

Results of elections to the EP: reasons and consequences

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EP Elections: who wins, who loses?

The model which is widely distributed through the media:

- Results: extreme nationalists, Eurosceptics and anti-European Union parties triumphed (or at least made big gains) in the 2014 European elections;
- Reasons: on-going economic crisis and massive public anger against national governments' austerity measures imposed by the EU;
- Consequences: “a Europe of division”, extremely fragmented, with citizens disenchantered and frustrated.

Can this simple one-dimension model be sufficient to understand current situation in the EU?

Compound polity/many actors/many dimensions:

- Eurosceptics / anti-EU forces or europeanists?
- Nation-states or the EU?
- Politics or anti-politics?
- Politicians or technocrats?

The 2014 European Parliament elections

- **‘Responsible party model’ vs ‘second-order election model’**

European parliamentary tradition and 'responsible party model'

- Parties are the critical institution linking citizens and state;
- Legislative and executive branches are chosen by the people, either directly or indirectly, in competitive elections;
- Governments are held accountable for their actions at periodic competitive elections;
- At elections voters are offered a choice of competing party programmes on the major issues confronting the system;
- The electorate votes according to the retrospective performance and prospective policies of the parties;
- Parties in government have a responsibility to implement their programme (Norris, 1997)

“Second-order” elections model (I)

- - **“First-order” elections** offer voters the critical choice of who should govern the country. This includes general elections in parliamentary systems like Great Britain, the Netherlands or Germany, and presidential elections in countries like the USA.
- - **“Second-order” elections** are less important because, although still open to influence by national party politics, they determine the outcome for lesser offices, such as regional, municipal and local officials in parliamentary systems, and legislative representatives in presidential systems (**Reif & Schmitt, 1980**).

“Second-order” elections model (II)

Second-order elections commonly display certain features (Norris, 1997):

- **Lower levels of voting participation:** since less is at stake fewer citizens bother to enter the ballot box.
- **The outcome is strongly related to the popularity of national parties within a particular country,** rather than revolving around particular issues, individual candidates, or specific events in second-order election campaigns.
- In a cyclical pattern, **governing parties often experience a fall in support** in second-order contests, particularly in the mid-term period, as people treat the contest as an opportunity to protest against the incumbent administration.
- **Minor parties are usually the main beneficiaries** of any temporary protest vote against the government.

“Second-order” elections model (III)

European Parliament elections were always considered to be relatively low salience contests, ‘ideal type’ second-order elections, fought in the shadow of the contest for the main (‘first-order’) national election:

- by the same parties as contest national elections and in the absence of truly common electoral system;
- with a subsequent focus on the national arena rather than European level issues, the performance of the political groups in the European Parliament, or the policy positions of national parties towards the EU.

“Second-order” elections model (IV)

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Limited even if constantly growing since the mid 1980-s EP's powers and relevance in the EU's institutional architecture (if compared to national parliaments);

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EP elections did not influence the composition or political complexion of the European Commission, let alone that of the Council of Ministers This encourages voters to behave differently from how they would if a national parliament election were held at the same time;

These facts free voters:

- to express their opposition to a particular (their national) government,
- to 'vote with the heart', by supporting their most-preferred (small) party rather than their second or third most preferred (mainstream) party which has a chance of winning a national parliament election;
- to signal their preferences on a particular policy issue they care about which the main parties are ignoring, such as the environment, or immigration.

“Second-order” elections model (V)

Lisbon Treaty has given the EP the responsibility to elect the President of the Commission on the basis of a candidate proposed by the European Council, after ***taking into account*** the outcome of the EP elections (Article 17(7) Treaty on European Union (TEU));

EP's Resolution of 22 November 2012 on "The elections to the European Parliament in 2014": urged European political parties to nominate candidates for the Presidency of the Commission in the context of the 2014 EP elections;

EP's Report of 12 June 2013 on "Improving the practical arrangements for the holding of the European elections in 2014": asked pan-European parties to make the nomination "sufficiently well in advance of the election" so as to allow the candidates to mount an EU-wide campaign that concentrates on European (not national) issues; called on national political parties to inform citizens, before and during the election campaign, of their affiliation to a European political party (such as by stating its name and the emblem on the ballot paper), as well as their support for its candidate for the post of Commission President and his/her platform; (Stratulat & Emmanouilidis, 2013)

BUT: Despite all new rules of play, the 2014 EP elections still conform perfectly to the ‘second-order’ elections model.

“Second-order” elections model (modified) (VI)

- Hix & Marsh (2011) try to identify a ‘European effect’ in European Parliament elections:
- a pan-European swing in votes towards or away from a particular group of parties, independently from the governing status or size of these parties.
- **“Looking at pan-European policy swings might be a more realistic way of thinking about what a ‘European election’ might look like at the aggregate level. If voters across Europe respond in similar ways to common policy concerns, then this might be the first step in the evolution of European Parliament elections into genuine European-wide votes about the direction of the EU policy agenda”.**
- Only two cases so far: Green parties’ success in 1989 and poor performance of socialist parties in 1999.
- **The 2014 EP elections are not the case.**

EP Elections consequences: who wins, who loses?

Points for discussion

- **Politics vs anti-politics/technocrats**
- A new way of the citizens' discontent channelizing/a new political cleavage emergence (as left-right cleavage is obsolete).
- **Eurosceptics vs europeanists (anti-EU forces/nation-states vs the EU)**
- Issue salience/ Eurosceptics are the only political force that speaks of Europe;
- The new President of European Commission is a candidate supported by the EPP (and nominated by the European Council, **i.e. in a way that is quite conventional**, but despite opposition from the UK and Hungary) – decrease of nation-states power within the EU.

Thank you for your attention!