Democracy in the European Parliament

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Introduction

‘I have come to the conclusion that if a vote were to take place today, the outcome would not be positive for the European institutions or for the European project. In these circumstances I have decided not to submit a new Commission for your approval today. I need more time to look at this issue, to consult with the Council and to consult further with you, so that we can have strong support for the new Commission. … These last few days have demonstrated that the European Union is a strong political construction and that this Parliament, elected by popular vote across all our member states, has a vital role to play in the governance of Europe.’

José Manuel Durão Barroso, Commission President designate

‘Today this House on the river Rhine has grown in stature. Its will was tested, its will has prevailed. … Mr Barroso, you suggested yesterday that it was anti-European to vote against your Commission. … [but] today, Euroscepticism loses because the voice of democracy in Europe has risen by an octave and has made itself heard in every national capital and beyond.’

Graham Watson, Leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (the liberal party in the European Parliament)

On 27 October 2004 the European Parliament refused to elect the new Commission, the European Union (EU) executive. There was no vote, as ten minutes before the vote the Commission President designate, José Manuel Durão Barroso, announced that he was withdrawing his team of Commissioners. He simply did not have the numbers: the Party of European Socialists, the second largest party in the Parliament after the June 2004 elections, was backed in its opposition to the proposed Commission by the smaller liberal, green, and radical left parties. This coalition, with a combined force of 371 out of the 732 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), was easily larger than the pro-Commission bloc of the
European People Party, with 268 seats, and the small conservative-national party to its right, with 27 seats.

If it was so clear that the Parliament would reject the Commission, why did Barroso not withdraw his team earlier? It had been known for some time that many liberal, socialist and green MEPs were unhappy with the nomination for the justice and home affairs portfolio of Rocco Buttiglione, a devout Catholic with ultra-conservative views about immigration, women’s rights and homosexuality.

Barroso and the governments thought they could railroad the Parliament. The governments expected the Parliament to support a Commission that was composed of politicians nominated by the twenty-five governments of the EU member states, as it had always done before. The Parliament does not have the right to reject individual Commissioners, only to reject the whole team, and rejecting the whole team was thought of as the ‘nuclear option’. Moreover, a cross-party coalition in the Parliament had voted for Barroso in July, and the proposed Commission contained a reasonable balance of conservatives, social democrats and liberals. Above all, Barroso did not place Buttiglione in another portfolio or force the Italian government to nominate someone else, because the governments were convinced that they could force ‘their’ MEPs to support the Commission.

This time, however, the European Parliament did not bend to the will of the governments. Only the night before the vote did it become clear that the overwhelming majority of MEPs would side with the leaders of their supranational parties in the Parliament rather than with their national party leaders, who were lobbying them heavily to support the Commission. It was now too late to reshuffle the team. Barroso hence decided that delaying the vote was the only option.

The media heralded this climb-down by Barroso and the governments as a founding moment for democracy at the European level. A coalition of supranational political parties
was able to rally their troops in the Parliament to block the will of the supposedly sovereign governments of twenty-five nation states. With cohesive parties that are independent from national government pressures, the formal powers of the European Parliament, to amend legislation and the budget and to elect and censure the Commission, were now a reality. Democratic politics had finally arrived in the EU.

Most commentators failed to realise, however, that parties and politics inside the European Parliament had been developing for some time. Since the first direct elections in 1979, beyond the attention of the mass media and the voters, and even off the radar screens of most of the EU’s governments, the MEPs had gradually fashioned a well organized and highly competitive party system at the European level. What actually happened in October 2004 was that Europe’s political class was finally forced to wake up to the new reality, where supranational party politics is a key aspect of policy-making in the emerging European polity.

What we do in this book is explain how this happened: why MEPs chose to organize as supranational parties in the European Parliament in the first place, why these parties then evolved as powerful agenda-setting actors, why voting along supranational party lines gradually replaced voting along national party lines as the dominant form of behaviour in the Parliament, and ultimately how democratic politics emerged in the only directly-elected institution at the European level.

We argue that increases in the power of the European Parliament have played a crucial role in shaping supranational parties in the European Parliament. 1 In a rather short space of time, a matter of decades rather than centuries, the European Parliament has evolved from an unelected consultative body to one of the most powerful elected assemblies in the world. Today, most social and economic legislation applied in the member states of the European Union is adopted at the European rather than the national level. The European Parliament not

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1 For a survey of the explanations for the development of the powers of the European Parliament see, in particular, Rittberger (2005).
only has the power to amend and reject most EU laws but also influences the make-up and political direction of the body that initiates these laws: the European Commission. We argue that this increase in powers has made the European Parliament look increasingly like a normal parliament with cohesive parties who compete to dominate legislative outcomes and who form coalitions with other party groups for that purpose.

**Summary of the Argument and the Main Findings**

We analyse all of the nearly fifteen thousand recorded votes by individual MEPs (roll-call votes) in the first five elected European Parliaments, covering the 25 year period between 1979 and 2004. We show that voting in the European Parliament has become increasingly structured. Contrary to a widespread popular perception, this structure is based around the transnational European parties, and not nationality. A German conservative is more likely to vote with a Portuguese conservative than with a German social democrat or a German Green. The voting behaviour of MEPs is thus based on party rather than nationality.

We build a theory to explain why this is the case in the European Parliament and also in other democracies. Our argument is based on the idea that in a democracy conflicts inside a parliament between representatives of different territorial units are best solved by federalism; in other words by the appropriate devolution of power to the territorial units themselves, when these conflicts are important. The costs of devolution can then be minimized by keeping some powers centralized, such as jurisdiction over free trade and other areas (some key environmental competences for example) where externalities between territorial units can be important and have a negative effect if not kept centralized. We argue that it is more difficult and less efficient to organize the devolution of powers to socio-
professional groups or economic sectors, or other functional interests in the economy, because this would entail potentially very negative economic consequences. If conflicts between territorial units can be solved more easily by devolution of powers than conflicts between socio-economic groups, then it follows quite naturally that the conflicts one ends up observing in national parliaments or federal legislatures are precisely conflicts between socio-economic groups. This explains why parties form along the left-right axis and not along territorial lines. The theory applies to advanced democracies as well as to the European Parliament.

We show that party cohesion has increased as the powers of the European Parliament have steadily increased. This shows that higher stakes in decision-making have given MEPs with similar policy preferences the right incentives to solve their collective action problems inside the parliament, to form European-wide parties, to delegate increasing powers to the leaders of these organizations, to come up with unified positions to compete with the other European parties, and to discipline their members into voting with the European party line. We show, for example, that cohesiveness of parties does not decrease in the long run even when the parties become more ideologically heterogeneous. However, higher fragmentation of the European parties is associated with a somewhat lower cohesion. In other words, when the European parties are composed mostly of many small national party delegations, they have a harder time to agree on a common position rather than when the European parties are composed of some large national delegations and some smaller ones.

The cohesion of European parties is quite surprising for several reasons. First, the degree of agenda-control by the European party leaders is more limited than in most national parliaments. Indeed, the European Commission has the exclusive right of initiative of EU legislation. Hence, legislation that comes on the floor of the European Parliament emanates from outside the parliament and not from a majority coalition inside the parliament. This inability to control the agenda should reduce party cohesion, as the leaders of the parties in
the European parliament cannot filter out issues on which their members have divergent political opinions. We do find some evidence of lower cohesion due to the lack of agenda control – for example, the parties are slightly more cohesive on non-legislative issues, which are initiated internally in the parliament, than on legislative issues, which are initiated externally. However, we also find evidence suggesting that the European parties are able to overcome the lack of agenda-control and vote cohesively. For example, we find that a European party is as cohesive in a vote on a ‘hostile amendment’ (where an amendment is proposed by another party on a bill where a member of the first party is the rapporteur) as in all other votes.

A second reason for which cohesiveness should be lower in the European Parliament is that European parties do not have many instruments to discipline their members. They do not control the selection of candidates in European Parliament elections, as this is controlled by the national parties who make up the European parties. The European parties also have no control over the future career of MEPs, as it is again the national parties who control the allocation of ministerial portfolios and other jobs in the domestic arena and the selection of European Commissioners. The only instruments European parties have to discipline their members are the allocation of membership of legislative committees, rapporteurships and other positions of influence within the European Parliament. These instruments are relatively weak in terms of their disciplining power. They are definitely weaker than the ones available to parties in parliamentary regimes. However, to the extent that it is national parties who develop common positions in their European parties, it is national parties who play a key role in enforcing European party discipline. Individual MEPs nearly always vote with their national party delegation, independently of their own preferences. If one adds this to the fact that it is rare that a national party votes against its European party, one understands that national parties play a key role in determining the cohesion of the European parties.
European parties are able to mobilize their members to participate more in votes that are expected to be closer and the outcome more competitive.

We consequently argue that the incentive to form and maintain powerful transnational party organizations is fundamentally related to political competition inside the European Parliament to secure policy outcomes from the EU that are as close as possible to the ideological (left-right) preferences of the MEPs and national parties. It pays to be cohesive because this increases a party’s chance to be on the winning side of a vote and thus to influence its final outcome. It is thus natural that the increases in the powers of the European Parliament have led to a stronger and more democratic structure of politics in the European Parliament, based around left-right competition between genuine European parties.

**Outline of the Book**

Chapter 1 provides some essential background material on the development of the powers of and parties in the European Parliament. Chapters 2 and 3 then present the two basic elements of our theory: that political parties are essential for the functioning of democratic politics, and that these political organizations are more likely to emerge around ideological (left-right) divisions than territorial divisions.

The remainder of the book contains a series of empirical tests of our ideas, using a unique dataset of all roll-call votes in the European Parliament between 1979 and 2004. Chapter 4 starts the analysis by looking at the increasing participation of MEPs in roll-call votes and how participation varies with the powers of the European Parliament on the issue of the vote. We find growing levels of participation, more growth in more highly organized parties, and more participation where the Parliament has more power.
The next three chapters focus on partisan politics inside the Parliament. Chapter 5 looks at the ‘cohesion’ of the political parties. We introduce a cohesion index for measuring the cohesion of parties and national delegations. We show that while voting along transnational party lines has increased and voting along national lines has decreased. We then investigate the determinants of party cohesion, and find that the transnational parties are increasingly cohesive despite growing internal ideological and national diversity.

We then investigate two possible explanations of growing partisan politics in the European Parliament. Chapter 6 focuses on whether the parties in the European Parliament can enforce party discipline by controlling the agenda. We find that parties are more likely to be cohesive where they have some control over the agenda, on non-legislative resolutions for example. Because agenda setting rights are shared amongst the parties and because legislation is initiated externally, by the Commission, this limited agenda control in the European Parliament should lead to a lower cohesion than what we observer. We also show that parties are not less cohesive when facing hostile amendments on bills they sponsor. There is thus strong suggestive evidence that European party groups are able to discipline the voting behaviour of their members even when they do not control the agenda.

Chapter 7 focuses on whether national parties or the European political groups have more control on the MEPs. We find that MEPs are less likely to vote against their national parties than their European political groups. On balance, one-third of an MEP’s voting behaviour is determined by his or her European political group and two-thirds is determined by his or her national party. Hence, growing transnational party politics in the European Parliament must be explained via national political parties. Despite continued policy differences between the member parties in each European political group, national parties have decided to form increasingly powerful transnational political parties and to endow these organizations with leadership and agenda-setting powers.
The next two chapters then look at the ideological structure of politics in the European Parliament, within and between the European parties. Chapter 8 focuses on coalition formation between the European parties. We look at the proportion of times the majority in each political group voted the same way as a majority in another political group. We show that coalitions in the European Parliament are increasingly along left-right lines. We also investigate the determinants of coalition formation, and find that the left-right ideological distance between any two political groups is the strongest predictor of whether they will vote together in a given period and over time.

Chapter 9 then looks at the dimensions of voting in the Parliament. We apply a scaling method to the roll-call votes and find that the classic left-right conflict is the main dimension of voting in the European Parliament, between as well as inside the European parties. In other words, the further an MEP is from the average left-right preferences of his or her European party, the more likely he or she will vote differently from the other members of the party. We also find that, although less salient, the second dimension captures MEPs’ preferences on European integration as well as conflicts between the parties in the European Parliament and the parties represented in the Council and Commission.

The next two chapters supplement the aggregate analyses in the previous empirical chapters with two detailed case-studies. Chapter 10 investigates at the parliament’s executive-control powers, by investigating MEP behaviour in four key votes in the fourth parliament (1994-1999) on the investiture and censure of the Santer Commission. We find the emergence of ‘government-opposition’ politics in the European Parliament: where the European parties who dominate the Commission tend to support the Commission, while the parties who are either not represented in the Commission or who are marginalised in this institution tend to oppose the Commission. From this perspective, at the start of the Barroso
Commission in 2005, there was ‘unified government’ in the EU, where a centre-right coalition controlled the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council.

Chapter 11 turns to the parliament’s legislative powers, by investigating MEP behaviour in the fifth parliament (1999-2004) on the Takeover Directive. We find that even when the political stakes are extremely high, European parties and left-right preferences have a significant influence on MEP behaviour. Where an issue is highly salient for a particular member state in a vote, the MEPs from this state may vote together and against their European parties. However, because this only affects one or two member states in any vote (as was the case with German MEPs on the Takeover Directive), and because this only occurs in one or two votes on any legislative act, European parties’ positions and left-right preferences of MEPs are the main determinants of legislative outcomes in the European Parliament.

Finally, chapter 12 concludes by drawing out the implications of our argument and findings as well as discussing avenues for future research.

**Lessons for Political Science and European Politics**

The research presented in this book contains insights both for political science in general and for the subfield of European politics. We spell them out briefly here but will come back to these issues throughout the book.

From the point of view of political science, our book contributes to the study of legislative behaviour in a comparative perspective. A first important question refers to the role of parties in democracies. Why do we generally observe party formation in democracies? Along what lines do they form? What is the effect of party systems in legislative decision-
In chapter 2, we provide a synthesis of these questions and provide a systematic analysis of the advantages of strong party systems in democracies relative to weak and fragmented party systems. We distinguish between the role of parties in solving collective action problems *external* and *internal* to the elected legislature. Collective action problems external to the legislature refer to electoral politics. Parties play a crucial role in mobilizing the electorate to vote, a key question in political science. They also provide brand names with well known and recognizable platforms and a reputation that has value with voters and is therefore valuable to preserve, which enhances the reliability of politicians. Collective action problems internal to the legislature refer to legislative politics. Cohesive parties reduce the volatility and increase the predictability of legislative decisions. They allow for specialization of parliamentarians in specific issues which improves the quality of bills. They increase the efficiency of policy-making by screening out inefficient programs that only bring benefits to small groups and costs to the general public. They also reduce the dimensionality of politics by creating correlations between the different dimensions of politics.

We contribute to the theory of parties by proposing a theory, briefly summarized above, for why parties in stable democracies form mainly along the left-right axis and not along territorial lines. Our theory is a complement to the ‘cleavage theory’ of Lipset and Rokkan. The cleavage theory does not ask why parties do not generally form on a territorial basis, except in countries where the borders have not settled. In the context of the European Parliament, it is especially important to ask that question. On the other hand, the cleavage theory gives content to our notion that parties form on a functional and not territorial basis.

Political scientists have made much progress in recent years in trying to understand what causes voting behaviour inside elected legislatures. The European Parliament is an especially interesting institution to verify political science theories. With members from multiple nation-states, who are organized into national as well as transnational political
parties, and with dramatic changes in the powers of the institution, the European Parliament is a unique laboratory for testing general theories of political parties and legislative behaviour. Most political science theories of parties and legislative politics have been developed in very particular institutional contexts, such as the U.S. Congress or the British House of Commons. If these theories are truly generalisable, however, they should also hold in the European Parliament. Different theories highlight different causes of party cohesion. Many traditional theories emphasize the ‘carrots and sticks’ used by party leadership to discipline their representatives to toe the party line. One alternative theory, associated mostly with Keith Krehbiel, emphasizes the preferences of the members of a party. Cohesion in voting is related to closeness in political and ideological preferences. Politicians sort themselves into parties on the basis of their preferences and it is this sorting that fundamentally creates cohesion. Another theory, put forward in a recent book by Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins, emphasizes the role of agenda-control in explaining party cohesion. Parties use their control over the legislative agenda to only put forward bills on which they can count on strong support from their party in the parliament.

In this book, we find that ideology alone cannot explain party cohesion. While European parties tend to form coalitions on the basis of ideological closeness, variation in cohesion within the European party groups is not related to variation in ideological preferences in the European party groups. Similarly, compared to other legislatures, European parties have relatively little control over the agenda. Nevertheless, cohesion is relatively strong. Overall, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the European parties are able to discipline their representatives in the European Parliament. However, we show that this happens mostly via the influence of national parties, who voluntarily choose to form European parties to promote their own policy goals, and they act collectively to secure these goals.
From the point of view of European politics, our work builds on the research of scholars done in this field in the last decade. Scholars have not only been closely observing the functioning of the European Parliament, they have also collected samples of voting data to try to understand better patterns of voting behaviour. By putting together and making available the complete population of roll-call data in the history of the European Parliament, we hope to contribute to bringing the level of research on the European Parliament to the level of existing research in American politics, where roll-call data from the whole history of the U.S. are used in a standard way to analyze issues of American politics.

Our research shows that the European Parliament cannot be understood as a unitary actor engaged in strategic games with the Commission and the Council. It shows how and why cohesion of the European parties has changed over time. It shows that left-right politics is the main dimension of contestation in the European Parliament, but a second dimension has also emerged, which relates to the speed and nature of European integration.

More broadly, the European Parliament is fundamentally important for the future of the European Union and democratic governance in Europe. The European Union was probably the most significant institutional innovation in the organization of politics and the state anywhere in the world in the second half of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, there is growing concern about how viable this organization is in the long-term if it cannot be made more democratically accountable. The European Parliament is uniquely placed, as the only directly elected institution at the European level, to operate as the voice of the people in the EU governance system. If democratic politics does not exist in the European Parliament, then the future of the EU may be bleak. However, if democratic politics has begun to emerge inside the European Parliament, in terms of being based around political parties who articulate the classic
ideological divisions of democratic politics, then perhaps democracy beyond the nation-state is possible after all.

This is all the more important in the light of the constitutional fiasco triggered by the failed referenda on the European Constitution project in France and the Netherlands. Opposing arguments have been voiced that the Constitution went too far or not far enough in the European integration process. It is doubtful, however, that a new constitutional project would gain more support within the European population if it does not strengthen the democratic accountability of European institutions. The European Parliament is the only directly-elected body in the European Union. While being often criticized or vilified by some national politicians and national media, one should not forget that it is also the European institution that is most trusted by European citizens. In the Eurobarometer opinion poll survey in the Autumn of 2004, 57 percent of respondents in the 25 EU member states said that they trusted the European Parliament, while only 52 percent said that they trusted the European Commission, and 45 percent said that they trusted the European Council – which is composed of the heads of government of member states. One can argue that these figures are relatively low, but our research shows that trust in the European Parliament is legitimate! The European Parliament is a real parliament, with real parties, and real democratic politics.
Chapter 6. Agenda Setting and Cohesion

In the previous chapter, we discussed party cohesion in the long run and found that increased powers to the European Parliament had led to increased cohesion of parties. Here we focus on the short run determinants of cohesion and look at the characteristics of particular votes: how relevant and important they are, who sets the agenda and for what purpose, and so on.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are several competing explanations of why parliamentary parties are cohesive. If the members of the party share the same preferences over policy, then on most issues these members will vote together naturally, without the need for any additional pressure or incentives from the party leadership. We found evidence that, despite increased ideological diversity (as a result of expansion of most of the groups to new parties from the existing member states and new member states), voting cohesion has increased and not decreased, suggesting that preferences alone cannot explain cohesion. We presented evidence suggesting that the explanation of cohesion based on the idea that the members of the political groups in the European Parliament have homogeneous \textit{a priori} preferences, does not hold. We showed in Chapter 5, for example, that growing internal ideological diversity in the political groups had no negative effect on the cohesion of the groups.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the difference between policy preferences of MEPs and their voting behaviour. In a survey of the MEPs in the fifth European Parliament (1999-2004) by the European Parliament Research Group, the MEPs were asked, among other things, to locate themselves on a 10-point left-right scale, where 1 represented the furthest left position
and 10 represented the furthest right position.\(^1\) Figure 6.1a shows the distribution of the 61 socialist and 72 EPP MEPs who responded to this question. In comparison, Figure 6.1b shows the distribution of the ‘revealed’ voting locations of these same 133 MEPs on the first dimension produced by applying the NOMINATE scaling method (Poole and Rosenthal, 1997) to the roll-call votes in the fifth parliament.\(^2\) In terms of basic ideological preferences of MEPs, Figure 6.1a reveals a considerable overlap between the socialist and EPP members, with some members of the socialists (such as some of the British Labour MEPs) placing themselves in the middle of the ideological spectrum and some members of the EPP (such as the Belgian and Italian Christian democrats) placing themselves considerably to the left. Nevertheless, in their revealed voting behaviour, Figure 6.1b shows that the centrist socialists voted more with their socialist colleagues to their left than with the ideologically closer EPP MEPs, while the centre-left EPP members vote more with their EPP colleagues to their right than with the ideologically closer socialist MEPs. Hence, despite internal ideological heterogeneity, the political groups in the European Parliament are capable of acting as independent and cohesive political organizations.

An alternative explanation, suggested by traditional research on parties, is that the party leadership can force the party members to follow voting instructions, even when these instructions may conflict with the members’ opinions, by using a variety of ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’, such as promises of promotion to key political offices in the parliament or the threat

\(^1\) See http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EPRG/data.htm.

\(^2\) NOMINATE is a well-known scaling method used in political science to map the voting behavior of individual legislators in a multi-dimensional space. We discuss in Chapter 9 the application of NOMINATE to the European Parliament because it is a useful tool to identify how many independent dimensions one detects in voting behavior and what are the main lines of conflict in a parliament.
of expulsion from the party. A third, and more recent explanation focuses on the effects of agenda control (Cox and McCubbins, 2005). The idea is that there are high transaction costs associated to the use of ‘carrots and sticks’ to discipline elected representatives. A simpler method is to use control of the legislative agenda to filter out proposals and bills that threaten to divide the party group and to only put forward bills and proposals for which there is sufficient support among the rank and file legislators. This presupposes that the party leaders control the legislative agenda so they can ensure that issues only arise on which their party members have common policy preferences, and so will naturally vote together on these issues.

If cohesion cannot be explained by policy preferences alone, the question remains open of whether cohesion is a result of party pressure or party leadership agenda control. Do MEPs follow voting instructions because of incentives and threats from their leaders? Or do MEPs vote together because their party leaders only allow votes to take place on issues on which they are certain their members will back them? To answer these questions, one needs to look at agenda-setting in the European Parliament. Our findings in this particular context are particularly instructive because the European Parliament is particularly interesting in terms of who holds agenda-setting powers. The Commission has the exclusive right of legislative initiative, which means that many votes in the European Parliament escape agenda control of the majority party leadership in the European Parliament. Moreover, agenda-setting powers are much more dispersed than in a normal parliamentary regime, and arguably more than in most existing presidential systems. It is thus possible to differentiate easily between votes where agenda control (in the sense of Cox and McCubbins) applies and votes where it does not.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows. In the next section we discuss the general theory of agenda setting and how the agenda is shaped in the European Parliament, and set out some propositions about what we should expect to observe in voting in the
European Parliament if the leadership pressure or agenda control explanations are correct. Section two then presents some descriptive evidence of agenda control, which suggest that different ‘agenda cartels’ existed in each European Parliament, but these cartels are relatively weak. Section three then tests the theories more directly, with a statistical analysis of the determinants of party cohesion in each individual roll-call vote since 1979.

What we find is that the policy agenda in the European Parliament is set externally to the parliament, by the European Commission, as well as internally, by the political groups. Also, agenda setting offices inside the parliament are allocated to the political groups broadly in proportion to their size. Consequently, no single party (or coalition of parties) can restrict the agenda sufficiently to ensure that votes are only held on issues on which the party’s (or parties’) members have homogeneous preferences. As a result, growing party cohesion in the European Parliament cannot be explained by strategic agenda control by the political parties.

6.1. Agenda Setting and Political Parties

6.1.1. The Agenda Cartel Theory of Parties

The issues a parliament tackles are not chosen randomly. Decisions are made about when an issue is put to the floor, who makes the proposal, and whether the proposal can be amended. As seen in Chapter 2, if a parliament operates according to an ‘open’ and competitive agenda setting procedure, whereby any member of the chamber can make a proposal, then policies are likely to converge on the median member of the chamber. This is because any proposal or counter proposal made by the median member of the chamber will by supported by a majority of the chamber, either to the left or to the right of this member.
However, if one actor – such as the majority party – is the sovereign agenda setter, then policy outcomes will be quite different (cf. Romer and Rosenthal, 1978; Tsebelis, 2002). First, as seen in Chapter 2, the agenda setter can choose the policy which is closest to his or her ideal policy amongst all the policies that the parliament will collectively prefer to the status quo. As a result, if agenda setting powers are concentrated, not only will the agenda setter never be worse off than the current policy, he or she should be able to move policies close to his or her ideal policy. Second, if agenda setting powers are restricted so that the parliament is likely to amend a proposal so that the agenda setter prefers the status quo to the new policy, the latter will not make a proposal in the first place. Agenda control thus has an impact on what policies will be proposed and adopted.

Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins (2005) propose a theory of political parties which builds on these basic agenda setting ideas. In common with other theories of legislative parties (e.g. Cox and McCubbins, 1993), they assume that there are collective incentives for members of a legislature with broadly similar policy preferences to form a political party, which involves a division of labour between leaders (who set the broad policies of the party) and followers (who collect information for the leadership and implement these policies). They then add an additional assumption, that ‘the key resource that … parties delegate to their [leadership] is the power to set the legislative agenda’ (Cox and McCubbins, 2005: 41). The result is what Cox and McCubbins call an ‘agenda cartel’, where the members of the party collude to monopolise the legislative agenda.

According to Cox and McCubbins, if parties are agenda cartels this has significant implications for policy outcomes and party cohesion. Policy outcomes will be different if agenda setting is controlled by a single party (or coalition of parties) than if an agenda is freely set by the individual members of a parliament. If the agenda is controlled by a particular party, the party leadership will not allow bills to be submitted to the floor which
might move policy outcomes further from their own policy preferences than the current policy status quo. So, under an agenda cartel model, policy outcomes should only be moved towards the policy preferences of the particular party (or parties) who control the agenda.

Cox and McCubbins’ theory also implies that parties will use agenda setting power to enforce party discipline rather than use the usual carrots and sticks. If a party is likely to be split on a particular issue, the party leadership will keep this issue off the agenda. As they explain:

> If all the party is doing is blocking changes to status quo policies that its members either agree to preserve or cannot agree on how to change, then it does not need much in the way of arm-twisting, cajoling or rational argumentation in the run-up to floor votes. The majority party keeps unwanted issues off the agenda mostly by the inaction of its officeholders (ibid.: 317).

Cox and McCubbins go one step further. In deciding what issues the party proposes, there is a trade-off between proposal rights (who in the party can suggest an item to be put to the parliament) and veto rights (who within the party can block an item from being proposed). If proposal rights are increased – for example, if the amount of party members needed to propose a bill is reduced – then the party will be able to make more proposals, but the voting cohesion of the party will decline. On the other hand, if veto rights are increased – for example, if the amount of members required to block a bill is reduced – the party will be able to make less proposals, but the cohesion of the party will increase. As a result, Cox and McCubbins (ibid: 16) predict that:

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3 Emphasis in the original.
The more heterogeneous the preferences within a given coalition [within a party], the more the coalition’s partners will wish to limit the proposal rights of other partners, which necessarily entails strengthening their own and others’ veto rights. … The more homogenous the preferences within a given coalition, the more that coalition’s partners will agree to expand each others’ proposal rights, which necessarily entails weakening their own and others’ veto rights.

This theory applies across both separation-of-powers systems and parliamentary systems. In the U.S. House of Representatives, for example, parties have few powers to force their members to follow voting instructions. However, the majority party in the House has a monopoly on agenda setting, controlling all the key committee positions and monopolising the floor agenda, and any numerical majority of this party can veto the placement of items on the floor of the chamber. As a result, the majority party is able to select the issues that are put to the floor, and hence rarely loses votes and is able to maintain a high level of party discipline despite highly heterogeneous preferences amongst the members of the party (Cox and McCubbins, 2002).

In parliamentary systems, the party or coalition of parties who form the cabinet collectively monopolise agenda setting. If each member party in a coalition government can veto a legislative proposal from the cabinet, then it can stop any item from being proposed which would either move policy outcomes further from their preferences or undermine their legislative cohesion. This consequently provides for Cox and McCubbins an explanation of why parties in government in parliamentary systems are almost never defeated in the parliament (on Japan see Cox et al., 2000; on Germany see Chandler et al., 2005).

The theory is also applied to ‘mixed’ systems of government, were agenda setting powers are controlled both externally and internally in a parliament. For example, in Brazil,
which is a separation-of-powers system but the President has considerable agenda setting authority, the parliamentary parties who support the President are rarely defeated (Amorim Neto et al., 2003).

6.1.2. Agenda Setting in the European Parliament: External and Internal ‘Cartels’

As we discussed in Chapter 1, the particular relationship between the European Parliament and the EU executive (the Commission), makes the EU a ‘mixed’ political system. On the one hand, like a parliamentary system, the Commission has a monopoly on legislative initiative, and is initially ‘elected’ by a majority in the European Parliament, and so it can be selective when making proposals to the parliament and can expect that a majority in the parliament will share its basic policy preferences. On the other hand, like a separation-of-powers system, the Commission has few powers to force the parties in the parliament to support its proposals or to prevent the parties in the parliament from amending its proposals significantly. Indeed, since the Commission can only be fired with a two third majority, one lacks the traditional vote of confidence instrument in parliamentary government which can be used to threaten majority coalition members into voting cohesively.

Given the current allocation of powers within the EU, the existence and make-up of the Council means that the Commission is unlikely to be primarily concerned with making proposals that satisfy the wishes of the main parties in the European Parliament. For about half of all EU legislation, which is adopted under the consultation procedure, the Council is the dominant actor. For this legislation, the Commission will be less concerned about making proposals that satisfy a particular coalition in the European Parliament than making proposals that will pass through the Council. Also, even on legislation adopted under the co-decision procedure, which must pass through an oversized majority (a qualified-majority) in the Council as well as a simple majority in the European Parliament, the Commission will try to
balance the interests of the governments in the Council and the parties in the Parliament. Also, the coalitions in the two institutions (Council and European Parliament) are likely to be different, as the coalition of governments in support of the legislation in the Council is likely to cut across the main political groups in the European Parliament – who have members from national parties that are in government (and so represented in the Council) and national parties that are in opposition.

Despite these factors, the parties in the European Parliament do exercise some independent agenda setting powers. First, the European Parliament is free to adopt ‘resolutions’ or ‘own initiative reports’. The former are statements by the European Parliament on any issue it feels obliged to address and the later are specific calls for the Commission to initiate legislation in a particular area. Although these statements are not legally binding, they are important signals of the positions parties will take on future legislation in a particular area. Second, on EU legislation initiated by the Commission, the European Parliament is free to propose any amendments. Under the consultation procedure, the European Parliament has an incentive to propose amendments that are acceptable to the Commission, as these are then likely to be supported by the Commission and backed by the Council. Under the co-decision procedure, however, legislation cannot pass without the positive support of the parliament. As a result, once the Commission has made a proposal under the co-decision procedure, the European Parliament is completely free to amend legislation as it sees fit. In this sense, under the main legislative procedure of the EU, once legislation has been proposed, the European Parliament has significant independent agenda setting power.

The process of agenda setting inside the European Parliament on legislative issues is as follows. After the Commission has proposed a draft bill (in the form of a draft Directive or Regulation), the bill is forwarded to the Council and European Parliament at the same time.
The Conference of Presidents of the parliament, which brings together the President of the parliament and the leaders of the parliament’s political groups, decides to which standing committee the bill will be referred. This is usually a straightforward question, since the subject of the Commission’s proposal usually clearly determines which committee in the parliament will scrutinise the legislation. For example, legislation on environmental standards in the single market will be referred to the European Parliament’s Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.

Once a bill has been referred to a committee, the committee assigns a ‘rapporteur’ for the bill from amongst the MEPs in the committee. This rapporteur is responsible for preparing the Parliament’s response to the legislation, in the form of a ‘report’ which contains three elements: a set of amendments to the bill; a ‘legislative resolution’ setting out the Parliament’s position on the legislation; and an ‘explanatory statement’ of the amendments and the resolution. Rapporteurships are assigned through an auction system, where each political group gets a quota of points in proportion to its total number of MEPs in the parliament. Each bill is discussed by the ‘committee co-ordinators’ of the political groups (the ‘whips’ of the political groups in the committees), who decide on the number of points each bill is worth and then make bids on behalf of the groups. Groups can raise their bid to the maximum level (five points) if the report is controversial. Groups sometimes raise bids to make their opponents ‘pay’ more for them. In general, though, this system means that the largest political groups will be allocated rapporteurship on most of the key bills. Once a political group has won the right to act as the rapporteur on a particular report, most of the other groups will appoint a ‘shadow rapporteur’, who will monitor the work of the rapporteur and prepare the position of his/her political group on the bill under discussion. Once a rapporteur has been appointed he or she has a right to remain the rapporteur on the bill in all the readings of the bill in the Parliament.
In line with the logic of division of labour inside parties discussed in Chapter 2 and which is at the basis of Cox and McCubbins’ approach, the rapporteur in the European Parliament is relatively autonomous to shape the position of his or her party on the issue of the bill. A rapporteur will of course liaise with the senior figures of the party in his or her committee, such as the committee chair or vice-chair and the party coordinator on the committee. However, once a rapporteur (or shadow rapporteur for that matter) has spent time focusing on the detailed issues involved in a piece of legislation, he or she usually has more specialist information about the issues in the particular bill, and so is best placed to work out what the position of his or her party should be on the bill. In return, the MEP will receive signals from her colleagues about the party’s position on the issues on which he or she is not a specialist. As a result of this specialisation, it is not unreasonable to assume that the rapporteur and his or her party share the same position on the legislation in question.

Once the rapporteur has prepared the report, the committee then votes on and amends the report. The rapporteur is the agenda setter in the committee, in the sense that he or she has the monopoly on the right of proposal. However, any other member of the committee is free to propose an amendment to the rapporteur’s proposal, which is then accepted or rejected by a simple majority in the committee. Once a report has been passed by the committee it is submitted to the full plenary of the European Parliament, and will appear on the agenda of the next plenary session. At this stage, the European Parliament operates an ‘open rule’, in that any political group can propose amendments to the report from the committee. The plenary votes first on the amendments to the proposal from the committee (these are changes to the European Parliament’s proposed ‘amendments’ to the legislative bill), then on the Commission’s draft legislative bill as a whole (as now amended by the parliament). The position of the European Parliament is then communicated to the Commission and Council, in
the form of a statement of whether the European Parliament has accepted, rejected or amended the draft legislation.

The process of adopting non-legislative resolutions and own initiative reports is very similar. Each committee is free to propose a non-legislative resolution or an own initiative report on any subject they wish. Rapporteurs are assigned in these cases in exactly the same way as they are assigned on legislative issues. Also, the committee then votes on these non-legislative reports and the plenary discusses and amends these reports in essentially the same way as they do with legislative reports.

As we explained in Chapter 1, not all decisions in the plenary are taken by roll-call vote. A political group or approximately five percent of MEPs (32 of the 626 MEPs in the fifth parliament and 37 of the 732 MEPs in the sixth parliament) can request that an issue on the agenda of the plenary can be taken by a roll-call vote. These requests must be made by the evening before the vote. In practice, approximately one-third of votes are by roll-call, with the other two thirds either by a show of hands or a (non-recorded) electronic vote. In other words, a political party in the European Parliament can decide which issues it would like to see held by a roll-call vote. But, a party cannot prevent other parties calling roll-call votes on issues it would prefer to be decide by secret ballot, for example because its members are divided on the issue.

In sum, no single party or coalition of parties can dominate agenda setting in the European Parliament. On the one hand, the coalition in the Commission constitutes a quasi-agenda cartel external to the parliament, in that the Commission possesses a monopoly on the initiation of EU legislation. When initiating legislation, the Commission must take into account how its proposals will be received in the Council and in the European Parliament. Because the Commission is composed of politicians appointed by the national governments, and because national governments are composed of parties from a variety of political families,
most Commissions are not dominated by a single political family and the median member of
the Commission is usually relatively centrist. Hence, the main external agenda setter is in
general likely to spontaneously propose legislation that is relatively close to the median MEP.

On the other hand, agenda setting offices (rapporteurships) are allocated broadly in
proportion to the size of the political groups. So, the main political parties in the European
Parliament control more agenda setting power than the smaller groups. But, the smaller
groups will control some agendas and will be able to propose amendments to agendas set by
the bigger parties. Also, because roll-call votes are not held on all issues, parties have some
control over which issues actually get decided ‘out in the open’. However, as mentioned
above, a party that would like to keep a vote ‘behind closed doors’ cannot prevent another
party forcing a roll-call vote on this issue.

6.1.3. Propositions about Agenda Setting and Party Cohesion in the European Parliament

The general theory of agenda control by Cox and McCubbins ‘recognizes an explicit trade-off
between floor discipline and agenda control, with effective use of the latter reducing the need
for the former’ (ibid: 9-10). This, together with our discussion of agenda setting in the
European Parliament, implies that parties should be less cohesive on issues on which they do
not control the agenda and should be more cohesive on issues on which they do control the
agenda.

First, the clearest example of a situation when a party is not in control of the issue on
the floor is a ‘hostile amendment’ by another party to a bill on which a party’s MEP is the
rapporteur. Since the party holding the rapporteurship on a bill is the main agenda setter, and
since a report only reaches the plenary after it has been discussed and approved by a
committee, then most amendments on the floor will not be supported by the party of the
rapporteur. Nevertheless, a party may support amendments to its bill that it was not able to
pass in the committee. Hence, truly ‘hostile’ amendments for a party are those amendments on which the majority of the party holding the rapporteurship votes against. But, hostile amendments are only likely to be proposed if they have a reasonable chance of passing. The MEPs in the party may be united against some of these hostile amendments. But, there are likely to be some hostile amendments on which some members of the party are in favour and some members of the party are opposed (if all the members of the party are in favour, then by definition it is not a hostile amendment). Hence, according to the theory of agenda control, a party is likely to be less cohesive on a hostile amendment than either on a ‘friendly amendment’ (an amendment which the party does support) or on amendments to bills on which MEPs from other parties are the rapporteurs.

Second, when the agenda is set externally (by the Commission), the parties in the parliament are less in control. On non-legislative resolutions and own initiative reports the parties in the parliament (via their MEPs in the committees who write the reports for these procedures) are free to decide which issues to address and when and how these issues should be put to the plenary. In this case, parties have agenda control. In contrast, once the Commission has proposed a piece of legislation, the parties in the parliament must respond, whether they support the legislation or not and whether they are divided on the issues involved or not. Hence, according to the theory of agenda control, parties are likely to be less cohesive in votes on pieces of legislation (or the budget) than in votes on non-legislative items.

Third, related to this issue of external agenda setting, the particular agenda cartel in the Commission and Council is likely to have a greater impact on some parties in the European Parliament than others. Almost all the main national parties of government sit in the socialist, EPP or liberal groups. However, not all national parties who sit in the socialist, EPP and liberal groups are in government or have Commissioners. Hence, agendas set by the
Commission and backed by the Council will not necessarily be the agendas of the national parties in the socialist, EPP and liberal groups who are in the opposition. As a result, according to agenda control theory, the three centrist parties in the parliament are likely to be less cohesive on legislative issues than the smaller political groups.

Fourth, parties are likely to be more cohesive in votes where they requested a roll-call than in votes where other parties requested a roll-call. On the one hand, this proposition accords with the logic of the agenda control theory. If a party leadership is unable to enforce party discipline, the party is unlikely to request a roll-call on an issue on which its members have heterogeneous preferences, as this might lead to a party split in the vote and so undermine the signal the party was hoping to send. Hence, a party should only request a roll-call vote on issues where the members of the party have relatively homogeneous preferences, and hence should be more cohesive in these votes than in other votes. On the other hand, this proposition also accords with the logic of a party discipline explanation. Presumably a party is more interested in enforcing discipline on issues that are more important to the party and its supporters. But, a party leadership can only monitor the behaviour of its members in these votes if a roll-call vote is held. Consequently, parties are more likely to request a roll-call vote on exactly those votes on which they have the most interest in enforcing party discipline. In other words, if parties are more cohesive in roll-call votes that they request than in other votes, it shows either that parties can select issues on which their members are already homogeneous or that parties can enforce discipline on the issues they care about most, or both.

Finally, relating to the trade-off between the preference heterogeneity of party members and party agenda control, parties whose MEPs have more heterogeneous preferences are less likely to be able to use strategic agenda setting to produce party cohesion in votes. If a party has a high level of heterogeneity of preferences amongst its members then
it is likely to have a high threshold for the proposal of party positions and a low threshold for the veto of party positions. In other words, in order to keep unity of the party, the party will wish to limit the proposal rights of its members and it will wish to increase veto rights of its members. In this situation, the party is unlikely to be able to act collectively to secure rapporteurships and form alliances with other parties on issues it cares about. Conversely, if a party leadership can enforce party discipline irrespective of the level of preference heterogeneity of its members, the party is likely to be able to secure a large number of rapporteurships and be able to build alliances with other parties to ensure that these reports are passed by the committee and the full plenary.

[Figure 6.2 About Here]

Specifically, consider the ideological diversity of the six main political groups, as shown in Figure 6.2. Whereas the socialists, radical left and gaullists were more ideologically homogeneous in the fifth parliament than in the first parliament (relative to their group’s size), the EPP, liberals and greens were more ideologically heterogeneous. So, the socialists should be more able to use strategic agenda setting in the later parliaments than in the earlier parliaments, while the reverse should be true for the EPP.

6.2. Descriptive Evidence of Agenda Setting and Policy Influence

To test the agenda control theory we first look at some descriptive evidence of the relationship between agenda setting and policy influence in the European Parliament. Figure 6.3 shows the proportion of votes in which the majority of the MEPs in each party were on the winning
side in each of the five directly elected parliaments. The political groups are ordered in each parliament from left to right, according to their location on the first dimension revealed by NOMINATE, as we show in Chapter 9.

[Figure 6.3 About Here]

Following the logic of the median-voter theory, if no agenda control is taking place, the median party in the parliament should be on the winning side most, and the parties on the extreme right and left should be on the winning side least, with the parties between the median and the extremes winning less than the median party but more than the extreme parties. If agenda control is taking place, however, the parties with the agenda setting power should be on the winning side more than their ideological location should predict. To investigate these arguments, the figure indicates the location of the median party in the parliament (shaded in dark grey) and the political affiliation of the main external agenda setter – the political group that contains the median member of the Commission (indicated by downward diagonal lines). In the first, second and fourth parliaments, the location of these two actors was the same: in the liberal group. However, in the third parliament, whereas the median member of the Commission was still a liberal, the median member of the Parliament was on the left (in the socialist group). And, the reverse was true in the fifth parliament, when the median MEP was in the liberal group and the median member of the Commission was a socialist.

The results suggest that extremist parties tend to do worse than centrist parties which would tend to be in support of the median voter theory relative to the theory of agenda control. This is clearest in the second parliament. Also, the party in the centre of most parliaments (the liberals) does better than its numerical share of seats would suggest. But, it
is impossible tell whether this is because the median on the floor of the parliament can amend issues to its ideal point or because the median member of the external agenda setter is already very centrist.

In support of the agenda control theory, however, political group size seems to be a better predictor of the proportion of times a political group is on the winning side, then the ideological location of a group. This reflects the fact that agenda setting powers (such as committee chairs and rapporteurships) are allocated in proportion to group size. Also, which groups tend to do better than their numerical size would seem to reflect the patterns of coalition formation, a subject to which we will return in Chapters 8 and 9. In the first parliament, when the EPP and liberals often voted together, they were more successful than the socialists, despite the fact that the socialists were the largest party at that time. Then, in the second, third and fourth parliaments, the ‘grand coalition’ of the socialists and EPP dominated, but with high levels of consensus amongst all the main political groups. Finally, in the fifth parliament, all the groups were less often on the winning side than in the previous few parliaments, which reflects the higher level of left-right conflict in this period. Moreover, this conflict in the fifth parliament reflects a battle between the external and internal agenda setters: where the EPP (often supported by the liberals) were the main agenda setters inside the parliament, but the socialists (who were no longer the largest party) dominated the Commission, and so could set the agenda externally.

These inferences are supported by the evidence in Figure 6.4, which shows the relationship between the control of rapporteurships and success. The larger the proportion of rapporteurships a party controlled in a particular parliament, the higher the proportional of times it was on the winning side relative to the other parties. However, it is difficult to identify this relationship independently of party size, as party size is clearly related both to the proportion of rapporteurships and the proportion of times a party is on the winning side – so
the two largest political groups controlled the most rapporteurships and were on the winning side most often, while the smaller political groups controlled less rapporteurships and were on the winning side less often.

Nevertheless, independent of party size, controlling the agenda is a bigger predictor of success for some political groups than others. The liberals do particularly well, in that in each parliament they were on the winning side more than their proportion of rapporteurships would predict. At the other extreme, the greens were on the winning side less than their proportion of rapporteurships would predict.

In sum, these aggregate descriptive results suggest that there is some relationship between the agenda setting resources of a party and policy outcomes from the European Parliament. Specifically, the larger political groups, who control most of the internal agenda setting offices, get the policy outcomes they desire, independent of their distance from the median member of the parliament. Also, the party that was closest to the median member of the Commission – the main external agenda setter – tended to do better than its size or ideological location would suggest.

Nevertheless, this evidence of a relationship between agenda setting and policy outcomes does not necessarily mean that parties are able to use strategic agenda control as a way of ensuring party discipline in votes. To investigate this we need to look in detail at the relationship between agenda setting and the cohesion of the political groups.
6.3. Statistical Analysis

To formally test the importance of agenda setting in the European Parliament we focus on the determinants of party cohesion in each individual vote. Our goal here is to test the trade off between agenda control and floor discipline predicted by the theory. We first introduce the variables we use in the analysis and then present the results.

6.3.1. Variables

We define the dependent variable as the relative cohesion of a political group in a roll-call vote. We use the same measure of relative cohesion as in Chapter 5, namely the absolute cohesion of a political group divided by the cohesion of the parliament as a whole. Recall that this captures the effect of variance in the overall size of the majority in each vote, on the assumption that it is easier to be cohesive when all the MEPs are voting together than when the vote is highly contested. We also look at the main six political groups, as in Chapter 5: the socialists, EPP, liberals, gaullists, radical left, and greens. However, this time we look at the voting behaviour of these groups in each individual vote since 1979 rather than the average behaviour of these groups in a six-month period. In the analysis of cohesion we consider each political group separately.

We have three main sets of variables to test the theoretical propositions. First, we include two variables which test the strategic use of amendments: *Hostile amendment*, which takes the value 1 if the vote is on an amendment to a (legislative or non-legislative) report where the party holds the rapporteurship and the majority of the party votes against the amendment, and a value of zero otherwise; and *Whole report*, which takes the value 1 if the vote is on a the report as whole, regardless of who is the rapporteur, and zero otherwise. There are four possible categories of votes of interest here: 1) on an amendment where the
party holds the rapporteurship (a hostile amendment); 2) on an amendment where the party does not hold the rapporteurship (other amendments); 3) on a whole report where the party holds the rapporteurship; and 4) on a whole report where the party does not hold the rapporteurship. If the theory of agenda control holds, a party is likely to be less cohesive on amendments on which it holds the rapporteur (hostile amendments) than on amendment on other bills. Hence, what we are interested in is a direct comparison between cohesion on hostile amendments and cohesion on all other amendments. We consequently include the Whole reports variable (which controls for the two categories of votes on which we are not interested), so that the baseline category is simply other amendments.

Second, to capture the effect of external agenda setting we include four variables, one for each of the main legislative procedures of the EU: Co-decision, Cooperation, Consultation, and Budget (for both the budgetary adoption and discharge procedures). Each of these variables takes the value 1 if the vote was on a bill or amendment under the relevant procedure, and zero otherwise. A number of votes are under other procedures where the European Parliament has institutional power, such as the assent procedure, and the investiture or censure of the Commission. But, because these other votes constitute a very small number, the main comparison for the four legislative procedure variables is the voting behaviour of the parties on the non-legislative resolutions and own initiative reports, for which the agenda is set completely internally in the parliament.

Third, we include a variable which tests the strategic use of roll-call votes. The variable Party called RCV takes the value 1 if the party in question requested a roll-call on the vote, and zero otherwise. If parties strategically call roll-call votes, then they are likely to be more cohesive in votes on which they call a roll-call than in votes on which other parties call a roll-call.
We also include several control variables. First, *Participation* is the proportion of all MEPs who took part in a vote. We include this variable as a proxy for the importance of a vote, on the assumption that more MEPs will take part in a vote if the issue is highly salient.\(^4\) Second, we include seven variables which control for the substantive issue of the vote: *Economic* (such as market regulation and competition policy), *Environment* (such as product packaging), *Social* (such as workers’ rights and gender equality), *External* (including trade, aid, and foreign and defence policy), *Agriculture* (related to the Common Agricultural Policy), *Institutional* (such as reform of the EU), and *Internal EP* (such as organization of the timetable of the parliament). These variables take the value 1 if a vote is on the relevant issue, and zero otherwise. Each vote can be classified as relating to up to three issues. Third, we include two types of variables which control for the timing of a vote: four dummy variables for each European Parliament (the first parliament is excluded as the baseline); and five dummy variables for the day of the week (Saturday is excluded as the baseline).

### 6.3.2. Results

Table 6.1 shows the results of separate models of the cohesion of each of the six main political groups in all votes in all five European Parliaments. The main findings are as follows. First, in general, parties are *not* significantly less cohesive on hostile amendments than on other amendments. To reiterate, a hostile amendment for a party is an amendment on one of the party’s reports which the party does not support. The fact that parties are as cohesive in votes on hostile amendments as in votes on friendly amendments suggests that parties in the European Parliament can enforce party discipline on the floor irrespective of who has placed the issue on the agenda. The only party for which this is not true is the Greens, who are significantly less cohesive on hostile amendments than on friendly

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\(^4\) Note that the level of MEPs’ participation in a vote is not fully exogenous to the level of relative cohesion of a party. However, in this context we use this variable only as a control variable.
amendments. This demonstrates that when an MEP from the green group is a rapporteur, the other parties are able to propose amendments that are supported by part of the green MEPs.

[Table 6.1 About Here]

It is also worth noting that parties are less cohesive in votes on whole reports than on amendments – whether hostile or friendly. However, this variable is included as a control, to isolate a direct comparison of the effect of a hostile amendment compared to a friendly amendment. We do not have any specific prediction about the expected relationship between voting on a whole report and voting on an amendment. But, the finding that a party is generally less cohesive on whole bills than on amendments is probably explained by the fact that whereas original reports and amendments are usually close to a party’s ideal point, many whole bills, once amended, are further from the preferences of some members of the party than the status quo. Put another way, a floor compromise will increase the overall level of support for a bill but is likely to reduce the level of support within the party groups.

The second main result related to our propositions is that the main parties are less cohesive on legislative and budgetary votes than on non-legislative resolutions or own initiative reports. In contrast to the finding about hostile amendments, which suggests that parties can enforce discipline, this finding suggests that parties are less able to enforce discipline when the agenda is set externally to the parliament (by the Commission) than when the agenda is set internally in the parliament. However, as we predicted, this result is mostly only true for the three political groups (the socialists, EPP, and liberals) who are likely to be internally split when the agenda is set by the Commission and when the parliament has to negotiate with the parties in government in the Council. The three groups to the right and left of these main groups, who generally do not have members from parties in government in the
Council or who have Commissioners, are more cohesive in votes under at least one of the legislative procedures than on non-legislative issues.

Third, a party is generally more cohesive in votes when it requested the roll-call than in votes when the roll-call was requested by another party or was required by the rules of the parliament. This observation is generally consistent with both an agenda control explanation and a party discipline explanation. However, one party, the gaullists, behaves less cohesively than the other parties on their own roll-call votes. Because the gaullists have equal access to agenda setting as the other parties (in proportion to its size), the fact that they are less cohesive in their own roll-call votes than in other votes suggests that the gaullists are less able than the other parties to enforce voting discipline – as we found in Chapter 5.

Fourth, the coefficients on the issues of the votes reveal some interesting patterns. In general, the substantive subject of the vote does not seem to affect the level of cohesion of the parties. Nevertheless, parties are generally less cohesive on external relations issues (such as trade, aid, security and defence policies) and internal parliamentary issues (such as the organization of the parliament’s timetable). This is not surprising. Some external relations issues probably split MEPs on national lines as well as along party lines. Also, parties are not likely to issue voting instructions on many internal organizational issues, which allow the MEPs a ‘free vote’.

Fifth, looking broadly at the results between the parties suggests that some parties are better than others at using the agenda powers and enforcing party discipline. On one side, the socialists and EPP are more cohesive when the agenda is set internally in the parliament (in other words, when they dominate agenda setting) and can control their MEPs on hostile amendments and in their own roll-call votes. On the other side, the greens are not able to control their troops on hostile amendments, and the gaullists cannot enforce party discipline in their own roll-call votes. Also, the gaullists, greens, and radical left are just as cohesive on
legislative as on non-legislative issues, suggesting that they are marginalised whether the agenda is set externally to or internally within the European Parliament. It is hard to compare the effect of preference heterogeneity on agenda control between groups of different sizes, as larger parties have significant more agenda setting power than the smaller parties. However, amongst the smaller groups, the radical left group is more homogeneous than the greens and gaullists, and there is some evidence that this group is more able to act cohesively when it controls the agenda than these other two groups.

[Table 6.2 About Here]

Table 6.2 shows the same models as in Table 6.1 but estimated for each parliament separately. These results confirm the findings in the pooled analysis. First, hostile amendments only undermined the cohesion of the EPP in the first parliament and the EPP and greens in the fourth parliament. Second, once the parliament gained significant legislative powers – in the fourth and fifth parliaments – the three main parties were less cohesive in votes under the co-decision procedure than in votes on non-legislative resolutions and own initiative reports (the variables for the other legislative procedures are included in the models, but not reported). Third, most parties were significantly more cohesive in their own roll-call votes in most parliaments. The only time a party was less cohesive in its own roll-call votes than in other votes was the gaullists in the fourth parliament.
6.4. Conclusion: Agenda Control Alone Cannot Explain Party Discipline

If a party can control which issues get to the floor of a parliament and how these issues are proposed it should not need to pressure its members to follow voting instructions, as the party should be able to limit votes to issues on which its members have similar preferences. The problem for parties in the European Parliament is that no single party or coalition of parties controls the agenda. First, the agenda on legislative issues is set externally, by the Commission, and on these issues political bargaining inside the parliament is influenced by the coalition that emerges in the other chamber of the EU’s legislative process: the Council. Second, even when the parliament itself possesses independent agenda setting power – for example on non-legislative resolutions or when proposing amendments to legislation initiated by the Commission – agenda setting offices (rapporteurships) are allocated on a broadly proportional basis between the political groups. So, the leaderships of the parties in the European Parliament have only a limited opportunity to use their agenda setting powers to control the voting behaviour of their backbench members.

Nevertheless, where the party leaders do control the agenda we found some evidence that they can use this power to enforce party discipline. In particular, the main political groups are more cohesive on non-legislative issues, when the agenda is set internally by the MEPs from these parties, than on legislative issues, when these parties are forced to respond to initiatives from the Commission. We thus find some support for the agenda control hypothesis. In general, though, enforcing party discipline through agenda control only affects the level of party cohesion at the margins.

Against the agenda control thesis we found that parties can enforce discipline in the most extreme circumstances – when the party is forced to vote on an amendment to one of its own bills which is proposed by another party and which it does not support. The fact that
parties are as cohesive in these ‘hostile amendments’ as on other amendments suggests that party leaderships are able to force their members to follow party voting instructions even when their prefer the amendment to the text on the table. Also, as the legislative power of the parliament has grown, the parties in the parliament have been increasingly forced to respond to agendas that have been set externally to the parliament. Hence, the fact that we observe growing party cohesion despite growing legislative powers is further support for the view that the party leaders in the parliament are able to use mechanisms other than agenda control to enforce party discipline.

We thus conclude that though we find some support for the agenda control hypothesis, we also find evidence of enforcement of party discipline that is independent of agenda control.
Figure 6.1. MEP Self-Placement and NOMINATE Locations in the Fifth Parliament

a. Left-Right Self-Placement

b. NOMINATE Location
Figure 6.2. Average Ideological Diversity of the Political Groups in Each Parliament

Note: For the calculation of the ideological diversity of a political group see Chapter 5.
Figure 6.3. Proportion of Times Each Party was on the Winning Side

Note: The political groups are ordered from left to right in each parliament according to their average location on the first dimension of NOMINATE. The political group that contains the median MEP is shaded. The political group that has the median member of the Commission is indicated by downward diagonal lines.
Figure 6.4. Relationship Between Agenda Setting and Winning

Note: SOC1 is the socialist group in the first parliament, SOC2 is the socialist group in the second parliament, and so on. To control for variations in the level of consensus in each parliament (as shown in Figure 6.2), the predicted value in the figure is the difference between the proportional of times a political group is on the winning side in a parliament and the proportion of times the least successful of the six political groups is on the winning side in the same parliament. For example, in the fifth parliament, the least successful of the six political groups was the radical left, who were on the winning side 40.8 percent of the time, and the most successful group was the socialists, who were on the winning side 63.8 percent of the time, which gives these two groups a relative score in the fifth parliament of 0 and 23.0, respectively.
Table 6.1. Testing Agenda Setting: Pooled Results

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Adjusted R-squared .04 .03 .03 .01 .04 .02

Note: Dependent variable: relative cohesion of a political group in a vote. Dummy variables for each parliament and each day of the week are included but not reported. Parameters of the models are estimated by linear regression. T-statistics in parentheses. * significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%.
### Table 6.2. Testing Agenda Setting in Each Parliament

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Note: Dependent variable: relative cohesion of a political group in a vote. Each model is specified as in Table 6.1 but the estimated coefficients of the other variables are not reported. Parameters of the models are estimated by linear regression. T-statistics in parentheses. * significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%.