However, by Rule 136, one-fifth of MEPs may request a secret vote, in which case it take priority over roll call.

Then, in the 16^{th} edition (September 2006), in the aftermath of the Southern and Eastern enlargement that resulting in an increase in the number of MEPs from 626 to 732, the number of individual MEPs required for requested a roll call increased from 32 to 37. This did in fact marginally lower the relative threshold from 5.11 percent to 5.06 percent. However, in October 2008, still the 16^{th} edition, Rule 19(1) clarifies that the President can end excessive use of separate, split and roll call votes where the intent is to prolong and obstruct. Also, by Rule 160(1) the number of MEPs required to file a roll call request increased to 40, resulting in a threshold of 5.5 percent.

Following the changes to the budgetary procedure in the Lisbon treaty, Rule 75d(6) makes it clear that the on budgetary conciliation, the joint text shall be subject to a single vote, by roll call, deemed adopted unless an absolute majority vote to reject (for an analysis of the reform of the annual budgetary procedure in Lisbon, see Benedetto and Høyland (2007) and Crombez and Høyland (2015)). More consequential for the composition of roll call votes was the introduction of Rule 166 which required that all single or final votes on legislative acts shall be by roll call using the electronic voting system. On a more technical nature, Rule 167(2) specified that roll calls shall be taken by the electronic system unless it is impossible for technical

reasons.

By the beginning of the 8^{th} Parliament, in 2014, the roll call requirement was further extended to include all single or final votes that were based on a report, unless in the context of MEPs immunity. Within the space of 5 years, the EP goes from only require roll call on two very specific votes on the Commission, to require roll call vote on almost all final or single votes. This is a remarkable change indeed, which perhaps is best understood along the credible commitment signalling logic proposed by Snyder and Ting (2005), in particular if seen in combination with the increase, although from a low base, in MEPs and political groups, reference to voting on social media and in the run-up to EP elections (Fazekas et al., 2021).

In January 2017, Rule 180(1) changed the number of MEPs required to request roll call to the "low-threshold" of one-twentieth, (5 percent) of the Parliament's members, i.e $751/20 = 38$ pre-Brexit and $705/20 = 35$ post-Brexit. Moreover, Rule 180(2) specifies that no political group may table more than 100 roll call requests per part-session. Also, Rule 164a now clearly specifies that the President has the power to strike down roll call votes that would prolong or obstruct the proceedings.

Finally, following the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020, the Bureau opted for a remote voting procedure by email. To ensure that MEPs could verify that their votes were correctly registered, it was agreed that all votes, unless otherwise specified in the rules of procedure, should be taken by roll call. These changes were formalized in changes to the Rules of Procedure in September 2021 (Rule 237c), where it specified specified that the remote voting procedure should be technical neutral, but must enable MEPs to verify that their votes are counted as cast. That is for sure easiest via roll call voting.

To sum up, in the space of three parliamentary terms, roll call votes went from requiring a separate request to be required by procedural rule on almost all final votes, while the scope for requesting multiple roll call votes on amendments and separate votes became more limited. How and to what extent did these changes affected the pattern of coalition formation and political group cohesion across requested and required roll call votes will be addressed next.

European Parliament Voting Data

In order to assess the effect of these procedural on the pattern of roll call requests, we need data on all votes in the European Parliament, both those that were recorded and those that were not. Of course, in the latter case, we do not have information on how MEPs voted, but we do have information about what the votes were on. We can use this information to assess the prevalence of roll call votes over time and across different categories of votes. Then, in the next section, we will rely on data from roll call votes to assess to what extent, and under which conditions, the picture painted by roll call votes vary with roll call prevalence.

We have develop a series of R-scripts to collect, parse and systematize the information available from the European Parliament web-pages and the EU legislative observatory. The resulting data-sets contain information from the beginning of the 6^{th} European Parliament in July 2004 until the fourth year of the 9^{th} EP in April 2023. This approach to data-collection allows us to update it regularly, as long as the EP does not change their policy on how information is published and used.

We start by providing an overview of voting across parliamentary terms, classified

Parliament	Not Recorded	Recorded	Proportion
EP 6	23,352	6,086	0.207
EP 7	21,001	6,638	0.240
EP 8	22,945	9,893	0.301
EP 9	8,109	14,425	0.640

Table 1: Count of votes in the European Parliament, not recorded and recorded, as well as the prevalence of recorded votes by parliament.

by voting technology, roll call vote or not roll call vote, in Table 1. We see that the number of unrecorded votes was fairly stable between 21,000 and 23,400 in the three parliaments from 2004 - 2019, but is significantly lower in the current, ninth parliament. In contrast, there has been a steady increase in recorded votes in the period. From just over 6,000 in EP6, with a small increase to 6,600 in EP7, before a 50 per cent increase to almost 9,900 in EP8, and another close to 50 per cent increase in EP9. The prevalence of roll call votes have increased accordingly. From under 21 per cent in EP6, via 24 and 30 per cent in EP7 and EP8, respectively. Then, the figure suggest more than a doubling to 64 percent in the first four years of EP9. Roll call voting and its prevalence is on the raise in the EP. To the extent that overall prevalence of roll call voting matter, then research on EP roll call voting using data from EP9 is in a happier state than research on previous parliaments. But although overall prevalence is important, the representativeness of these votes should also be assessed.

We start this assessment by checking to what extent the increase in roll call prevalence is similar across whole and part votes. The descriptive statistics statistics of this is presented in Table 2. There are several observations that can be made from this table. First, for the parliaments that we have complete data, there has been

an increase in both the absolute number and proportion of roll call votes, for both part votes and whole vote. In EP9, it does not look like there will be an increase in neither the number of roll called whole votes, nor the proportion. However, there is a massive increase in both the number and the proportion of roll call votes on part votes. This is at least partly due to the remote participation regime in place during Covid-19, where almost all votes were recorded (Broniecki and Høyland, 2023). The overall picture is nevertheless that a larger proportion of whole votes than part votes are recorded. This is not surprising given the reforms in the rules of procedure that mandate roll call on more of the whole votes.

		Part			Whole	
Parliament	Total	Roll call	Prop	Total	Roll call	Prop
EP 6	25,596	4,758	0.186	3,842	1,328	0.346
EP 7	23,920	5,220	0.218	3,719	1,418	0.381
EP 8	28,752	8,117	0.282	4,086	1,776	0.435
EP 9	19,982	13,351	0.668	2,552	1,074	0.421

Table 2: Count of votes in the European Parliament, not recorded and recorded, divided into whole and part votes.

In Figure 1, we compare the raw number of votes, rollcalled or not rollcalled, by type of procedure, budgetary, legislative, and non-legislative. We see that there has been an increase in the proportion of roll call votes over time across different types of votes. We also note that within each parliamentary term, most part votes are on non-legislative business. Moreover, this difference seems to increase over time.

Now, consider whole votes. In Figure 2 we see that the rule change is reflected in the difference in roll call prevalence across the different types of votes. From EP6

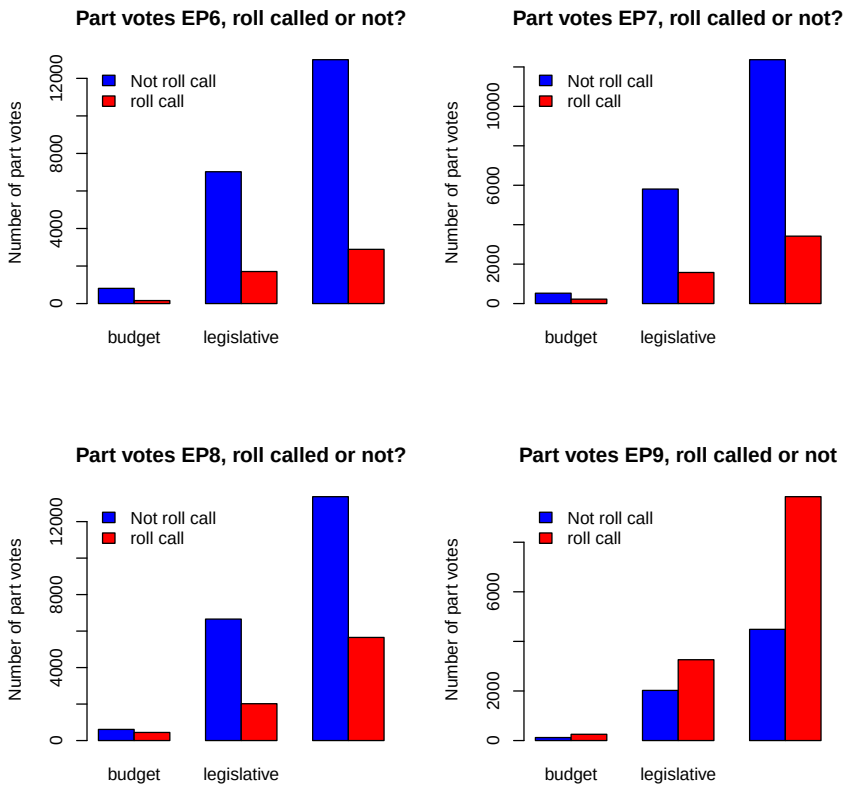

Figure 1: Number of not recorded and recorded part votes by type of procedure (budget, legislative, non-legislative) and parliament.

to EP7, as roll calls on final legislative votes became required, roll call on whole legislative votes increase in prevalence. Similary, as this requirement is extended to all final votes on a report in EP8, we see a substantive increase in the prevalence of roll call on non-legislative whole votes. From EP8 to EP9, we see that the development towards roll calls on all whole votes continues.

Of course, given that there are differences across different types of procedure and type of vote, there is no reason not to expect variation across policy-area. Focusing

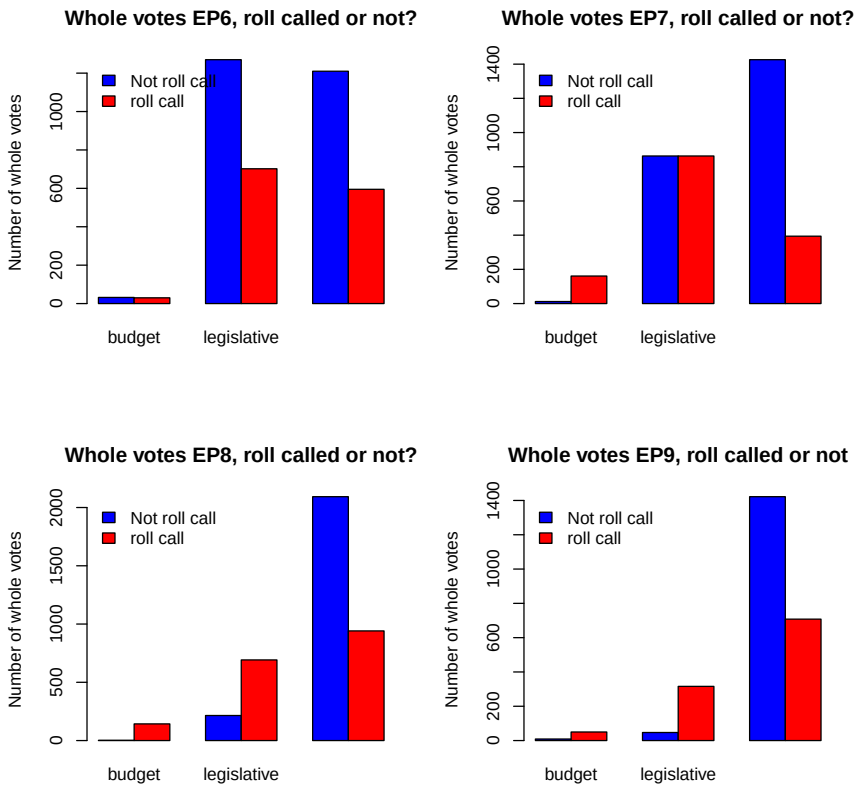

Figure 2: Number of not recorded and recorded whole votes by type of procedure (budget, legislative, non-legislative) and parliament.

on votes on reports, we can group votes by lead committee, as recorded by the legislative observatory. Figure 3 shows the evolution in proportion of roll-called votes by committee over time. The figure support our intuition. While some policy-areas have, such as Budget, Civil Liberties, Constitutional Affairs,. EMU, Environment, Internal Market, International Trace, Regional Development and Women's Rights have see their roll call share increase to over .4, and in the case of International Trade and Regional Development, over .8, this is not the case across all committees. Agriculture,

Budgetary Control, Development, Fisheries, and Legal Affairs have seen little change in their proportion of roll called part votes. In particular, rather than seeing a spike in EP9, we see that the remains the same and falls. As a result, these policy areas will matter comparatively less in any aggregated analysis or roll call votes, that do not differentiate between policies.

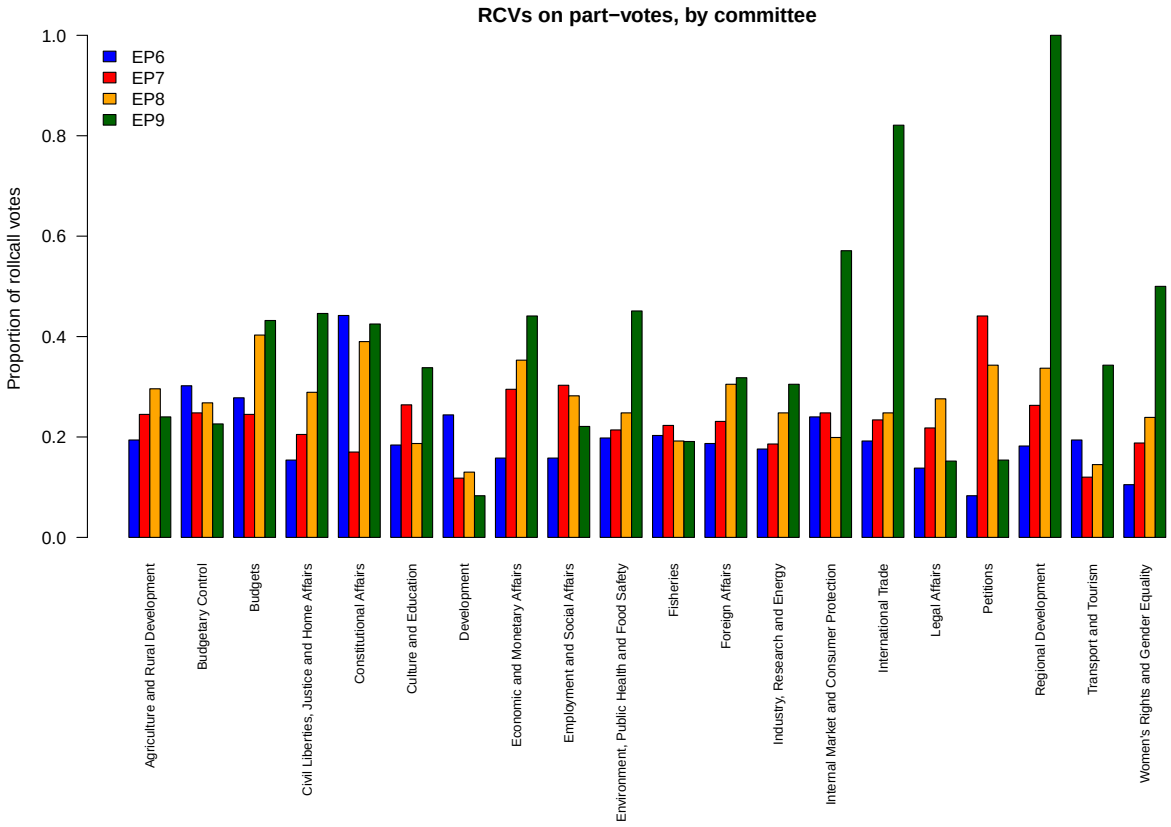

Figure 3: Proportion of roll called part votes by committee and parliament.

For comparison, we present the corresponding graph for whole votes in Figure 3. Here we see that all committees, except Agriculture in EP9, used roll call voting on at least 40 per cent of final votes. By the 8^{th} Parliament, most committee had more

than 80 per cent of their whole votes rollcalled. Also, the increase is fairly similar across most committees, but we note that those that deal less with legislative affairs, see a marked jump in EP8, when it becomes required with roll call on all, no only legislative, final votes with reports.

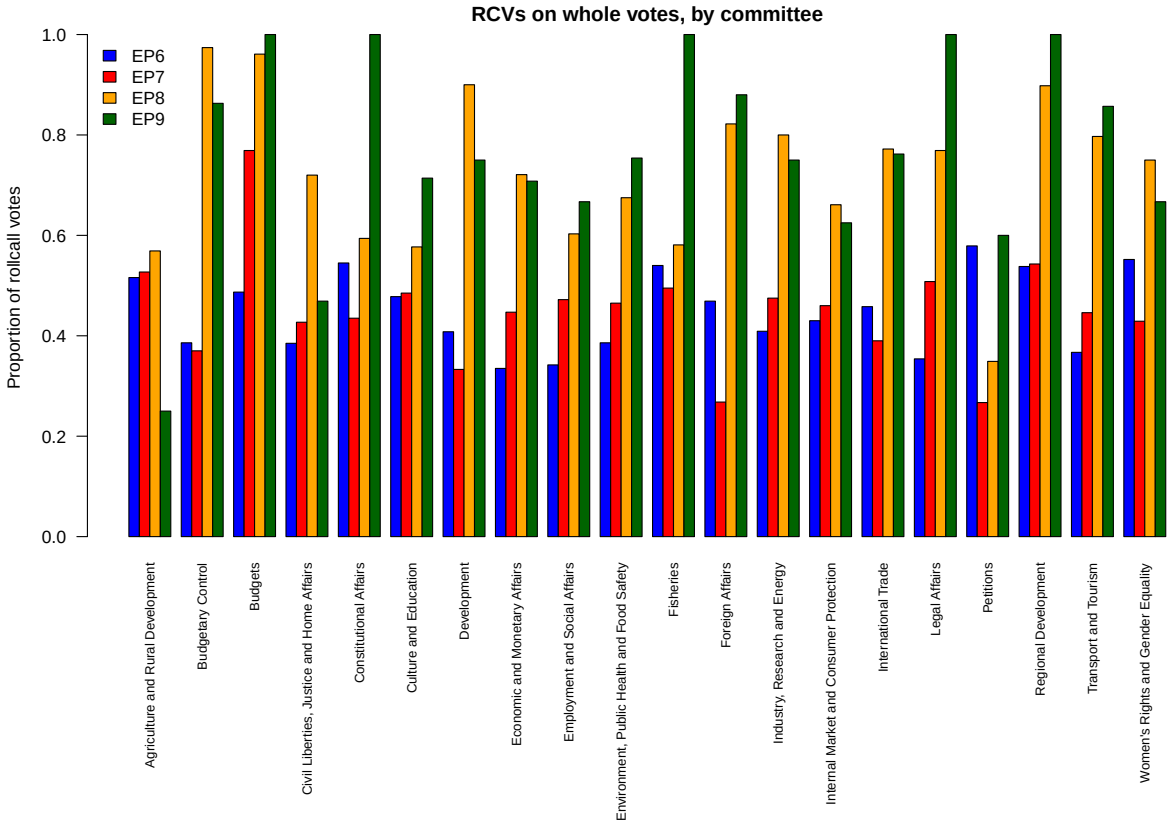

Figure 4: Proportion of roll called whole votes by committee and parliament.

To sum up, the description of the pattern of votes by roll call or not shows that the increase in prevalence of roll call voting has not been uniform. It varies across type of procedure, stage and policy. Next, in the results section, we will look at how prevalence of roll calls varies with average vote splits, party loyalty and voting unity.

Results

In this section we present the results from an analysis of the correlation between prevalence of roll call voting on the one hand, and average vote-split, political group voting loyalty and political group voting unity on the other. Average vote-split is the mean absolute difference between yea and nay votes. Political group voting loyalty is the of average across the proportion of times each MEP voted with the majority of the political group. Political group unity is the average proportion of MEPs that voted the party line on a vote by vote basis.

The unit of analysis is vote-type (part of whole) within a policy area (committee) during a legislative term. Votes that are not assigned a policy area are dropped from the analysis. We first present bivariate correlations, before presenting results from regression models with heteroskedastic autocorrelation corrected standard errors and fixed effect for different combinations of political groups, committees and parliaments. We analyse part and whole votes separately. The comparison of the these two set of results represents the core of the analysis. Note that the purpose of the analysis is to describe to what extent roll call prevalence is correlated with outcomes that we care about. We do not claim a causal effect of roll call prevalence on these outcomes.

Roll call prevalence and vote split

Roll call prevalence is positively correlated with vote-splits on part votes, but not on whole votes, as we see in Table 3. We find strong positive correlation between roll call prevalence and split votes within each parliamentary term as well as overall in the case of part votes. For whole votes, we find a positive correlation clearly different

from zero in two of the four parliamentary terms, EP7 and EP8, only.

	part votes	whole votes
EP6	**.714**	.343
EP7	**.605**	**.488**
EP8	**.452**	**.437**
EP9	**.685**	.155
All	**.648**	.035

Table 3: Correlation between roll call prevalence and vote split. Boldfaced numbers indicates that the correlation is not equal to zero.

In Figure 5, we see that relationship holds in a regression context where we also add fixed effects for committees and parliamentary terms for part votes (upper). This result holds across all specifications. In contrast, for whole votes, we fail to find a clear relationship in the case of whole votes (lower). Here, depending on the set of fixed effects included, the result switches sign. But given that we have non-significant results for both the baseline model (within any fixed effects) and for the model where both types of fixed effect (committees and parliaments) are included, we are forced to conclude that for whole votes there is no clear correlation.

Roll call prevalence and voting loyalty

One reason for studying roll call votes is to evaluate voting loyalty. One of the most surprising findings in the EP literature is how early the political group loyalty reached levels on par with those seen in comparable legislative bodies such as the US Congress (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2005). Ainsley et al. (2020) warn that voting loyalty scores can be unreliable for low level of roll call prevalence. Here, we evaluate to what extent

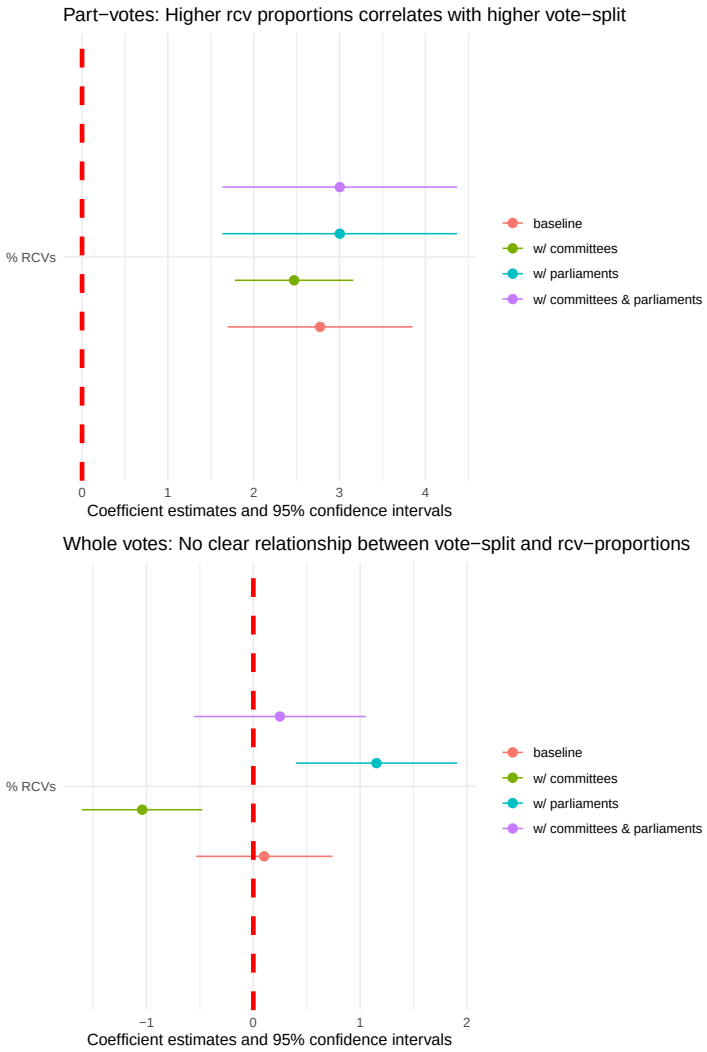

Figure 5: Roll call prevalence and vote-split, part votes (upper) and whole votes (lower).
Linear regression model with heteroskedastic corrected standard errors and fixed effects (committees, parliamentary terms, or both). The dependent variable is vote-split and the explanatory variable of interest is prevalence of roll call votes in a given policy-area in a given parliamentary term. The models are run separately for part-votes (upper) and whole votes (lower). Red dashed horizontal line indicates zero.

voting loyalty vary with roll call prevalence. Again, we start by comparing correlation for part and whole votes in Table 4.

	part votes	whole votes
EP6	.050	-.030
EP7	-.017	-.021
EP8	-.027	.019
EP9	.065	-.055
All	**.104**	.052

Table 4: Correlation between roll call prevalence and voting loyalty. Boldfaced numbers indicates that the correlation is not equal to zero.

We see that while there is a positive correlation for part votes when aggregated across all four parliamentary terms, but not a significant correlation within each parliament. For whole votes, we fail to find any correlations, not even in the aggregate.

Moving on to the regression results, we see that in the case of part votes there is an positive association between roll call prevalence and political group loyalty. The higher the proportion of votes recorded, the higher the recorded loyalty for three of the four models. It is only when both political groups and parliamentary groups are controlled for that the coefficient estimate overlaps zero.

In contrast, for whole votes, the coefficient estimates overlap zero for all of the models. It is hence not any evidence to suggest that when a larger proportion of whole roll call votes are recoded, example as a result of a new procedural requirement, that this change the MEPs voting loyalty scores.

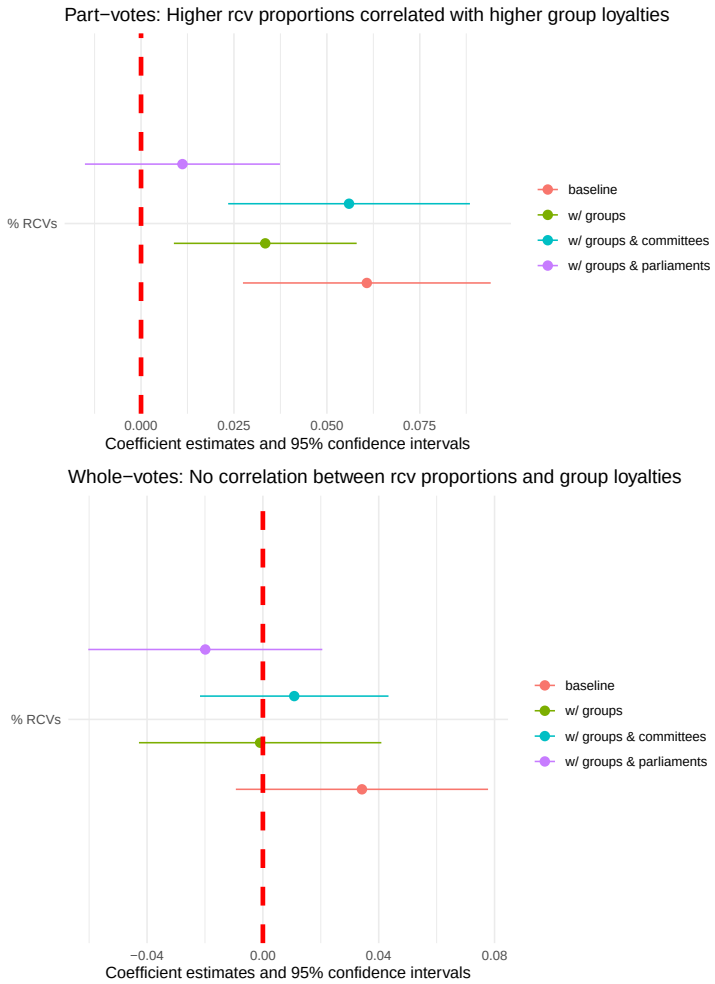

Figure 6: Roll call prevalence and voting loyalty, part votes (upper) and whole votes (lower).
Linear regression model with heteroskedastic corrected standard errors and fixed effects (groups, committees and parliamentary terms). The dependent variable is political group voting loyalty and the explanatory variable of interest is prevalence of roll call votes in a given policy-area in a given parliamentary term. The models are run separately for part-votes (upper) and whole votes (lower). Red dashed horizontal line indicates zero.

Roll call prevalence and voting unity

Finally, when we look at average voting unity, how united each party group is within each vote, we see a similar, but not identical pattern. Table 5 shows again, that there is only in the aggregate, and only for part votes, that we see a non-zero correlation.

	part votes	whole votes
EP6	.043	-.005
EP7	.023	.054
EP8	-.010	.029
EP9	.049	.004
All	**.087**	.069

Table 5: Correlation between roll call prevalence and vote unity. Boldfaced numbers indicates that the correlation is not equal to zero.

Then, for the regression results, reported in Figure 7 we see that for part votes there is a positive association. This holds across all model specifications. In contrast, for whole votes, it is only for the baseline model that we find a non-zero correlation.

In sum, the finding that emerges is that effect of the prevalence of roll call on is contextual. In particular, whether roll calls are requested on a vote by vote basis, as in part votes, or required per rules of procedure, as on some of the whole votes, matter for observed vote-splits, political group voting loyalty, and unity. Roll call prevalence is positively correlated with larger vote splits, higher voting loyalty and how united political groups are in requested votes. This has implications for how we should interpret observed roll call patterns and what to infer from changes in such observed pattern. In some cases the root cause to the change in observed pattern may be a change in behaviour, in other cases, it may simply be a change in the process of

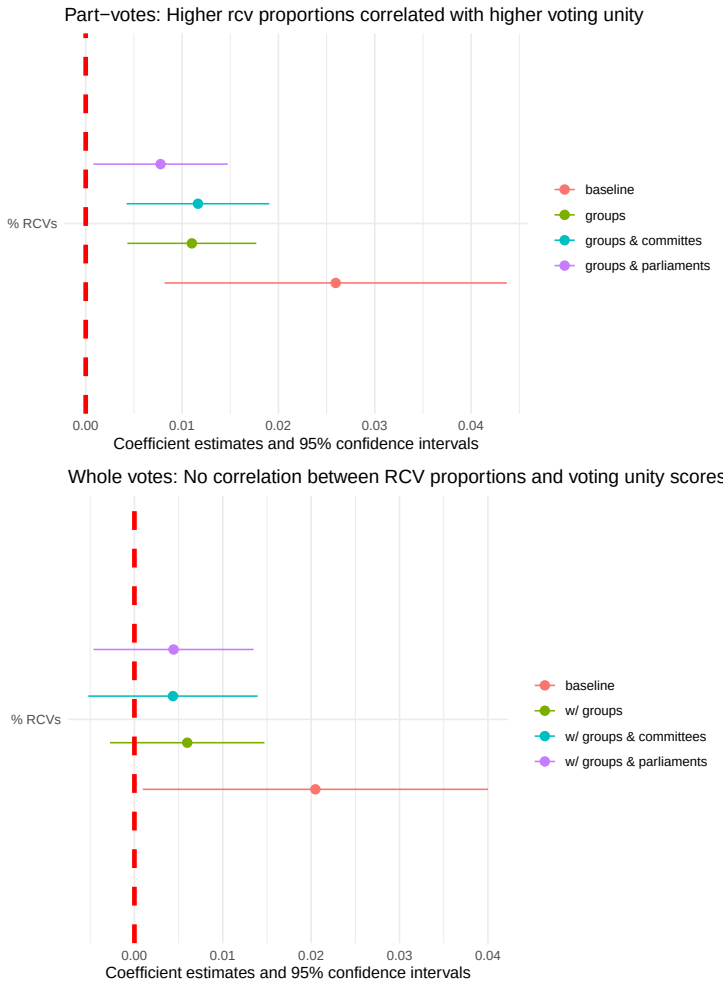

Figure 7: Roll call prevalence and voting unity, part votes (upper) and whole votes (lower).
Linear regression model with heteroskedastic corrected standard errors and fixed effects (groups, committees, parliamentary terms). The dependent variable is voting unity and the explanatory variable of interest is prevalence of roll call votes in a given policy-area in a given parliamentary term. The models are run separately for part-votes (upper) and whole votes (lower). Red dashed horizontal line indicates zero.

recording votes. The reason for the latter may or may not be related to the voting decisions themselves. We hence need a better understanding of why some votes are recorded and others are not, and how and to whet extent that may bias the resulting roll call data.

Summary

Roll call votes are vital to legislative scholars interested in testing individual level theoretical predictions of voting behaviour (Clinton, 2012). However, in almost all cases, these votes do not represent the whole population of votes in the legislature. Whether a vote get to be observed depends on both the the rules of procedure regulating under which conditions roll calls are to be used, under which conditions roll calls may be used, and under which conditions roll calls may not be used, as well as the decision of legislative actors on whether to request a roll call on a particular vote when the rules of procedure so permit.

This paper contributes to our understanding on how the changing conditions of when roll calls are required in the European Parliament and the changing pattern of requesting roll call votes, may influence the pattern of vote-splits, voting loyalty and political group unity. The key finding is that increased prevalence of roll calls matter most when requested, less so when required. As such, it cautions against drawing implications about the overall pattern of voting behaviour on part votes on the basis of behaviour observations from procedural changes in the recording of whole votes (cf. Yordanova and Mühlböck, 2015; Hix, Noury and Roland, 2018). Such conclusions would require a more in-depth, theoretically guided empirical investigation into the

pattern of requested roll call votes.

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